








Running on Air

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Running on Air

by [eleventy7](#)

Summary

Draco Malfoy has been missing for three years. Harry is assigned the cold case and finds himself slowly falling in love with the memories he collects.

- Translation into Português brasileiro available: [Correndo no Ar](#) by [overmonroeville](#)
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- Translation into Русский available: [Бег по воздуху](#) by [wakeupinlondon](#)
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Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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The colour of the bones almost matches the summer-scorched grass pushing between the vertebrae. The ribs bend like stalks of wheat, permanently bowing to an invisible wind; the finger knuckles look like sun-bleached pebbles.

“Five or six years.”

The man offers the statement without raising his eyes from the skeleton. Harry shifts restlessly under the high sun. It’s too hot, he thinks, especially this late in the summer. His robes hang off him, heavy and damp with perspiration, unmoved by the slight breeze. The other man — small and bespectacled, with a neatly cropped salt-and-pepper beard — gives no indication of being affected by the heat. He wears the ivory-coloured robes of the post-mortem division and somehow, the pale colour gives the illusion of coolness and shade.

A camera clicks; the sound of the shutter echoes across the field. Both Harry and the other man turn. The photographer — a tall, broad-shouldered witch with an aristocratic nose — gives them a look.

“I’ve got another job at three, Butterworth,” she says. The man — Butterworth — gives her an irritated look.

“I’ll perform the spells, then we’ll be out of your way,” he says tersely. The woman waits, hand hovering impatiently over the shutter release button.

Butterworth performs the spell. Numbers waver above the skeleton, as if caught in a shimmering heat-wave. “Five years,” he says, a note of satisfaction in his voice. He likes being right.

Harry shifts from one foot to another. The hair at the nape of his neck is curling damply as perspiration beads across his skin.

“Month?” Harry asks, wishing he could leave already, retreat back to the soothingly cool halls of the Ministry. Butterworth flicks his wand.

“Between January and April.”

Harry sighs. Butterworth bristles.

“The longer they’ve been dead, the less accurate the spells are. I can’t give you anything better than that.”

Still...it’s close enough to suit Harry's current case.

“Could be Fenwick,” he says. “He went missing March 2001. Found his broom not far from here. Might be a match.” He doesn’t get his hopes up, though; too many failed matches have taught him caution.

“We’ll get a sample and take it back to the department,” Butterworth says. “Let you know in a week.”

“That’s short.” Harry's surprised. Cold cases rarely get priority.

Butterworth shrugs. “Been a slow month. You can leave if you want. I’ll collect the sample and Glassbrook here will finish photographing the scene. Rest of the team will be along soon.”

“Thanks.”

Harry Disapparates with a pop.

* * *

When Harry was a fresh-faced Auror, twenty years old and eyes sharp with eager enthusiasm, a white-knuckled grip on his wand and a mind clear as sunlight, he thought he knew exactly what his job was. Saving lives and saving people through tangible work: footsteps racing along alleyways and hexes darting like frightened rabbits, skin-bruising tackles and flashy counter-spells.

He was good at that part. Very good in the field. But, as his supervisors explained cautiously, he was not good at the investigative side of it.

“That’s what the detectives are for,” Harry had argued, and his supervisors had all swapped expressions before saying that a Head Auror — just for example — needed to have a mind carefully honed to the subtle intricacies of each case. People skills, they agreed, was what a Head Auror needed. Not just raw strength and skilled magic.

“I’m not Head Auror,” Harry had pointed out helpfully.

“Yet,” they’d said.

And with that single word, Harry had been assigned to work with the Investigative Division for the next eighteen months. He hadn’t been very pleased about it and there had been considerable mutterings about ‘missed fieldwork’. His supervisors had been suitably soothing, telling Harry he already outclassed every Auror as far as practical wandwork was concerned and there was no need to worry about his skills growing rusty.

His new supervisor — Head of the Investigative Division, Clara Holdsworth — had been far less diplomatic.

“Aurors like you,” she had said when they first met, “view your work as a game of Quidditch. As though you’re a seeker and people are simply snitches.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Harry had retorted, feeling rather defensive, and Holdsworth’s mouth had thinned. She had set him a cold case as his first project — an ancient file from 1949 — and Harry had considered that a calculated insult. Not even something new and interesting, just old files regarding people long gone. He’d made a half-hearted attempt on it before delegating it to the bottom of his desk drawer. At least the Fenwick case was actually within the current decade; Harry regarded it as a slight upgrade.

But now, six months into his assignment, he still doesn’t understand the lesson he’s supposed to be learning.

* * *

A file drops onto Harry’s desk.

“Congratulations on closing the Fenwick case,” Holdsworth says. She doesn’t smile. Only the faint warmth in her voice indicates any praise. “This is your latest assignation.”

“Thanks.”

She leaves. Harry can appreciate how blunt Holdsworth is; she speaks when she has something to say, and goes away when she doesn’t.

The pale blue colour of the folder denotes it as a cold case, but that could mean anything from two years ago to a 1920s relic. He turns past the index and onto the first page, where detectives first on the case would have summarised the facts.

Case number: L10-332-5

Date filed: 10 September 2003

Case Classification: Missing

Name: MALFOY, Draco

Other names: None.

Harry stops there. He puts the file down and stands up, then wonders where he’s going. To Ron, to share the file? To Hermione, to ask what she thinks? He shakes his head. It won’t be news to them. Lucius Malfoy went missing in the summer of 2002 and Draco Malfoy had, as ever, imitated his father and disappeared one year later. Harry, in the midst of his Auror training and in a heady rush of his new life — engaged to Ginny, celebrating Ron and Hermione’s marriage, avoiding reporters as he breezily Apparated to casual get-togethers with Neville and Luna and all the rest — had barely registered the news. Malfoy had probably retreated to a sunny Italian villa or French château along with his supposedly missing father, Harry had thought unkindly. Well, at least karma caught up to one of the Malfoys: Lucius, unlike Draco, had still been awaiting trial at the time of his disappearance and a warrant was issued for his arrest. The Aurors caught him in the winter of 2003. Harry’s colleagues had been floating on a cloud of euphoria after tracking and capturing the elusive Lucius Malfoy, but the victory had proven bitterly short-lived — Lucius had died during the capture due to a rebounding curse.

Harry shakes his head, bringing his thoughts back to the present, and stares down at the file, forcing himself to calmly read through it. Be objective, he reminds himself. Be professional.

It lists the usual details. Nationality, sex, height, weight, physical characteristics, clothing when last seen. None of it is anything unexpected. The ‘distinguishing features’ section notes the Dark Mark on the left forearm, of course, and a ‘small crescent-shaped scar on the lower back’. Malfoy seems slightly underweight, Harry notes, frowning at the height/weight section.

All in all, brief notes. He turns the page.

Circumstances of Disappearance, the heading states, and then written underneath: *Last seen Eeylops Owl Emporium, Diagon Alley (4pm, 09 September 2003).*

Very brief notes, Harry thinks critically.

Well, every case must start somewhere. He turns the page, skipping to the evidence section. The detective took a memory from one Herbert Higgs, proprietor of Eeylops Owl Emporium.

Time to visit the evidence vaults, then, and use the pensieve.

* * *

Owls hoot softly; there’s the smell of living creatures in the air. The rustle of feathers, the creak of sun-warmed wood. The smell of sawdust as the field mice nest in their cages. The shop is dark and enclosed, the overhead roosts dotted with owls and the walls lined with teetering boxes of pet supplies.

Harry looks around the memory, but he can't see Malfoy anywhere. The shopkeeper — a portly man in robes of red, with receding grey hair — is handing a bag of something to a young witch.

“Two drops a day, and your owl should be perfectly fine by the end of the week,” the man says kindly. The witch nods and gives him a handful of knuts, then turns and leaves.

Not a minute later the door opens again, sending the silver bell chiming. Draco Malfoy steps inside.

Harry frowns, carefully scanning Malfoy for any clues to his disappearance. This is the last anyone saw of him, after all. And it’s the first Harry has seen of Malfoy since the Battle of Hogwarts. The description in the file was right, at least, but Harry supposes they took the details direct from this memory. The weak sunlight, filtering through the narrow windows, catches on the tiny clasp of Malfoy’s black travelling cloak. A silver snitch, Harry thinks with closer inspection, no bigger than the fingernail of Harry’s index finger.

“How may I help you?” the shopkeeper says stiffly. Malfoy glances at him.

“I am in need of an owl. Speed is less important than accuracy.”

Malfoy looks in need of a good meal, but Harry had expected the thinness from the file information. He looks a little tired, Harry thinks, noting the faint shadows beneath Malfoy's eyes. Still, nothing particularly notable; nothing more than Harry would look after a long day at the office. He spoke without his usual arrogance, affecting a politely bland tone, but Harry can't detect anything else unusual about Malfoy. He watches as the shopkeeper makes his recommendations and Malfoy selects a very ordinary looking barn owl.

"I have other errands to run," Malfoy says, giving the shopkeeper a handful of galleons. The shopkeeper nods.

"You can pick it up later, or give it your address and it will fly there." The shopkeeper gives Malfoy a scrap of paper and a quill. At that moment, another customer enters the shop and the man bustles over, leaving Malfoy to write his address and tie it to the owl's leg. A few moments later, Malfoy opens the door, allowing the owl to fly out, and steps onto the street. In a matter of seconds, he's gone. Harry goes to the window but since it's the shopkeeper's memory, the street is nothing more than a beige blur. The memory keeps refocussing on the new customer.

Well, that was completely useless. Harry surfaces from the memory with a sigh.

No matter which way he looks at it, he has to admit his presumptions are wrong. Draco Malfoy certainly did not 'disappear' to a luxury estate somewhere. All the circumstances are leading to the most probable scenario: Malfoy was forcibly taken away. He had been dressed warmly for the autumn weather but otherwise travelled light, with no sign of luggage. He'd mentioned running other errands and hadn't wanted to carry the owl around with him while he completed them.

Malfoy had turned left when he'd left the shop, Harry recalls. There's only a few shops on the left of the owl emporium, and then it leads straight to the Leaky Cauldron. No other shopkeeper had seen Malfoy, the file notes, and he didn't pass through the Leaky Cauldron. It stands to reason that somewhere in the short distance between Eeylops and the Leaky Cauldron, Malfoy disappeared.

Harry enters the memory again. This time — having gotten an outline of the entire incident — he focuses on tiny details instead. It feels strange to do so, but he walks straight up to Malfoy, eyes narrowed, checking for anything noticeable. He's wearing a white button-up shirt beneath the robes, Harry notices, and neatly-pressed grey trousers. Was he expecting to go somewhere requiring formal business wear? The robes are good quality but ordinary; robes that any wealthy wizard might choose to wear to run errands.

Malfoy turns and takes a step closer to the owls, nearly walking into Harry; Harry instinctively ducks away.

"I'm afraid I'm not fond of eagle owls," Malfoy says to the shopkeeper.

"Well, if you're not interested in our eagle owl range, then may I recommend several barn owls?"

Malfoy had an eagle owl during Hogwarts, Harry recalls. Strange for him to say he's not fond of them.

Malfoy turns again, sunlight winking off the small silver clasp. Harry studies it for a moment. It strikes him as unusual, if only because he'd expect a large and ornate clasp — something worthy of wealth and prestige. A large gold serpent, perhaps, with jewels for eyes. Not a tiny silver snitch.

Maybe Harry's just drawn to it because it's something he'd wear himself, something he'd choose.

In fact, there's very little decoration to Malfoy's outfit. The clothes are nice, Harry guesses with another look, but they don't look particularly special. No elaborate stitching or patterns, and the robes are plain. The cloak, too, is without decoration; a simple travelling cloak without a hood. Malfoy's wand must be in a pocket somewhere, for Harry can't see it at all.

"That one, sir?" the shopkeeper asks Malfoy. Harry glances up and watches Malfoy nod at the plain-looking barn owl.

Malfoy's address. Did the owl ever turn up there? Perhaps it left, if Malfoy didn't let it in. It should have returned to the shop. Harry peers over Malfoy's shoulder as he writes the address, but once again the memory limits him. He can only see what the shopkeeper's eyes saw, and the shopkeeper never glimpsed Malfoy's address. When Harry looks at the parchment, all he sees is a beige blur again.

Someone taps his shoulder and the memory dissolves.

* * *

"What?" Harry asks irritably, lifting his head from the pensieve.

"Oh, that's a nice way to greet your oldest friend, isn't it?" Ron drops into the chair opposite Harry's desk.

"I was in the middle of a memory."

Ron winces. "Don't want to know. Saw one of your colleagues on the way in, he's working a case where a little witch disappeared in Leeds. Little girl she was, barely five years old."

Harry's not particularly fond of those cases either.

"Did the Grimwright raid today, then?" he asks, switching topics.

Ron lights up as if it's Christmas, eyes brightening as he leans forward. "Mate, you wouldn't believe it. We've been staking out this place for months..."

Yes, Harry thinks. He was part of the initial sweep team. He listens to Ron's story, wondering how much is exaggeration and how much is outright fabrication.

But a good story is a good story.

And, as he's learned from this division, a story can be found in the smallest details: a stitch in a robe, a smile across a room, the faint tremble of a hand. He can pick a story out from the bruise dancing across Ron's knuckles, from the droplets of blood on his collar, from the way his knee jitters as he spins his tale.

The easy thing about being an Auror, Harry thinks, is that if he looks at a picture and doesn't see what he wants, he changes the picture. He can start new surveillance, or interrogate a different suspect, or use other informants.

But the problem with cold cases is he cannot change the picture.

He can only look harder.

Chapter 2

Harry looks harder.

Malfoy left Eeylops, the original detective noted. No other witnesses. There's an interview with Malfoy's wife, Astoria Greengrass, who reported Malfoy missing after he didn't return home for the night. Typical interview, Harry thinks, reading the transcript. Astoria appeared 'in a state of distress' and proved to be of little use. Nevertheless, he reads it again and again. Visits the pensieve again and again until he has it memorised, until he knows the script by heart.

"How may I help you?"

"I am in need of an owl. Speed is less important than accuracy."

The shopkeeper, playing his role as a typical post-war man meeting a post-war Death Eater. Clipped words and stiff body language that says *I know who you are, but I'm too civil to point it out.*

Draco Malfoy, playing his role too. Can't appear too brash or demanding, Harry thinks, watching Malfoy for the tenth time as he reaches for an owl. Must show just the right amount of deference; it's there in the polite neutrality of his voice, in the way he keeps his body language small and contained. Not drawing attention, not making bold or sweeping gestures. *I know who I am too, and I'm tired of people pointing it out.*

He watches the memory again. Eleven times in total, and it's going nowhere. This is the hardest part of solving cases, Harry thinks. Getting started. Looking for something, but nobody knows what it is. It's like trying to find a book without knowing the title or author.

Books...

Hermione.

He decides to visit her tomorrow night.

* * *

"You want my help?"

Hermione knows, he thinks, as soon as she sees him standing in her fireplace. Ron's away on an overnight stakeout; nevertheless, dinner is cooking over the kitchen hearth and Harry assumes he's invited to stay without a word from Hermione.

"You're the smartest witch I know."

"Don't start," she says with a laugh. "I hear that all the time from Ron when he needs help tracing a Dark artefact or potion."

Harry gives her a wry smile and steps into the room, setting the file down on the kitchen table. He may as well get to the point, he thinks. They know each other too well to spend time dancing about a topic.

"Draco Malfoy."

Hermione starts. "What? You saw him?"

"I didn't. That's the problem."

Her brow creases, if only for a moment. Then she glances at the file and remembers. "Oh, Harry," she says, looking exasperated. "They didn't assign you *that* file, surely?"

He nods and pulls out a chair, sitting down.

"Oh, honestly." Hermione sighs. "You'd think they'd have a bit more sense. Well, if you ask Holdsworth for a file transfer, I'm sure — "

"I *can* be objective, you know," Harry says, faintly annoyed. "This is my job, after all. Solving cases."

Hermione looks at him, raises her eyebrows, and then turns round to busy herself with the kettle.

"Tea?"

"You don't believe me."

"Yes, I do. Tea?"

"Yes, thanks," Harry says warily. "Listen, Hermione — "

"I said I believed you, didn't I? Now, what do you need help with?" She puts a teaspoon of sugar into a mug and turns around, glancing at him. Defeated, he lets her look through the file. She scans it, looking increasingly surprised as she reads on.

"Well?" he says when she's done.

She glances up at him. "Well, truthfully...I'm rather surprised. I always assumed Malfoy disappeared to some luxurious holiday destination, just to escape his old life. But this..."

"I know." Harry stares down at the table, fingers tracing patterns in the wood. "Sounds like a forced disappearance, doesn't it?"

Hermione's arm twitches slightly, as if remembering the souvenir Bellatrix's torture left behind. *Forced disappearance*. The words the Ministry liked to use during Voldemort's reign. It sounded so much nicer than *abduction* or *murder*.

"Have you visited Eeylops?" she asks.

"Multiple times. I'm not sure what else the memory can give me."

"Not the memory. The store itself."

Harry frowns. "You think there's something left there?"

"No," Hermione says. "But it might offer a new perspective." She taps the file. "Would you mind if I accessed the memory?" *Maybe I'll find something you missed*, Harry adds silently. Hermione's too tactful to say the words herself.

"I haven't got a problem," Harry says, "but Holdsworth might. Confidentiality and all that. Long as you don't tell anyone you saw the memory, I'll be fine."

"You know I won't." Hermione straightens up suddenly and glances towards the kitchen. "Oh. Tea's getting cold."

Harry settles back in the chair, glancing at the file. He wishes Hermione had more concrete suggestions, but he's not coming up with anything better.

A new perspective.

* * *

The silver bell chimes gently as Harry enters the shop, and he's struck by a profound sense of déjà vu. By the counter, the grey-haired shopkeeper glances up.

"May I help you?" he asks blandly. Harry's taken a polyjuice potion — selected randomly from the wide stock of Ministry potions — for the sake of avoiding recognition. It's easier this way, when he's investigating witnesses.

And Merlin help him, he's so stuck in the memory that he repeats the first thing that comes to mind.

"I am in need of an owl. Speed is less important than accuracy." He blinks, feeling unsettled by the taste of foreign words in his mouth; singing a song that isn't his.

"We have several eagle owls that have demonstrated geographical accuracy," the shopkeeper says, leading Harry over to a collection of owls. The shop hasn't changed at all, Harry thinks, letting the shopkeeper continue his sales pitch. The same narrow windows illuminate the shop with the same sunlight, although it's slightly brighter in its late summer glow rather than the weak rays of September. The boxes of supplies clutter the shop, and the owls ruffle their feathers overhead along the roosts.

He could question the shopkeeper, but it's unlikely he could give any further details. Besides, it's been five years, and Draco Malfoy was simply another customer.

"Our owls self-deliver," the shopkeeper said, noticing Harry staring at a golden-eyed eagle owl. "You can pick them up later or simply write your address and await delivery."

Harry starts. The shopkeeper looks at him with surprise.

"I *am* looking for an owl," Harry says, softening the blow of a lost sale, "but I'm also investigating a cold case at the moment." He holds up a badge, grateful it has his reference number rather than his name. "Draco Malfoy."

The shopkeeper stares at him blankly. Then — "Oh, him. Look, I've already given a memory, and I'm afraid I hardly remember the incident at all now."

"Just a quick question, that's all," Harry says. "Regarding the owl he purchased. Did it ever return to the shop?"

"I don't recall."

"Do you have records?"

"I'm afraid we destroy records of sale after twelve months." The shopkeeper gives Harry a peculiar look and he realises his hair is slowly darkening to black again; he fumbles for the flask of polyjuice potion and takes another swig. The shopkeeper gives the flask a very suspicious look. "Are you drinking on the job?" he demands. "What's your name? I'll report you, you know."

"Potion for my dragon pox," Harry retorts, and the shopkeeper retreats very hastily.

Harry purchases a box of owl treats, at least, leaving a handful of knuts on the counter, and disappears out the door. The silver bell chimes softly behind him. He pauses a moment, tempted to try and trace Malfoy's steps, but besides turning left he has no idea where Malfoy went.

He goes home instead.

* * *

Coming home is effortless to other people.

They come home in the same way they draw breath, or take a step, or glance up at the stars when they're beneath the night sky. Coming home is a journey learned by rote, committed to the memory of their heart. Take a turn here, a corner there, ten steps to the front door — and they're home.

To Harry, it's a weary journey that he must think about, and he's painfully, consciously aware of the exact measurements of the home to which he's going. A two-bedroom apartment in Westminster, polished and sleek, commanding a modest view over the skyline of south-west London. It had cost an uncomfortable amount of money but it was in an ideal location. Perfect as a home base for Ginny, who had to frequently travel across the United Kingdom for her Quidditch matches. And, as she had said when she first booked an inspection for the apartment, the perfect place for Harry, so close to the Ministry.

He Apparates to the front door and unlocks it with a wave of his wand. Inside, the lights are on and the Wizing Wireless is playing. For a moment, Harry's heart lifts; too often has he returned to a dark, empty apartment, to find Ginny's practice has run overtime.

"Harry!" Ginny calls from the bedroom. "Home at last! Normally I'm the one doing overtime."

He walks to the bedroom and sets his messenger bag — stuffed full of files — on the floor. His heart slowly sinks again. Ginny is flurrying around the room, her red hair splaying around her in a vibrant splash of colour. She turns and grins at him, her freckles scrunching up like handfuls of sand.

"Guess what?"

He doesn't have to guess. Judging by the amount of Quidditch gear she's shoving into her bag, and looking at the little washbag sitting on her bedside table, her team won their first match of the season.

"Congratulations, Ginny," he says. "I'm sorry I couldn't make the game."

"Only preliminaries," she says easily. "We're playing the Margate Rovers on Saturday."

"That's not too far away," Harry says, eyeing the overnight bag. Ginny pauses halfway through wrapping up her shinguards and looks apologetic.

"I'll be leaving tonight though, so we can practice all tomorrow on the Margate pitch." She grabs a practice Quaffle and shoves it into the bag. "Oh, how'd your case go?"

"Good. Closed the Fenwick one."

"Did you? Brilliant." Ginny grabs her bag. "Ticket on the table if you can make it to the game. Love you." Then she reaches for the portkey on the bed — an empty Jammie Dodgers packet — and whirls away in the blink of an eye.

Harry sits on the edge of the bed and listens to the silence. It seems amplified by the white walls, the endless expanse of glossy floorboards, the kitchen in which they never cook.

He falls back slowly, until he's lying down on the bed, and stares at the ceiling.

* * *

That night, Harry dreams.

He's in the memory again. The soft rustle of feathers overhead, the sound of talons against wood. Draco Malfoy walks into the shop.

Something's different.

Harry tilts his head, frowning. The shop seems a little brighter somehow. Did someone light a candle? A lantern?

No. The sunlight, he thinks. It's fiercer, as if it's the light of a summer day. And the shopkeeper...his face seems different somehow, as if slightly more lined. His robes, too, seem somehow more worn, more creased.

"How may I help you?"

"I am in need of an owl. Speed is less important than accuracy."

Harry walks up to Malfoy. *Look for clues*, he thinks vaguely. But he's looked at this scene so many times...

There's a slight pause in conversation between Malfoy and the shopkeeper. Harry, aware of the unusual silence, frowns and lifts his gaze.

Malfoy is staring at him.

Harry's eyes widen for a moment before he remembers it's just a memory. Malfoy isn't looking at him, he's looking *through* him.

Then Malfoy glances down at his own hand. Harry automatically follows his gaze.

There's nothing particularly interesting about Malfoy's hand, he thinks. He glances back up again, but Malfoy's already looking at something else; another owl.

Harry wakes, feeling unnerved. Now he even dreams about the memory, it seems. He reaches for the glass of water usually kept on his bedside table.

Then he pauses, eyes glazing slightly.

Malfoy's hand.

He wasn't wearing a ring. A wedding ring. It wasn't there.

* * *

Hermione looks around the owlery. She'd agreed to visit the pensieve memory with him, if only for Harry to demonstrate his success.

"He looks thin," she'd observed of Malfoy, but Harry had quickly shushed her.

"Look...in a few seconds, he'll glance at his hand...I can't believe I didn't notice it earlier! Any moment..."

They wait. Malfoy looks at the owls, nods, points at one. Harry frowns.

"He should've already..."

But before they know it, Malfoy has finished the sale and left. Hermione gives Harry an apologetic look.

"Well, you probably noticed it subconsciously and your dream planted the information there for you."

"I guess."

"Anyway," Hermione says encouragingly, "this is a start. What do you think it means?"

"What, not wearing his ring? I don't know. Could mean anything. Maybe his marriage was falling apart; maybe he lost the ring; maybe he just doesn't like wearing it."

"Maybe he was getting it resized because of recent weight loss," Hermione says, and Harry wishes he'd thought of that.

"That's actually a good point," he admits.

Nevertheless, when he steps out of the memory, he looks up the contact address for Astoria, last updated in the file three years ago.

He hopes it hasn't changed.

* * *

The summer is cooling down to a soft glow of hazy blue and shy green. Astoria's house — a large Georgian home with a gabled roof and young ivy climbing its limestone walls — is set against a background of lushly green gardens dotted with bright frenzies of wildflowers and, every now and again, a graceful young oak or chestnut tree.

It's the sort of place to which Harry could effortlessly come home.

He walks up the narrow path to the front door, ducking beneath a trellis of roses coloured a soft pink, as if summer has faded them, and knocks twice on the door.

Astoria answers.

Harry, taught well by now to look at every detail, catches the look of brief surprise that flashes across her face. She's wearing a casual sundress, printed with roses, and her sun-streaked hair is pulled back into a half-hearted ponytail. Not the way she'd present herself usually, Harry guesses, and he smiles apologetically.

"I've visited at a bad time, haven't I?"

"No, not at all," Astoria says after a beat. Her eyes dart to his scar and away again quickly; he's chosen not to use polyjuice for this particular visit.

"I'm here on Ministry business," Harry says. "Might I come in?"

"I...certainly." She steps back, allowing Harry to walk into the refreshingly cool hallway, and closes the door.

Something is baking, Harry thinks, inhaling the sweet aroma of sugary pastry. He steps over a rag doll and frowns. He didn't realise Astoria had a child.

"Tea?" Astoria asks.

"Thanks."

He follows her into the kitchen, illuminated by bright sunlight. The Wizarding Wireless on the counter is playing a cheerful song; teamed with the pleasant aroma of baked sweets and the uncaring mess of the kitchen — flour spilt across the counter, a cluster of butter-smearred measuring spoons — Harry feels a little more relaxed.

A footstep behind him. He turns. A young child — no more than one and a half years old, he'd guess — is clutching a half-eaten strawberry and staring at him.

"Hullo," he says. The girl studies him a moment, then takes a bite of strawberry before uttering a messy "ullo" in return and toddling out of sight.

Astoria pours Harry a cup of tea and sets it down on the kitchen table. He takes the cue and sits down on a chair, first removing a toy model of the Hogwarts Express and several plush toy owls.

"I'm here about Draco Malfoy," he says, watching Astoria's face carefully.

She pales, her grip tightening around her mug of tea. "No," she says. "My petition was accepted, they agreed I'd done everything I could to locate him — "

"What petition?" Harry asks, confused, and Astoria looks at him as if he's just asked which direction the sun comes up.

"My divorce petition. The divorce has already been granted in absentia. It can't be reversed." Astoria is outright anxious now. Harry quickly shakes his head.

"No, it's nothing to do with that. I've been assigned the case."

"They already investigated. It was three years ago." Astoria's anxiety is fading to confusion.

"Cold case now, yes." Harry hesitates, but the original case manager already asked Astoria all the generic questions: where did she last see him, was there anyone who wished him harm, and so on. Asking them now will get him nowhere. He takes a sip of tea to collect his thoughts, but he's never been good at interview strategies and so he says the first thing that comes to mind. "I didn't realise you'd remarried."

Astoria gives a tense smile. "Matthew Venn. You wouldn't know him." She perhaps catches Harry's glance towards the doorway, for she adds, "Our daughter, Sophie."

"People judge you for it," Harry says slowly. Astoria glances away, staring down at her cup of tea.

"Of course. That's what people do, isn't it? They judge. My parents adored Draco. If it were up to my mother, I'd be a widow forever, trailing about the place dressed in mournful black. She thought it was awful of me to remarry." She taps a fingernail against the rim of the mug. "I was very close to Draco, of course, and when he first went missing I was a mess." That matches the case officer's description of his interview with her, Harry thinks. "But we learn to pick up the pieces and move on, don't we?"

She seems to be waiting for affirmation, so Harry gives it. "We do, yes."

Astoria nods. The conversation lulls; she traces the pattern on the mug, one fingernail skimming over the printed flowers and leaves. Harry looks at her. *Properly* looks, as he's been taught to do with any item of evidence.

She seems casual. Never consciously aware of her movements, whether it's tucking her bare feet under the chair or tracing patterns on the mug. Quick to smile, Harry thinks, seeing the beginning of fine laugh lines around her eyes. Her light tan and sun-tinted hair suggest someone who enjoys being outdoors; a stack of books on the corner of the table with titles like *Easy Gardening Charms* and *The British Guide to Sustainable Harvest* certainly attest to that, although they may belong to Matthew.

The words are out before Harry can stop them. "You don't seem like someone Malfoy would marry."

Astoria's eyes flicker to his, and Harry's startled by her expression. Surprise, he thinks, and...caution? Perhaps even a tinge of suspicion...

"Oh? And why's that?" she asks. Yes; her voice is definitely guarded now.

Harry shrugs. "To be honest, I always pictured his wife to be a female version of him." He says it as a joke, to try and put Astoria at ease again, but she doesn't smile.

"Then I suppose you don't know him very well," she says.

"No," Harry says, studying her. "I don't."

He takes his leave then. He'll visit again, and bring up her previous marriage then. Speaking of it now won't get him anywhere, he senses; Astoria has withdrawn from her initial welcome.

She bids him farewell politely enough, however, and he leaves.

* * *

Harry returns to his Westminster flat. Coming home to the box in the sky.

He pours himself a glass of Irish whiskey and stands on the balcony, looking over the London skyline. He remembers how Ginny's eyes had lit up, the city lights reflected in her pupils, when they first stood at this window and looked at the view. *It's beautiful*, she had breathed. She always had the ambition and drive to own a place like this. Strong lines, clean forms and bold features. She'd been enchanted with London since she was a little girl, accompanying her father on trips to the Ministry and loving the rush of the city. *One day, I'll live in a box in the sky*, she had told her father once, and on the day they bought the apartment, she had laughed with the joy of achieving a long-lost childhood dream.

Harry's heart belongs to the rambling houses of stone and wood, the homes that first captured his heart: Hogwarts, a ramshackle and ancient beast of stone and magic and, later on, the Burrow with its cosy rooms and meandering gardens.

He takes a sip of the whiskey, feeling the slow burn in his throat.

He can see the lights of South Lambeth across the river, reflected in the glittering darkness of the River Thames; a train is approaching the above-ground platforms, visible only as an even line of lights crawling along. A moment later another train leaves, picking up speed.

Harry watches the train until it disappears from view, going out west, where the lights of the city will give way to dotted suburban streetlights and then, the inky darkness of the countryside.

Somewhere, in the streets below, someone is whistling a familiar tune. Harry tilts his head, listening for a long moment before the words come to him. An old English folk song, he remembers.

Blow the wind southerly, southerly, southerly

Blow the wind south o'er the bonny blue sea

Blow the wind southerly, southerly, southerly,

Blow bonnie breeze, and bring him to me...

The last of the summer is bending to autumn's will, sending a chill breeze whispering through Harry's hair. He shivers and steps inside, sliding the door shut behind him.

The trains come and go, threading along like lines of stars, disappearing gradually into the night.

* * *

Saturday.

It's Ginny's big game.

Harry wakes early. This is a routine and it grounds him like a lightning conductor. Wake early, go for a run. Shower, dress. Breakfast.

He's just reached the breakfast stage of his routine and is halfway through a bowl of cereal when his wards tremble. He pushes the bowl away and stands up, making his way to the door. Hermione? Or Ron, wanting to come along for the game?

But Harry's becoming very adept at picking up magical signatures these days, particularly after his Investigative Division training. There's magic drifting around the front door, but it's not Hermione's nor Ron's.

He picks up his wand and whispers a spell, rendering the door transparent only to him, like a one-way mirror.

Blonde hair. Blue eyes.

Harry hesitates, then opens the door.

"Mrs Malfoy."

The woman pauses, then nods. "You may call me Narcissa."

"You should not have found me." As far as Harry's adoring masses are concerned, he lives somewhere in Sussex. Only Hermione and the Weasleys know the truth.

"And yet here I am." She speaks politely, evenly, without a trace of coldness or resentment in her voice, and Harry is hit by the similarity between her tone and that of Draco in the owlery. Both of them have had something struck from their voices since the war, Harry thinks. That polite deference that seems heavy as silence, blank as white walls, like one person in an empty room.

Harry swallows the temptation to ask how she found him.

"Come in," he says instead because what else can he do, with Narcissa Malfoy standing on his doorstep?

She steps inside. The wards shimmer for a moment, then accept her as someone who means no harm. She looks around, eyes flicking once around the room, but Harry doubts she's prying. She seems to be looking for a chair instead, but there are no overstuffed armchairs or cosy sofas in this sparse apartment. There's only the row of stools by the island bench, and a glass-topped dining table with two dining chairs on each side of it.

He checks his watch. He should be portkeying in the next fifteen minutes, arriving in time to wish Ginny luck.

"My arrival is ill-timed," Narcissa comments, and Harry quickly shakes his head. Narcissa is already beginning to look doubtful and the last thing he wants is for her to flee, taking any useful information with her.

"Not at all. Tea or coffee?" he asks, hoping Narcissa will refuse both. The only tea available is builder's tea, and the coffee is a cheap instant powder kept only for Arthur Weasley's infrequent visits.

She declines with a faint shake of her head. "No, thank you."

Harry sits at the dining table. Neither he nor Ginny use it particularly often, although there's an inkwell and quill in the corner for letter-writing. There's a faint patina of dust over the table. He mutters a discreet Scourgify.

Narcissa takes the other chair, glancing once across the apartment. It's a surprisingly clear day for London, and she seems to pause to take in the view. Then she opens the small purse in her lap and pulls out a photograph, placing it face-up on the table.

"I received a Ministry owl several days ago," she says, "stating that my son's case had been re-opened and is under your management."

Harry looks at the photograph. It's a simple portrait of Draco Malfoy. He's unsmiling, mouth turned slightly downwards as though he's contemplating something sorrowful. He's wearing

slate-grey robes and a plain black cloak. Harry looks closer; sure enough, the clasp is a small silver snitch.

Malfoy glances away and Harry, startled, nearly drops the photograph. He'd thought it Muggle from the way Malfoy didn't seem to move at all.

"It's the last photograph I took of Draco," Narcissa says.

"Right." Harry doesn't know what else to say. He glances back down at the portrait.

"He liked that silver snitch clasp. It was a gift from his father, he said."

Harry glances up, wondering if Narcissa somehow read his mind. But she's not looking at him; she's gazing at the photograph, and although there seems to be the faintest trace of a smile on her lips, sadness lines her face. She looks far older than Harry remembers. The fine lines around her eyes seem deeper and she seems thinner. Harry wonders if all the Malfoys became thinner and smaller after the war. Taking up less space, or trying to vanish themselves somehow.

"Do you know why he liked the silver snitch, Harry?" Narcissa asks. He half-wishes she called him the far more formal Mr Potter. He's not sure he's comfortable with any Malfoy calling him by his first name.

"No." He wonders if Narcissa will reprimand him for knowing so little about Malfoy, but she seems to be caught in other thoughts, staring down at the photograph with a pensive expression.

"He liked circles." Narcissa turns the photograph over and glances about the table; Harry wordlessly hands her the quill and she accepts it, writing a sentence on the back of the photograph. "In incepto finis est," she says. "In the beginning is the end. When Draco first found out what I did during the battle — the lie I told to the Dark Lord — he said that to me. In incepto finis est."

"And what did he mean by that?" Harry's intrigued despite himself.

"That a mother's love brought about the first downfall of the Dark Lord, and a mother's love ensured his defeat again seventeen years later."

Harry sits back, a rush of some unidentifiable emotion crashing over him like a wave.

"I never thought about it like that," he says. "I never thought..." He glances at Narcissa. "Why are you telling me this?"

She lifts a hand to the necklace around her neck, fingers resting on the sapphire pendant.

"I didn't travel all this way to tell a story of circles. I came here to ask if you intend to find my son."

"I was assigned the case — "

"So was the first detective, three years ago, and he spoke my son's name as if it were mud in his mouth. He told me Draco had probably run away to live a life of luxury abroad."

Harry flinches, although Narcissa spoke without anger. Her face is calm, like a deep lake, but Harry's experienced firsthand the dangers that lurk beneath still waters.

"I promise," Harry says, "I'll do my best to find him." He hesitates, but Narcissa has been generously honest and sincere and he feels obliged to return the favour. "I...I originally thought that, too. That Malfoy had just run away to join his father." He realises he forgot to use Malfoy's given name, but Narcissa gives no indication of offence. "But I don't believe that, not anymore. I've been revisiting all the evidence...I'm working on some new observations now, actually," he says, thinking of the missing wedding ring.

Narcissa listens to him carefully, her eyes studying him as if he's a particularly difficult rune. Then she leans back slightly, clasping her hands in her lap.

"If you speak the truth," she says, "I will give any information you require, any assistance you need to find my son."

"You trust easily." The words are uttered more from surprise than anything else; the Narcissa Malfoy he remembers certainly wouldn't trust him with her son's precious memories or secrets.

Narcissa says nothing for a long moment. Then she reaches out and touches a hand to the photograph, as if reassuring herself it's real.

"Perhaps so," she allows, "but my son has been missing for three long years now, and this seems to be his last chance. Should I gamble it for the sake of keeping secrets, guarding memories?"

Harry can't argue with that. After a long moment of silence, Narcissa hands him a card and stands up.

"My contact details. Please keep me updated."

"Certainly." Harry picks up the photograph to return to her, but Narcissa shakes her head.

"Keep it. You may find it useful somehow."

He accompanies her to the door, wondering what he should ask about Malfoy. What information could possibly prove useful? He doesn't know where to start.

"What were the last words Malf— Draco said to you?" he says impulsively. He's mildly curious, but it's partially a test to see if Narcissa will freely give personal information.

She looks at him, then glances down at her hands as if the answer is written there.

"I can give you the memory," she says slowly, "of our last meeting. The last time I saw him. Perhaps it may help."

Well, Narcissa has gone beyond Harry's simple test of faith.

"The memory?" he repeats. Narcissa nods. "I...if it's not too much trouble, I suppose."

He half-expects Narcissa to say she'll send it to him in a day or so, but instead she stands there, waiting patiently, and Harry realises she means now. He hurries away and, after a rushed rifle through the kitchen drawers, finds an empty potions vial to give her. He turns away and busies himself tidying the kitchen while she extracts her memory, knowing that some people prefer privacy while performing the spell.

When he turns back to Narcissa, she's holding out the vial, silver wisps moving within.

"I must ask," she says, "that you do not share the memory."

"Only I will see it," Harry promises.

Narcissa nods once, then turns and departs without further farewell.

Harry checks his watch. The game would have already started, he thinks, and Ginny knows, anyway, that his work always comes first, same as her Quidditch does for her.

He slips the vial into his pocket and steps outside the apartment wards, Disapparating to the Ministry.

Chapter 3

Within seconds of pouring the memory into the assigned pensieve, Harry disappears into its depths. A room constructs itself lightning-quick around him, the memory quickly taking form. Half-height walnut panelling, a rich leather chaise, solemn-faced portraits in gilded frames, a marble fireplace — a room in Malfoy Manor, Harry would wager.

Narcissa stands by the fireplace, the flames casting patterns of light and shadow over her face.

"You are unhappy," she says slowly.

Harry turns around. Malfoy is behind him, he realises, standing and facing away from his mother, seemingly studying a family portrait on the wall. He's neatly dressed, as ever, but he wears no robes or cloak. It gives him a strangely vulnerable look.

Malfoy doesn't reply to his mother. He keeps staring at the family portrait. It consists of a far younger Narcissa and Lucius, Harry sees, standing each side of their son. Malfoy looks about ten or eleven and when Malfoy speaks next, he confirms Harry's estimate.

"This portrait was painted the day before I left for Hogwarts."

"Did you hear me, Draco? I'm asking if you're happy," Narcissa says. Malfoy, once more, doesn't respond. He keeps staring at the portrait, eyes locked on his younger self. Lucius and Narcissa look proud, Harry thinks, and so much more complete. The toll of the war was high indeed.

Narcissa watches her son with a frown on her face. "Draco — "

"I heard you."

Narcissa raises a hand to her necklace. It's a habit she has, Harry thinks, when she's anxious or displeased.

"You're not wearing your wedding ring," Narcissa observes, and Harry glances at Malfoy's hand. Narcissa doesn't miss a thing, he thinks wryly.

"I never do," Malfoy says, not turning his gaze from the portrait.

Several expressions shift over Narcissa's face, difficult to observe in the flickering firelight. She drops her hand from the necklace and changes topics. "Well, seeing as you're so interested in portraits, you'll be sitting for your next one in a few months. I thought the conservatory would make a nice backdrop."

Malfoy nods. Narcissa presses on.

"And perhaps a quote, carved into the frame? You'll have to give it some careful thought. Your father selected a Seneca quote about power, if I recall correctly. Perhaps you'll choose

something similar?"

"I've got something in mind," Malfoy says.

"Yes?" Narcissa tilts her head expectantly. "Tell me, I'll be sure to tell the framer."

"We cannot accept," Malfoy says, "what we do not choose."

Narcissa is silent.

Malfoy crosses the room in a short number of strides and leaves, his footsteps fading down the hallway, and the memory dissolves to nothing.

Harry's not sure what he should make of it.

* * *

The Wandsworth Warriors win the Margate match.

Ginny arrives at the apartment just after five o'clock in the evening. Harry is standing on the balcony, staring out over the Thames, watching the trains. The wards suddenly shimmer, wavering across his view, and the next moment Ginny has tumbled into the middle of the kitchen, a portkey clutched in one hand. Her cheeks are flushed, her eyes bright with victory. She kisses him before rushing away again; the team captain has organised a celebratory dinner for the team.

"I'll skip the drinks afterwards and just come home," Ginny promises as she changes into a set of casual robes.

"Don't be daft, go and have fun," Harry says, and Ginny smiles as she kisses him again in farewell, rushing out the door again. A moment later, there's a brief pop as she Disapparates.

Harry goes out onto the balcony again. The sun is setting over London, silhouetting the buildings starkly against the pale blue sky.

It's the last day of summer.

If he listens carefully, he's certain he can hear someone whistling again, sending the notes into the gentle August sky.

Blow the wind southerly, southerly, southerly...

* * *

Harry wakes early on Monday and leaves Ginny sleeping. She's used to his early starts.

Sometimes, he thinks, it's like there's only one of them living in the apartment.

The morning sunlight slants across the white walls. He puts the kettle on, gets a mug out of the cupboard, measures a spoonful of sugar. Every noise seems amplified in the quiet

apartment. Every footstep echoes on the floorboards; he can hear every breath he takes.

Inhale, exhale.

The sliding door to the balcony is clean, all fingerprints Scourgified away. The glass is clear as air. The view beyond it could belong in any real estate magazine.

Maybe nobody's living here at all.

* * *

At the Ministry, he passes by the Auror offices, listening to them laugh and joke about some potions incident. Ron hasn't arrived yet, Harry thinks. It's a running joke that he always sleeps in.

The Investigative Division offices are far more quiet. Harry unlocks the door to his office and steps inside.

Unlike the pristine apartment, his office is a comfortable clutter of mismatched furniture and piles of paperwork. There's the battered desk with his chair behind it; in the corner of the office are two comfortable chairs and a low table with an inviting bowl of sweets. It's been deliberately designed to be as soothing as possible, as the designated corner for interviewing (often distraught) relatives.

The walls are lined with colourful pictures: bright crayon drawings sent in by families grateful for news of long-lost spouses and parents, and a framed picture of the Chudley Cannons on one wall (a joke gift from Ron). Harry, aware that many friends and family of missing people will sit in the office and look around it, has made a concerted effort to hide anything upsetting. Unlike the Auror offices — often with enlarged mugshots on the walls or mind-maps that track motives and suspects — Harry is far more discreet with his file information. It was one of the first thing Holdsworth taught him about being in the Investigative Division.

In keeping with these principles, Malfoy's case isn't visible. The file is locked in Harry's desk drawer; the pensieve is locked in the cabinet behind his desk.

The pensieve.

He unlocks the cabinet and stares into the silvery depths of the pensieve, frowning.

He watches the memory with Narcissa again, looking for the most insignificant detail. The way Malfoy pauses before speaking, the way he stares at the family portrait in the same way Harry stares at photographs of his parents and thinks it's the closest he'll ever get to them.

But everything feels so cryptic. Everything Malfoy says seems to have a thousand different meanings, depending on how Harry chooses to interpret the tone of his voice or the slightest tilt of his head or the faintest pause before he speaks. *We can't accept what we do not choose* could refer to Malfoy feeling resentful of the way his family naturally led him to the Dark Arts, or the way Voldemort forced his hand, or it could have nothing to do with the war at all.

Maybe it's his marriage, Harry thinks critically. Maybe Astoria wanted a divorce and Malfoy didn't, but either way he'd end up having to concede. It would explain the absence of Malfoy's wedding ring.

But then, Malfoy said he never wore the wedding ring, and what was *that* supposed to mean? He simply doesn't like jewellery, or perhaps found the ring too bothersome — always losing it or something — or some deeper meaning Harry's failed to grasp?

Everything seems to lead in circles.

Circles.

Well, he's got one concrete bit of information. Caught in an unusually capricious mood, Harry smiles wryly and reaches for the file, drawing up a fresh page and writing *Likes circles*. He pauses, then adds *In Incepto Finis Est*. He uses a sticking charm to attach the photograph of Malfoy to the page. He looks at it for a long time, waiting for a scowl or rude gesture, but Malfoy just gazes at some point past Harry, clearly locked in deep thought.

"Where are you?" Harry mutters, staring at the photograph. "Are you even alive?"

Malfoy moves at last, touching a hand absently to the silver clasp on his cloak, before his hand falls to his side again and he resumes gazing at nothing.

Harry sighs.

* * *

He walks slowly up the meandering path to Astoria's door. He'd received an owl around lunchtime, just after he finished reviewing the file notes again. The letter had requested he visit and Harry had jumped at the chance to acquire something new, wasting no time in Disapparating to Astoria's home.

The first signs of autumn are beginning to chill the lingering touch of summer. The soil is damp with early rain and, as Astoria greets Harry and takes him to the kitchen, he sees the little reminders of autumn: a small woodpile by the hearth, a vase of marigolds — the last of a late summer bloom — on the table. The kitchen hearth burns a gentle fire, consisting mostly of glowing coals. The weather is still too warm to justify a roaring blaze.

"You spoke to Narcissa," Astoria says as she makes him a cup of tea. She hadn't seemed surprised to see him so soon after sending the owl.

Harry takes a seat at the table, moving a bag of seed sachets and a set of gardening shears from the chair.

"She told you that?" He frowns, wondering if it matters if the two regularly keep each other updated.

"Yes. I received a letter from her."

Astoria sets the cup of tea in front of Harry, then moves to sit opposite him. "You must have made quite an impression. Narcissa seems to trust you, and she does not trust readily."

"She told me herself that she has little choice. This could be her last chance to find her son."

Astoria regards him for a long moment. He'd expected her to be formally dressed today, as she had perhaps expected his visit this time, but apparently not. Her hair is brushed into a neat bun but there the effort ends. She wears a comfortable set of robes, designed for lounging on a sofa with a good book rather than impressing guests at dinner parties, and wears no jewellery that Harry can see besides her engagement and wedding rings.

Wedding rings.

"Narcissa allowed access to a memory."

Astoria's eyebrows jump upwards. "Which one?"

Harry shakes his head. He doesn't know if Narcissa would want Astoria to know. "It doesn't matter. But in it, Malfoy mentioned he never wears his wedding ring."

Astoria glances down, towards her cup of tea. People look downwards when they're upset, Holdsworth once told Harry, or trying to hide emotion. But it's difficult to read Astoria's face, although she twists her lips slightly as if considering something.

"Narcissa was very pleased with my marriage to Draco. She dearly wanted a grandchild. And she liked me. My family is wealthy, of good status and pureblood, but sufficiently distanced from Voldemort. We never got involved with that sort."

"Until you married a Death Eater," Harry feels obliged to point out. Astoria gives him a sharp look.

"Narcissa and Draco were both acquitted. The past doesn't matter to my parents, anyway. They just wanted to see me happy, and they adored Draco. During our courtship, he became my closest friend."

Harry smiles to hide his disbelief, but Astoria seems to catch it anyway and her face tightens. "You don't believe me."

"Malfoy doesn't have friends, he has allies. Trust me, I — "

" — know him?" Astoria shakes her head. "Like the officer first on the case. He thought he knew Draco too. 'Oh, I know the Malfoys,' he said. 'We'll find whatever overpriced villa your husband is holidaying at and drag him back home.' Like Draco was a spoiled child — "

"I'm nothing like that," Harry interrupts, annoyed. "I'm doing my best to find Malfoy."

Astoria grabs her wand; Harry instinctively ducks, reaching for his own wand, and feels slightly embarrassed when Astoria presses her wand to her own head and slowly draws out a silver wisp of memory, holding it in place before she spots a vial full of seeds on the table.

She empties the vial carelessly, then refills it with memory. "There you go," she says. "More memories for your collection. I must ask you to not show anyone else."

Harry nods curtly, accepting the vial. "Thank you for the tea," he says tersely. "And the memory."

"When you watch it," Astoria says, "let me know."

Harry nods, feeling strangely apprehensive.

* * *

When he's back at his office, Harry pours the memory into the pensieve and wonders whether he should leave it until tomorrow. It's nearing five o'clock now, and he should be going home soon. But the temptation proves too much, and he enters the pensieve.

And he's not sure what he'd been expecting, but this isn't it.

He's hit first with a sense of motion, like flying but not quite, and he feels nauseous for a moment before the rest of the scene rolls over him like a tide. He's sitting in the back seat of a car.

"This is terrifying. You're going to kill me."

He looks ahead. Astoria. She's sitting in the front passenger seat, eyes wide. Malfoy is driving. Harry never imagined Malfoy like this. He's dressed in his usual style — neat and formal clothes — but he's not wearing robes, nor a cloak. His hands are resting lightly on the steering wheel, warm sunlight slanting across his wrists.

"I assure you," Malfoy says, a faint trace of amusement in his voice, "I passed the test."

"It self-steers though, doesn't it? Draco, tell me *you're* not steering."

Malfoy lifts his hands from the wheel and the car begins to coast to the right; Astoria cries out. Harry laughs before he realises what he's doing.

"Don't *do* that!" Astoria says as Malfoy takes the wheel again. "Merlin, how do the Muggles do this? It's — watch out for that car!"

"You mean the one on the opposite side of the road?" Malfoy says dryly.

"Did you *see* how close it was?" Astoria twists round in her seat, watching the car recede into the distance.

"It's supposed to be close, Astoria. This is a country road, not a four-lane motorway."

"You're insane." Astoria glances at Malfoy. "Why are you doing this, anyway? We could buy a car with automatic driving spells, Draco. It's not like we don't have the money for it. My father could find us a very nice Bentley, all the latest self-driving and space-squeezing charms on it."

"What's the point in that?" Malfoy says, and there's a strange edge to his voice that Harry's never heard before. "Sitting in a box, only going where someone else takes you."

"Watch out for that car in front of us, if they go any slower you'll hit them," Astoria says, still sounding thoroughly unnerved. Malfoy's eyes flick up to the rear-vision mirror and for a moment, his eyes seem to meet Harry's. Then he switches the indicator on and overtakes the car, his eyes back on the road. "I don't think anyone I know has a Muggle driving licence," Astoria continues. "And now I understand why." She laughs, but Malfoy doesn't. He glances at the rear-vision mirror again, and once more he seems to be looking at Harry. *Not at you*, Harry reminds himself. *Through you*.

"I wanted to be the first in my family to do something," Malfoy says. "For once."

Harry's eyes fall to Malfoy's wrist. He can see the faint curve of the serpent's tail, the beginning of the Dark Mark. The tail seems to ripple as Malfoy turns a bend in the road, flexing his wrist as he steers.

Fields of wheat wash up on each side of the road like a tide of gold. It's high summer, Harry thinks, staring into the cloudless blue sky. For a moment, he wonders where Malfoy's driving. Maybe he's going nowhere. Maybe one day, he just got into his car and drove and drove and never stopped.

He closes his eyes. The sun feels so heavy with warmth, he can almost believe this moment is real. But as Malfoy slows down for another corner, the memory dissolves like a handful of sand tossed into the sky.

* * *

A new scene forms, and for a moment Harry is disoriented. Then he remembers Astoria said she gave him memories, plural.

The high summer sun has long set, it seems. He's standing on the crumbling stone steps of a small chapel. There's a brisk wind stirring dead leaves along the gravestones. Overhead, the sky is bruised with unshed rain. Someone is standing at a grave, setting a small handful of wilting bluebells upon it, but Harry doesn't recognise them.

He turns and nearly jumps. Astoria stands just behind him, her face pale. Her robes — black and plain — billow and snap in the wind like the sails of a storm-tossed boat.

The chapel door opens. Malfoy steps out and closes it behind him.

"Astoria."

Astoria's mouth looks like a bruised petal, Harry thinks. She shakes her head. "I can't go back in there. I can't *stand* it. My father would hate it, all the people in black and Mother sitting there with that horrible blank look on her face — "

"You have to deliver the eulogy," Malfoy says. Astoria looks at him, a strange mix of desperation and disbelief on her face.

"I can't. Will you do it? For me?"

"No."

"I *can't* — "

"You told me last night, Astoria, that you wanted to be the one standing there delivering your father's eulogy." Malfoy's expression hasn't changed a bit, Harry thinks. He's standing there looking intently at Astoria.

"Can't you do it for me?" Astoria turns away from him, her mouth trembling. "Merlin, I can't cry. If I cry now, I won't be able to go back in."

"Then don't cry," Malfoy says flatly.

Astoria looks at him then, and anger seems to overtake her grief. "You don't even care, do you?" She steps to the door, resting her hand on the wrought-iron handle. "Sometimes I wonder why I married someone so selfish and unkind."

She opens the door and enters the chapel and, with that, the memory dissolves.

* * *

The next memory is bright, filled with sun again. The tepid sunlight of autumn, streaming through a large window. A bedroom, Harry thinks, turning from the window. There's a dresser, and a wardrobe, and a bed of course. The style of the room reminds him of Astoria's country home and he wonders if that's the location.

Astoria is sitting on the edge of the bed. She's holding something in her hand.

A wedding ring, Harry realises. As he steps closer, he realises she's crying. Did she have a fight with Malfoy? He waits restlessly for Malfoy to step through the door and say something acerbic.

Nothing seems to happen, however.

He gives up waiting for Malfoy and restlessly paces the room. There's a collection of items on the dresser — a seashell, an acorn, a photograph of a sunset over a field — and a small calendar. Harry glances at it, then looks again.

25 October 2003.

Just over a month since Malfoy went missing. He turns to gaze at Astoria. She's still sitting on the edge of the bed, her wedding ring in one hand, crying silently. He feels slightly uncomfortable with the memory and wonders why Astoria gave him such a personal scene. Then she speaks, and for a moment Harry thinks she's speaking to him. But she seems to be addressing nothing more than air.

"I never told you," she says, her voice low and hoarse. "I never said how grateful I was, that day you made me go and say my father's eulogy."

And then the memory dissolves again and Harry finds himself standing alone in his office.

* * *

He paces his office, mind racing. The memories rush through his head like water.

What's the point in that? Sitting in a box, only going where someone else takes you...

I wanted to be the first in my family to do something, for once...

"You wouldn't believe the stunt Creechurch pulled this morning!"

Harry whips around, startled from his thoughts. Ron has just walked through the door, looking slightly tattered.

"She used this amazing hex to catch McGregor, it was brilliant, but it was nowhere *near* safe! Williamson's given her a right telling-off...oh, didn't interrupt anything, did I?"

"No, I was just viewing some memories," Harry says, turning and locking the cabinet. Ron looks at him with sudden interest.

"Hermione said you were working Malfoy's case. Is that true?"

Harry nods.

"Well," Ron says doubtfully, "doesn't that create a conflict of interest, really?"

"I *can* be professional, you know," Harry says defensively, and Ron shrugs.

"All right, calm down. You're working late — it's past six, you know. Saw your light on and figured you'd be here. Seem to practically live in the office these days." Ron frowns.

"Everything all right with you and Ginny?"

"Course it is, why wouldn't it be? This case has gotten interesting, that's all."

Ron's eyebrows shoot upwards. "You've got new leads? Blimey, Harry. Malfoy's been gone, what, three or four years now?"

"No new leads," Harry admits. "But...I don't know. It's hard to explain."

"Tell you what, if you found Malfoy after all this time, I reckon Williamson'll give you any assignment you want! We'll be going on fieldwork together before you know it." Ron grins.

"Never thought I'd say it, but you need any help finding Malfoy — just ask, I'll see what I can do."

"Thanks, Ron."

They leave the office together, Harry feeling a little more clear-headed.

He'll need to visit Narcissa Malfoy, however.

He wants to know what happened to Draco's car.

* * *

Although he writes an owl on Tuesday, he doesn't get a response until Thursday, when Narcissa Malfoy sends an owl. It's short and succinct: she will receive him at the manor, two o'clock sharp on Friday. Harry can't help but feel slight resentment that Narcissa feels perfectly welcome to turn up at his apartment at any time, but he's expected to practically make appointments to visit her.

Nevertheless, he arrives at the manor at the expected time. It's still protected by wards, he finds, and he has to walk up the rather long driveway. He's half-expecting a house-elf or servant to greet him at the door, but it's Narcissa herself.

"Do come in," she says.

Harry wonders how she can possibly live in the manor, filled with nightmare-inducing memories. It's exactly how he remembers it: the cold stone floors, the rows of disapproving portraits glaring at him. They pass the drawing room; the doors are firmly locked, Harry notices, and judging by the layer of dust on the handles, the room has been abandoned for a long time.

He expects to be taken to a sitting room or reception hall, but Narcissa leads him straight up the stairs, into the family quarters, and to a narrow door. She unlocks it with a tap of her wand and opens the door, the smell of dust and disuse rising from the room like a wave. Harry glances at Narcissa, then walks in.

It's a bedroom. There's a bed in the corner, with hunter-green covers, although it's hard to tell from the layer of dust over it. A bedside table, a dresser, and a neat stack of boxes in the corner. Harry turns to look at Narcissa, but she sees the question in his face without him uttering a word.

"Draco's possessions," she says.

"This was his room?"

Narcissa nods, just once. "Until he purchased a home in East Devon."

"The same house Astoria lives in now?" Harry says, frowning.

"No."

"What happened to Draco's home, then?"

Narcissa lifts a hand to the necklace around her neck. The sapphire pendant again, Harry sees.

"It was solely in Draco's name. I sold it on his behalf."

Harry frowns. His first instinct is to wonder why Narcissa sold her son's home, but then he imagines what he would do if it had been someone close to him who went missing. Could he bear to let the empty house sit there for years, slowly decaying?

"These are his things," Narcissa says, tilting her head towards the boxes stacked in the corner. It's a very small pile, Harry thinks critically. Is it really the contents of a whole house?

"And what happened to the furniture? His car?"

"The furniture was sold with the house." Narcissa hesitates. "There's a set of stables on the manor grounds, when there used to be horses and carriages kept here. The stables were converted to a storage area for the gardener's equipment. Draco's car is kept there too."

"You didn't sell it?"

Narcissa glances away, a hand still resting on the sapphire pendant. "You can look at it, if you think it will help. It's one of Draco's most prized possessions."

Harry studies Narcissa for a moment. "You didn't approve of it."

"I preferred not to encourage Draco's interest in the Muggle vehicle, no." Narcissa turns away. "You may peruse the boxes at leisure. I hope you find something of use in the investigation."

She leaves.

Harry turns his attention to the boxes and opens the first one.

Chapter 4

Draco had a very limited range of possessions, Harry thinks an hour later. It's surprising; he assumed Draco would amass a number of expensive but useless things.

But the first three cartons are lined with neatly-folded clothes. Well-made robes and quality cloaks, but hardly opulent or extravagant clothing. There's a small selection of ties for formalwear, and three tiny boxes that Harry first mistakes for ring boxes. But no; each one has a set of cufflinks inside. The next carton is filled with documents: tax files and the like. Draco's finances were kept in good order, Harry sees with a brief skim of the documents. No apparent investments, but his spending seemed quite limited.

The fourth carton is filled with personal possessions, items of which Harry can only guess the history. A set of photographs of picturesque countryside, several books (a well-thumbed car manual and a set of Hogwarts textbooks), a notebook, an origami rose, a bottle of aged whiskey, and a school tie. When Harry picks up the tie, it unravels and sends a prefect's badge spinning across the floor.

But beneath the tie, he discovers, is a small white jewellery box. More cufflinks? He snaps it open.

Draco's wedding ring.

It's a plain platinum band. Rather inexpensive looking, Harry thinks. He turns the band around, looking for an engraving, but there is none. The ring looks like it's never been worn.

He packs up the carton and goes to find Narcissa.

* * *

"It can't be all of it."

"I assure you," Narcissa says, setting her needlework aside, "it is."

Harry restlessly paces the room. It looks awfully familiar and he realises, with a jolt, that it's the same room that was in Narcissa's last memory of Draco. Narcissa sits by the gilded fireplace; on the wall opposite Harry is the family portrait at which Draco had spent so long gazing.

"There's practically nothing. Clothes, some paperwork, a few books and a couple of personal items. You're saying that's everything in Draco's life?"

"Draco became very..." Narcissa pauses, then picks her needlework up again. "The war changed him."

"The war changed everyone." Harry's voice is sharp, and he wonders why he feels irked by Narcissa's words.

"In any case," Narcissa says, drawing a long thread of red through the eye of a needle, "I assure you that all of Draco's possessions are in those boxes."

"Where's the rest? There must be other stuff. You've got his Hogwarts textbooks and a school tie — what about his cauldron set, then? Or his robes. Or his Quidditch stuff — he'd definitely have that." Draco was always unbearably smug about his flying skills, Harry thinks.

Narcissa shakes her head. "I don't know why he kept the textbooks, but he sold or discarded everything else from Hogwarts."

"Not his broom, at least."

Narcissa nods. "I assume he sold his broom. Both Astoria and myself removed all his possessions when I was granted the rights to sell his house. We collected every item."

Harry is silent for a moment.

"Do you mind if I take the cartons with me?"

Narcissa says nothing for a long moment, pushing the needle through the cloth. "I don't wish for his possessions to be lost or destroyed," she says at last.

"I'll keep it in the evidence archives."

"Anyone could access it."

"My office, then."

Narcissa is still hesitant, Harry sees. He wonders if the previous case officers 'misplaced' seized possessions, and gives her what he hopes is a reassuring look.

"I'll keep the carton in my home, then, and put a Disillusionment Charm on it."

Narcissa considers that. "I'll accept those terms," she says, then stands up. "Would you like to see the car?"

Yes, he would. She accompanies him to a side-door — an old servant entranceway, Harry guesses — and gives him directions to the converted stables.

He sets off into the gardens, following a path that cuts directly across manicured lawns and past a weeping willow with a stone bench beneath it. He can see the stables, flanked by well-tended flowerbeds, and as he unlocks the bolted door and steps inside, he can still smell the rich aroma of riding leather. The hooks on the wall — no doubt once used to hold tack — now hold secateurs, hedge trimmers, trowels and grafters. Harry manages to squeeze past the bags of potting mix and fertilisers, making his way through a narrow doorway and into the main stables.

The stalls have been removed, but the sweet scent of hay still lingers. There's some gardening items in here too — rakes and brooms leaning against the wall — but most of the room is

taken up by the car, hidden beneath a large swathe of canvas. Harry drags the canvas away, causing clouds of dust and dirt to drift into the air, and detects deterrence spells woven into the material. Most likely to stop rats and other vermin from getting near the car and chewing wiring, Harry thinks.

The car is in beautiful condition. A 2002 Renault Mégane coupé, Harry recalls from the car manual found in the cartons. A nice car, but hardly something flashy or outrageously luxurious. It wouldn't look out of place parked in Muggle London somewhere, and maybe that was Draco's intention. He rests a hand against the bonnet, feeling the cold metal beneath his skin, polished smooth. After a moment, he steps forward and tugs on the driver-door handle.

Locked.

"*Alohomora*." If Draco's warded the car with magic, the spell won't work.

But it does. Harry tries the handle again and this time, the door swings open.

It's the same car that was in Astoria's memory, he thinks. The interior is pale grey, in comparison to the charcoal-coloured exterior, and is just as clean. At first, Harry suspects someone Scourgified the car, but then he spots a handful of Muggle coins and some receipts in the centre console compartment.

He pauses a moment, then gets into the car and shuts the door. It feels strange, sitting in the driver's seat of Draco Malfoy's car. He glances into the rear-vision mirror, half-expecting to see a ghost of himself sitting in the back seat.

What's the point of that? Sitting in a box, only going where someone else takes you.

Harry shakes his head, as if trying to shake away his thoughts, and turns his attention to the receipts. One is dated 09/09/2003 — the date of Draco's disappearance — and shows that he purchased £20 worth of petrol. Harry checks the time-stamp: 10:26am, at least five hours before he arrived in Diagon Alley.

The second receipt is dated 05/09/2003, at 11:29pm, and shows that Draco purchased £20 worth of petrol again, in Truro, Cornwall. A fair distance from East Devon. What was Draco doing there, so late at night? Harry's eyes flick to the rear-vision mirror again, as if he'll find the answer hiding behind him.

He leans across to the glovebox and opens it. There's the ownership papers inside: Draco purchased the car from a dealership in Essex, on the thirty-first of July 2002. Harry smiles slightly at the date and puts the papers aside. There's also a large book that Harry has to work hard to free from the glovebox. *2003 Great Britain Road Atlas*, he sees. He sets it aside and peers into the glovebox. There's an auto-inking quill but nothing else.

Harry frowns and turns to the road atlas, opening it up. Immediately, a plastic rectangular card falls out.

Draco's licence.

Harry studies the photograph. If he looks closely enough, he can see a faint smile on Draco's face. He looks younger than he should, Harry thinks. Or perhaps it's just the first time he's seen Draco smiling since he began this case.

The licence doesn't hold much new information for Harry. It has Draco's name, birthdate, address. The licence was granted on the twentieth of June 2002, and expires in 2012.

Still valid.

Harry slips the licence into his pocket, although he doesn't know why. It's unlikely to give new information no matter how much he studies it. He places the rest of the items back in the glovebox, then leans back and stares through the windscreen and at the timber walls of the stables.

Would the car start if he tried it?

Harry drops his gaze to the steering wheel. There's two slightly faded patches on it, where Draco must have rested his hands constantly. Harry lifts his hands and places them over the same patches.

"Would you like the key?"

Harry jumps and swears loudly, then flushes as he realises Narcissa is standing near the driver's side.

"I didn't see you come in," he says, wondering if he should apologise for swearing. Narcissa doesn't seem particularly offended, however. She's studying him intently.

"It's strange," she says, "to see someone sitting in it. Can you drive?"

"No," Harry admits. "I mean, with Floo networks and portkeys and Apparating and everything, it seemed a bit redundant to get my licence."

Narcissa nods. "I never understood why Draco bothered with these ridiculous Muggle contraptions." She holds out a plastic rectangle and Harry stares at it uncomprehendingly. "It's the key," she says with an air of faint irritation.

Harry accepts it, turning it over in his hands. "This...this isn't a car key. There should be a little silver key, probably with a black grip on it and a button or something."

"I assure you, it is the key," Narcissa says, her voice a little chilly. "I would not have assumed that you knew even less about the Muggle world than me."

"It doesn't look like a car key," Harry says defensively. Perhaps it's new technology? He wishes he'd kept up with the Muggle world. "I mean, how do you open the car door with this?"

"Draco would just open the door," Narcissa says. "As long as the key was in his pocket or in his hand, the door would open."

Harry hunts around the steering wheel, looking for the ignition. There's a button with 'Start' on it, and he presses it doubtfully.

Nothing happens.

"Battery needs replacing," Harry says decisively, pleased to at least know something. He tries a Reparo spell but it doesn't work. "I'll have to research automative spells," he says, getting out of the car and shutting the door.

Narcissa covers the car with the canvas again, and Harry watches the sleek lines disappear beneath the folds of dusty cloth.

* * *

When he goes to the apartment that night, Ginny wrinkles her nose after hugging him.

"You smell odd. Like...hay and leather."

Harry laughs. "Long story. I was in some old stables."

"Your latest case is a missing horse, then?" Ginny nods at the boxes Harry had set down beside the front door. "Oh, I meant to tell you — we're playing the Stratford Skylarks on Saturday, there's going to be an International Quidditch scout there!"

"That's brilliant news, Ginny," Harry says warmly. It's long been a dream of hers to gain a place on the English National Team.

"I know, but the whole team's nerve-wracked about it. Gwen's called us all in for a special debriefing tonight, and we'll be practicing all tomorrow. I'm sorry, I know we were supposed to be going to Ron and Hermione's for dinner tomorrow, but — "

"It's all right, I know how important this is for you."

"Thanks for understanding," Ginny says, kissing him briefly before grabbing her well-thumbed copy of *Practical Quidditch Strategies*. "The debriefing should only take an hour or so."

Unlikely. The team captain, Gwen, could get a bit overenthusiastic and micromanage every detail; she reminds Harry uncannily of Oliver Wood.

"See you soon," he says, and she nods and steps out the door, Disapparating a moment later.

Harry sits at the counter, but the apartment seems too silent.

So he goes out onto the balcony, and watches the trains come and go, and listens to the noise of the city. If he removes his glasses and tilts his head slightly, he can imagine that the River Thames is the Hogwarts lake, shining in the dark light of dusk, and beyond it he can almost see the green Quidditch pitch, smell the freshly-cut grass...and if he looks over his shoulder, he'll see the towers of Hogwarts reaching into the azure sky...

He looks over his shoulder.

The white walls of his apartment greet his gaze.

So don't look back, then.

He reaches into his pocket and takes out the driver's licence, angling it in the thin light spilling from the apartment. Draco's face always stays the same though, locked in a moment from four years ago.

In the streets below, someone is whistling *Blow the Wind Southerly* again.

* * *

The following day, Harry receives an owl from Astoria asking him to visit that afternoon. He arrives around two o'clock, wondering if she'll give him more memories.

She does.

She takes him to the kitchen first, however, and makes a cup of tea. For once, her husband is home. He's sitting at the dining table, Sophie nestled in his lap as she tries to build a house from blocks.

"Matt," Astoria says, "this is Harry Potter. He's trying to find Draco."

Matthew looks up, still laughing over something Sophie did. He's a broad-shouldered man, with thick chestnut hair and brown eyes crinkled with laughter. Someone who smiles easily. Harry thinks, and well-suited to Astoria's personality.

He waits for Matthew to gape at him, or at least stare at his scar. But not a trace of recognition seems to cross Matthew's face.

"Hullo," he says cheerfully, holding out a hand. Harry shakes it. "Nice to meet you. Had much luck finding Astoria's mysterious ex-husband, then?"

"He's not mysterious," Astoria says with exasperation.

"He lived in a manor, you said. I feel like you two probably lazed around all day, eating grapes off gold platters and laughing at us peasants."

Astoria laughs and shoves at him playfully. "You think you're hilarious, don't you?"

"Little bit. Hey, Harry, are you a wizard?"

Harry stares at him, not sure if he's joking. "Yes?" he ventures.

"Oh, so there's like...a wizard police, sort of thing? Like Scotland Yard, but magic?"

"Stop quizzing Harry, he's here to talk about the case," Astoria says, and Matthew shrugs.

"All right. I think it's time for someone's nap, anyway." And he stands up, lifting a helplessly-giggling Sophie over one shoulder as he walks from the room. Harry waits a moment, listening to Sophie's giggles fade, and then turns to stare at Astoria.

"You married a Muggle?"

"Are you surprised?" Astoria puts the kettle on.

"Well, quite frankly — yes. You're pureblood, you said, and...I mean, not that I have a problem with it, of *course* not, but — "

Astoria takes pity on him. "I understand. We all make certain assumptions, don't we?"

He studies Astoria as she pours the tea. "I watched the memories."

"And?" She walks over, setting a mug in front of him.

"I don't know." He chews his lip, thinking. "Draco's car...did he drive a lot?"

"Whenever he felt like it, yes. Sometimes he'd just get in the car and drive and drive."

"He went to Truro a week before he disappeared."

"Yes." Astoria sips her tea. "He said he wanted to see where the British mainland ended."

"Or started."

Astoria looks up at him, surprise etched across her face. "Or started," she says slowly. "He said that too. Or started."

"Draco liked circles."

Astoria studies him for a long moment. "I met Matthew in 2001," she says. "I was in a bookshop in Exeter, and we both reached for the same book at the same time." She looks away, a small smile gracing her face. "We had a coffee together and by the end of the week, I was hopelessly in love."

"But...you married Draco in 2002." Harry's slightly bewildered by the sudden change in topic.

Astoria nods. "My parents...well, they might not be Voldemort supporters, but they're still old-fashioned. If I had married a Muggle, I would have broken my father's heart. My mother might be more understanding, but my father..."

Harry takes another sip of tea, wanting to interrupt and ask questions, but knowing he must let Astoria tell her story.

"My parents were desperate to procure a good marriage for me. They arranged for me to meet with the Malfoys. Draco was perfectly civil, but I saw something in him that was also a part of me. We were both acting the roles we had been assigned, wearing masks given to us by

others. After we became friends and then best friends, I told Draco I could never truly love him and I intended to marry just to please my parents." Astoria pauses to take a long sip of tea; when she sets the mug back down, she begins tracing patterns on the table. Drawing circles, Harry notices, and wonders if she realises.

"And?" he prompts. Astoria glances up at him.

"And Draco said the same."

Harry waits, but Astoria doesn't elaborate and he thinks he understands, anyway.

"I assume this will stay between us," Astoria says after a moment.

Harry nods, then changes the topic. "Those boxes at the manor...are they truly all of Draco's possessions?"

"Yes."

"Just those and the car?"

Astoria straightens up, looking attentive. "You saw the car? Oh, it's been a long time since I saw that thing. I almost miss it. *Almost*."

Harry hesitates. "It makes me wish I'd learned to drive."

Astoria smiles. "I've got another memory for you. I wasn't sure which one to pick, but I think it's the right one." She searches her pockets for a moment, then hands him a vial. "Take care of it."

"I will."

Harry departs, thoughts churning like wind-tossed waves.

* * *

He wants to view the memory straight away, but he's supposed to be visiting Ron and Hermione for dinner. He goes straight to the apartment and runs a comb through his hair before Floo'ing directly to Ron and Hermione's place.

He arrives right in the middle of an argument. He walks towards the kitchen, where delicious smells and angry voices are coming from.

"I asked him outright and he said no — "

"Oh, is that how you approached this matter? Just wandered past him and said — with a mouthful of sandwich, I imagine — 'having problems with Ginny, then'?"

"I didn't have a mouthful of sandwich," Ron says defensively just as Harry steps into the kitchen. Ron stares at him; Hermione, her back to Harry, quickly turns around.

"Oh," she says. "Hullo, Harry."

"You think me and Ginny are having problems?" Harry says slowly. Hermione coughs.

"No, of course not." She hesitates. "Because you're not, are you?"

"No!"

"Ron said you've been staying late at the office a lot lately."

"I did not!" Ron says quickly. "I said...he's been...staying *great* at the office lately, and you just misheard me."

"Staying great?" Hermione raises her eyebrows.

"Yes, that wasn't really a good save, Ron," Harry mutters.

"Anyway, it's true, isn't it?" Ron says shamelessly. "Ginny's been unbelievably busy, really throwing herself into Quidditch lately..."

"That's because it's her *job*," Harry says. "And I've been busy with *my* job. And that's all."

"See? No problems," Ron begins cheerfully, but Hermione levels him with a look.

"All right, fine," she says, turning back to Harry, "but I've got one last question for you, Harry. When was the last time you spoke to Ginny — "

Harry laughs. "We're not *that* busy. We do still talk. Last night, she told me she had to head out for a debriefing."

"I didn't finish the question," Hermione says, narrowing her eyes. "When was the last time you spoke to Ginny...about something other than work?"

Harry gapes at her. "I — what? Well — loads of times, of course. What sort of question is that? I mean — just this morning, she...she asked me to pick up a carton of milk on the way home...well, didn't *talk*, she left a note on the fridge because she came home late after work last night and was really tired and...and yesterday! Yesterday — or maybe the day before — she asked if I could renew her Quidditch Weekly subscription..."

Hermione is looking at him, her eyes still narrowed and expression unchanged. Ron is shaking his head and giving Harry a pitying expression.

"Well, that's that," Ron says heavily, dropping himself into the nearest dining chair. "You're having problems with Ginny, and Hermione is right again."

"Would you stop saying I'm having problems? I'm not! Everything is fine! Maybe we don't talk as much as we should — "

"Or at all," Ron says helpfully, and Harry gives him a look.

"Whose side are you on?" he says incredulously.

"There are no sides. Accept your defeat with honour." He takes a swig of butterbeer.

"I am *not* — Ginny and me are *fine*, and — this weekend, I'll take her somewhere nice. Dinner at a fancy restaurant, and we'll chat about *everything*."

"Okay," Ron says, in tones that imply Harry's started ranting about Wrackspurts and Gnargles. "You do that."

"Yes," Hermione says, "you do that. And come and tell us *all* about it."

"I will!"

"Fine," Hermione says shortly. "Good." She strides into the kitchen and starts stirring a pot on the stove. Ron fetches Harry a butterbeer and sets it down on the table.

"You could've been a lot more supportive," Harry mutters, sitting down beside Ron and opening the butterbeer. "I'm your oldest friend."

"Yeah, well," Ron says, glancing over at Hermione and lowering his voice, "friendship can do a lot of things, but it can't get you a shag."

Harry chokes on his butterbeer.

* * *

Later on, after he's farewelled Ron and Hermione and returned to the apartment, he remembers what they said.

He traces a hand over the kitchen counter. It's immaculately clean, as ever. There's a fruitbowl on one end of the counter, although it doesn't contain any fruit. Just some receipts and a handful of knuts and sickles.

He looks across the room, to the dining table. A quill and inkwell in one corner, the edges of the table already gathering dust again since his last Scourgify. The white walls gleam, untouched by pictures or photographs.

If Harry went missing, who would comb through the possessions of his life, and what would they think? He has nothing in this apartment. Most of his possessions are kept in his Gringotts vault. *Temporarily*, he'd said, but that had been three years ago when he first proposed to Ginny. And he somehow never got round to unpacking.

Or maybe he'd secretly hoped the apartment was temporary. Somewhere to pause in his journey, but not the destination.

Warm light spills from around the corner, where the bedroom is. Ginny will be there, reading *Quidditch Weekly*.

He steps around the corner and smiles at her. She's sitting in bed, intently reading a copy of the Quidditch magazine, and jumps when Harry clears his throat.

"Oh! I didn't hear you come in. Have fun with Ron and Hermione?"

"Would've been better if you'd been there."

"I know," Ginny says apologetically. "I only got back from practice twenty minutes ago. Gwen reckons me and Pearson are the best players, and we're the ones the scout might be taking notes on. She must've made me practice the dives a dozen times."

When was the last time you spoke about something other than work?

"Sounds stressful," Harry says, taking off his robes and hanging them behind the door. "You know, we should do something relaxing next week. Just us, together."

Ginny raises her eyebrows, smiling. "Special occasion?"

"Didn't realise I needed a reason to spend time with you."

She laughs. "Well, I can't do Saturday, we're attending a Holyhead match to take notes, so I'll be gone Friday night too. Sunday I've got debriefings."

"How about Thursday?"

"I'll ask Gwen."

"Well, let me know and I'll make a reservation."

"Sounds good."

See? They're wrong, he tells himself.

Everything's fine.

* * *

Monday morning finds Harry in his office again, watching Astoria's newest memory.

The familiar rolling motion hits him and he knows immediately he's in a car again. Draco's car. The Renault Mégane. It feels strange now that he's physically been in the car. Like two versions of him are intersecting. There's an odd duality about it.

Astoria is in the front passenger seat, looking sleepy. It's night-time, and they're driving beside a river, Harry realises. He presses his face to the glass, seeing the faint twinkling lights of houses reflected in the river, and for a moment it feels like they're driving through the night sky itself, stars above and beneath.

He turns away from the window, moving closer to the middle of the back seat, and looks at the rear-vision mirror. Draco is gazing ahead, his mouth small and serious, his grey eyes

seeming to search the road ahead.

"We could just Disapparate to visit your mother, you know," Astoria says sleepily. "It's a two-hour drive, for Merlin's sake."

"I've driven to Glasgow." Draco's eyes never leave the road.

"I remember that." Astoria shifts, resting her head against the glass and closing her eyes. "I don't know why you'd go there."

"Because I hadn't been there before. Because I wanted to."

"You don't know what you want, Draco."

He drives around a bend in the road. Harry watches the way he grips the steering wheel, flexing the tendons in his wrist. There's a mesmerising confidence in Draco's hands, in the way he effortlessly steers, the way he drives without really thinking about it.

Draco's eyes flick up to the rear-vision mirror, meeting Harry's gaze.

"No, I don't," he says, and it takes Harry a moment to remember who Draco's replying to.

Draco drives on and on, the river and sky and road melting into a field of stars as the memory slowly disintegrates.

Harry surfaces from the pensieve, inhaling deeply like he's coming up for air.

* * *

He visits Astoria the next day. She laughs when she opens the door.

"You're becoming a regular visitor. I suppose you'll be wanting a cup of tea then?"

"Thanks," Harry says, following her to the kitchen.

"Did you like the memory?" Astoria asks, measuring out a spoonful of sugar for Harry's mug. "It's one of my favourites."

Harry hesitates, busying himself clearing a spot at the table and sitting down before he speaks. "Do you think...do you think Draco chose to leave?"

Astoria pauses. "You think Draco was unhappy with his life?"

"You'd know better than me, but...I think he was searching for something. A memory, a state of mind, a new life, I don't know."

Astoria pours the tea. "I often said that to him, in a roundabout way. I'd joke that he was driving everywhere to try and find a place that didn't exist."

Harry stares unseeingly at the steam curling gently from the mugs of tea. "Matthew's a Muggle."

"Well — yes — "

"Would he teach me how to drive?"

Astoria starts to laugh.

* * *

Harry's first driving lesson is on Wednesday, at 4pm. He arrives at Astoria's punctually; Matthew arrives late from work and barrels through the front door with arms full of blueprints.

"Where's my princess?" he shouts and Sophie lets out a shriek of glee, coming down the hallway so quickly she nearly falls over.

"Matt's an architect," Astoria says, noticing Harry staring at the blueprints.

"That's interesting."

"No it's bloody not," Matthew says, setting the blueprints down and gathering his daughter into a bone-crushing hug. "So, ready for your first lesson?" he says over Sophie's head. "You haven't got your own car, have you? You'll be learning in mine, then. Not bad a car for a learner."

They wander out to the car, a white sedan, and Harry tries to discuss monetary payment, feeling rather like Matthew should be compensated for all the inevitable moments of frustration and despair. Matthew quickly quashes that notion and instead demands Harry pays him with stories of the wizarding world.

"She's awful," he says, gesturing to Astoria. "Tells me all about this amazing world, then complains every time I try and ask questions! 'Oh, Matt, it's just a castle in Scotland, why are you so interested' or 'it's called Flooing and I'm in no mood to explain it'."

Harry laughs. "I understand. I didn't know about the wizarding world either, not until I was eleven, and everyone was always rushing through things and acting like I should know all of it already."

"Quit chatting and get in the car already," Astoria says impatiently. "I want to see how badly Harry screws up."

"Leave him alone," Matthew says amiably. "You only tried to drive once, and you went straight into the ornamental pond and shouted at me for twenty minutes afterwards."

Astoria frowns at him and Harry tries to unsuccessfully hide his smile.

Soon enough, however, his smile has been replaced by nervous apprehension. Matthew spends a good fifteen minutes running through safety before Harry even starts the car.

"All right, so, you've checked your mirrors, adjusted your seat, put your seatbelt on, got your foot on the brake...turn the ignition, then."

The car rumbles to life. Harry feels terrified and wonders how much the car cost and how mad Matthew might be if Harry, too, drove into the pond.

"Foot still on the brake? Good. Handbrake off."

"Right."

"Good, good. Now, ease your foot onto the accelerator a little — "

The car jerks forward violently and Harry, horrorstruck, slams the brake on and comes to an equally violent stop. Matthew starts laughing.

"Bit trigger happy, aren't you? Look at your face! Calm down, no harm done. Try again. Go on, foot off the brake."

By the end of the hour, Harry has managed to successfully drive to the end of the driveway without giving either himself or Matthew whiplash. That, Matthew declares, deserves a butterbeer.

Over which they'll discuss exactly how a portkey works, of course.

* * *

Harry arrives home at nine o'clock that night. Ginny is in bed, reading a book.

"You're back late," she says, idly turning a page.

"Got stuck chatting to some people about the case." He'll tell Ginny about all of it tomorrow, he thinks. Their date. "I made a reservation at Citrus Moon, by the way."

Ginny frowns. "What — oh, tomorrow night! I'd nearly forgotten. Citrus Moon? Is that a new restaurant?"

"It's a Muggle one."

"Oh. Well, that'll be something new, at least. I'm looking forward to it."

Harry disappears into the bathroom, planning to take a long and relaxing shower.

Learning to drive, he thinks, is extraordinarily stress-inducing.

Chapter 5

Ginny dresses up for the date and Harry thinks she looks beautiful, even if her practice ran overtime and she arrived half an hour late. He orders an oak-aged rum; Ginny opts for a glass of riesling.

"You look amazing," Harry says and Ginny smiles.

"Thanks," she says. "Practice ran overtime. The scout left after Saturday's game without a word, which was a little disappointing. Maybe next match, though. Pearson's been scouted before — oh, thank you," Ginny says as a waiter places her glass of wine on the table. Harry accepts his glass with a nod and takes an appreciative sip. "Anyway, the wind conditions weren't too good on Saturday's match, and... "

Harry listens to Ginny speak. He's always liked her passion for things, he thinks. It's one of the first things he loved about her. When they were in the midst of the war and she was so full of fiery energy, her eyes bright and her hands steady as she lifted her wand. She never looked as beautiful as she did during the battle, he thinks, with her dirt-smudged face and torn robes, when her strength and spirit shone brighter than ever.

He wonders if he'll ever see that level of passion again.

"Let's not talk about work tonight," Harry says suddenly, interrupting Ginny's description of Saturday's match. "Let's talk about other things."

"Oh." Ginny pauses and looks about the restaurant, as if searching for a conversation topic. "It's interesting, isn't it, a Muggle restaurant? I was about to tap my wand on the menu items to order them. Nearly forgot."

"The view's nice."

"Isn't it? I wish we'd been able to afford an apartment in central London."

"I'm sorry, I know you always wanted — "

"Oh, that wasn't a criticism!" Ginny says quickly. "I was just saying, that's all. I don't think the Minister himself could afford *those* apartments. But if I make the English National Team, who knows? At our next game, it might be — oh, I'm talking about work again." She laughs.

But soon enough, her laugh dwindles into silence, and Harry — thinking of several things to say but dismissing them all as work-related — desperately grabs at the first alternate topic that pops into his head.

"Do you remember the battle?"

Ginny tenses. "It's a little hard to forget, Harry."

"Still, you were brilliant."

"I remember Fred's funeral," Ginny says distantly, evidently not hearing him. "George still can't produce a Patronus, Mum says, and she doesn't think he will ever again."

Harry stares down at his glass of rum, then takes a long drink of it. The waiter appears beside the table and Harry is almost relieved to see him.

"I'll have the Cornish lamb, and another glass of the Appleton Estate," he says quickly. Ginny orders the roasted monkfish and a refill, too. The waiter disappears again, taking the menus with him.

"We'll be finishing the borough preliminaries soon," Ginny says, breaking the silence.

Harry doesn't point out that it's work-related. He listens as she speaks of the upcoming season, her guesses at how the season will finish, and a light criticism of the performance of her favourite team, the Kenmare Kestrels.

"I know it's rather disloyal — I should have an English team, really — but the techniques the Seeker uses are brilliant and very daring. The Chasers are working on this new formation too, and I wouldn't mind practicing it. I should bring it up with Gwen."

Harry leans back slightly as the waiter places another glass of rum in front of him, waiting until he's gone away again before lifting the glass and taking a long sip. They receive a reprieve when their meals arrive, at least, and can occupy themselves with eating. Ginny orders another glass of wine and Harry tries a twelve-year whiskey, then follows it with Scottish single malt. The waiter probably considers him an alcoholic, Harry thinks, and by the end of the meal he's delightfully fuzzy-headed and only half-listening to Ginny's Quidditch strategies. Having had too much to drink to trust his Disapparating skills, Harry flags a passing taxi to take him and Ginny home. Ginny seems to enjoy the trip, finding it rather amusing when Harry has to run to the apartment and frantically search for his cache of Muggle money to pay the driver.

"That was nice," Ginny says afterwards when they're both preparing for bed. "Did you enjoy it, Harry?"

Did you hear me, Draco? I'm asking if you're happy.

"Yeah," Harry says, staring at the wall opposite. There's nothing on it. Only whiteness. A blank canvas.

"Good," Ginny says, slipping beneath the covers and turning off her lamp.

Harry sleeps restlessly that night.

* * *

Perhaps it's the driving lessons, but a week later Harry finds himself dreaming of a car. Draco's car. The memory, he thinks. Dreaming of the memories again. He's sitting in the back, with Astoria in the passenger seat and Draco driving. They're beside the river, night-

time, and Harry wants to wind down the window and breathe in the sky, the stars, the water, the land with the endless road rolling across it like a tar-streaked ribbon.

"You don't know what you want, Draco," Astoria is saying.

Draco's eyes flick up to the rear-vision mirror, meeting Harry's gaze.

"No, I don't," he says.

There's a lull in silence and Harry realises Astoria has fallen asleep. The memory should have ended. He glances away from her, then looks up and freezes. Draco's eyes, reflected in the rear-vision mirror, are locked on his.

Draco speaks.

"We could go anywhere."

He's not talking to you, he's talking to Astoria, he's not looking at you, he's looking through you...

"Anywhere?" Harry repeats, just to make sure Draco can't hear him.

Draco smiles slightly, his gaze returning to the road ahead. "Anywhere."

Harry's heart quickens. "Let's go to where you are."

"Why?"

"I don't know where you are," Harry says, his mouth dry. "I'm trying to find you."

"That's strange," Draco says, "because I'm looking for you."

This is important, somehow. Like a fading voice, like a closing door, like the lights of a train fading into the distance.

"Like a circle," Harry murmurs. Draco looks at him again.

"Now you're getting it, Potter," he says.

When Harry wakes up, there's a rectangle of plastic in his hand.

Draco's licence.

* * *

Harry gets his provisional licence on the thirty-first of October. He Floos to Astoria's house — having officially been linked into her Floo network — and shows Matthew.

"The photo looks terrible," he observes, and Matthew laughs.

"Rite of passage. Everyone's first licence looks awful. At least you can legally drive now," he adds. Harry's graduated from the driveway to actual roads, as the country lanes surrounding Astoria's home are generally bereft of traffic.

"I could try one of the main roads," Harry says excitedly.

"Don't get ahead of yourself, mate. You still can't focus on using the indicator without taking your foot off the accelerator."

"Multi-tasking is difficult when you're going sixty miles an hour," Harry retorts.

"Yeah, and it'll be worse when you get in an accident because you spent fifteen minutes carefully hunting for the indicator switch."

Nevertheless, when they begin the driving lesson, Matthew lets Harry try the main road and, as Harry hits a long stretch of straight road and needs no assistance, Matthew asks about Draco.

"Found much yet?"

"Nothing. Everything seems to go in circles."

"Well, best of luck. I mean, it's been three years anyway, and — watch out, you're coasting to the left a little — let's face it, not much of chance of finding new clues."

"Well, I'm hoping to find something. Speaking of finding things — you wouldn't happen to know of a good mechanic, would you?"

"I know of a few in Exeter. I'll look up their details when I get home. Now, turn left at this intersection. I feel like you're ready to brave the motorway."

"I hope you're joking."

Matthew grins.

* * *

Harry arrives home at eleven o'clock that night, smiling and thinking how he'll share the news with Ginny. He can legally drive. He's got a car licence — provisional, of course, but by the end of the year he might even have a full licence. It seems important, somehow. A milestone. Ginny hasn't even noticed his driving lessons, and...

He steps into the bedroom and his smile fades a little. Ginny's not there, although there's a note on her pillow. He picks it up.

Sorry, forgot to say this morning — got a two-day strategies workshop in Leeds. Be back Thursday. Love you, see you soon.

Harry stares at the note for a second, then sets it aside. He stands for a long moment, thinking, then slowly turns to the two boxes stacked next to his bedside table and removes the

disillusionment charm.

He may as well work, then.

* * *

Two hours later, Harry's sitting in the middle of the bed, the objects scattered around him like autumn leaves. A prefect's badge catches the lamplight and shines brightly; an origami rose lays upon a cushion.

Harry, long ago forgetting the purpose of the task and becoming absorbed in tiny details, finds himself poring over the Hogwarts textbooks.

Draco wrote in them. Little notes, scribbled in the margins, from the very first *Standard Book of Spells, Grade One* to *Advanced Potion-Making*. It's strange; Harry had always assumed Draco to be irritatingly arrogant and unbearably smug about classwork, but the first-year textbooks reveal pages and pages of notes painstakingly written in the childish hand of an eleven-year-old. Draco had recorded every step and, it seems to Harry, had been fearful of misfiring a spell or using incorrect technique.

It's strange seeing how Draco's handwriting changes over the years. The carefully rounded letters soon give way to a lopsided look and, towards sixth year, the writing develops into a strong and graceful script.

There's little asides dotted throughout the pages. *Merlin's beard, this is boring*, Draco has written in a Herbology textbook, abruptly cutting off his extensive notes about a Seven-Teethed Tulip. Even more surprising is the frank admission in *Advanced Potion-Making*: on a page about the uses of beetle legs, Draco has written *I don't even care about this subject anymore*.

Strange, that Draco would write such thoughts in his textbooks. But, Harry realises, who else could he have confided in? Towards the end of their time at Hogwarts, it became clear Draco didn't trust even his closest friends. And certainly, he couldn't confide in his parents, both of whom were equally troubled as him.

It must have been lonely. And Harry knows that loneliness well.

Harry turns the pages of *Standard Book of Spells, Grade Six*. Every now and again, there's an elaborate Celtic knot, but Harry doesn't assign that any meaning. It seems Draco was fond of simply practising the patterns during especially boring classes. There's a few notes here and there, written neatly in the margins. *Spell didn't work when attempted to cast on self*, Draco's written on one page. Harry frowns and reads the title of the spell. Tranquillo Charm, apparently used to calm people and lessen fear or anxiety.

He shuts the book and stares down at the cover for a long time. There's no seventh-year books. Draco hadn't returned to Hogwarts after the war to complete his schooling, then.

Harry leans across the bed and pulls Draco's notebook towards him. It's a 2003 calendar and diary, filled with neatly written but mundane dates. Weekly withdrawals from Gringotts,

scheduled in like clockwork; a reminder to renew his car registration. The final note was written on the day Draco disappeared. *Visit family solicitor, 4:30pm*. No doubt the errand Draco had planned to complete after purchasing the owl. Nevertheless, it might be worth asking the solicitor about the purpose of Draco's visit, if the solicitor can recall it.

Harry flips through the rest of the notebook, but the pages beyond September 9 are all blank and —

His name.

He stares at the page. November 21. A date apparently selected at random.

Potter,

I believe you have property which is rightfully mine —

The words are quickly crossed out. A draft of a letter, Harry realises, for just beneath it, Draco attempts a second approach.

Dear Potter,

I believe you are currently in possession of a hawthorn wand, unicorn hair core —

Crossed out again. A third attempt, a fourth. The fifth attempt demonstrates a degree of annoyance and begins in a wilful scrawl:

Potter, give me back my wand. It's not like you're using it, anyway. You probably don't even bother with wands anymore. Frankly, I'm waiting for you to ascend the ninth plane and become an anthropomorphic mass of pure energy. Next headline in the Daily Prophet: Saviour Potter Now Classified as New Planet.

Harry can't help but grin. It's quite funny, really. Adding to the amusement is a small drawing Draco did, presumably of Planet Harry: he's drawn a Saturn-esque planet wearing a pair of spectacles. Harry laughs and turns the page, half-hoping to find another amusing drawing, but instead finds more writing. The letter continues, apparently.

Do you remember when we were eleven? Let's go back to that.

The words roll across Harry's mind like waves breaking. He blinks, his smile fading, and begins reading again.

Do you remember when we were eleven? Let's go back to that. I'll throw Remembralls into the sky and you can try to catch them.

Sometimes I think you can just keep my wand. I think of all the Dark spells I performed, all the Unforgiveables I tried to cast with it. But then I remember when I was eleven years old, learning Lumos and casting mending charms, and it's hard to let go of that.

So give me my wand, or give me a timeturner.

Harry has no doubt that Draco — in a pique of frustration after trying to pen a suitably formal letter — wrote this particular message with the intention that it would never be read by anyone, ever, let alone Harry himself. There's a strange honesty and directness in the letter and Harry finds it difficult to imagine Draco — with his cold expressions and inability to express himself beyond childish insults — wrote it.

Then he remembers Draco wearing precisely the sort of cold expression Harry is imagining as he told Astoria to go deliver her father's eulogy. Yes, Draco hides his thoughts and feelings well, cloaking them beneath apathy and arrogance.

Do you remember when we were eleven? Let's go back to that.

Harry's heart suddenly aches for all of them. Hermione and Ron, so unknowing of what lay ahead; Neville who would one day be tortured by Death Eaters; and yes, even Draco, who had clearly dreamed of a different future.

This is still Malfoy, he reminds himself, but Malfoy — sneering, self-indulgent Malfoy — is hard to remember, as if the years have sifted away like fine sand and now all he knows is Draco, who always looks serious and sad, who wears a silver snitch clasp because *in incepto finis est*, who tries to fix himself by writing letters he'll never send, who drives everywhere, looking for something.

Looking for himself, or maybe a memory. Maybe, after all this time, he's just looking for a state of mind.

Harry packs up the possessions one by one. The origami rose, which looks old and tattered and makes him wonder why Draco kept it. The textbooks, with six years' worth of notes and drawings. The school tie, the prefect badge. Had Draco been proud of being a prefect? Or had he come to view the badge as he did his wand, as a bittersweet memory, a reminder of what he'd done and what he could have been?

That night, he dreams.

* * *

It's nighttime. The stars are high and clear above him, crisply white like winter's first snow. He's standing on the edge of a cliff, staring out at waves rolling in like low thunder, breaking against the cliff face and sending sea foam whirling around the darkly gleaming rocks.

He turns.

Draco stands beside him, staring out across the sea.

"This isn't a pensieve memory," Harry says slowly. He expects to be ignored, but he's startled when Draco turns to look at him.

"You're here again," he says.

"Again? I've never been here." Harry doesn't know how else to respond.

"I thought it was a dream last time, in the car, when I saw you — "

Harry's blood runs cold

"That was a dream. This is a dream too."

"These are my memories, Potter. This is real. September fifth, 2003. I drove to the Cornish coast."

"Truro," Harry says suddenly. Draco turns away from him again, gazing into the dark waves of the Celtic Sea.

"Past Truro. I wanted to see where the land ended. I drove to Helston and parked at the lighthouse."

Harry looks around, but there's no lighthouse. There's nothing. Not even a window of light from a house, or distant headlights. Only the half-moon overhead illuminates the scene, casting a faint glow over the ocean.

"And then I walked," Draco says.

"What, out along the cliffs? At midnight?"

"Three in the morning, to be exact." Draco glances at Harry. "You have to find me, Potter. This is my last chance. I don't know why it's you, of all people, turning up in my memories — "

The thundering of the waves against the cliff seems to intensify. Harry shifts slightly; it feels like the earth is beginning to tremble.

"I'm investigating your case," Harry says, raising his voice over the roar of the waves. The edge of the cliff is beginning to crumble into the sea and he stumbles backwards. "I'm trying to find you. Where are you? If this is real, tell me!"

Draco opens his mouth but the cliffs are crumbling, falling away like sandcastles, and the terrifying darkness of the storm-wild waves reaches up to eclipse Harry.

He wakes with a painful rush of adrenalin, a cry half-buried in his throat.

* * *

"I swear, I'm telling the truth."

Hermione glances up at him as he paces around her kitchen. Then she returns her doubtful gaze to the cup of tea sitting before her on the table.

"You dreamed of Malfoy? And he told you he went to Helston?"

"Yes," Harry says with frustration. "He said the memories were real, that they weren't dreams, and I needed to find him — "

"Maybe you should have asked Malfoy where he is, then," Hermione says, and Harry's not sure whether she's teasing him or not.

"I tried, and the dream literally fell apart." Harry paces along the kitchen again, his cup of tea on the counter slowly going cold "It happened before — I dreamed of a memory and spoke to him, I mean — but Draco seemed different then. Sort of abstract. Like he thought the whole thing was a dream, too, and he was just going along with it. But this time — he seemed surprised I was there, he asked me questions — he seemed more *real* somehow." He looks up and catches Hermione's eye. "You think I'm mental, don't you?"

Hermione says nothing for a long moment. Then she takes a long sip of her tea.

"You've had dreams of real events before, Harry."

That stops his pacing. He whips around. "That was different, that was Legilimens and Dark magic," he says, his voice low and angry, and Hermione sighs.

"That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that I trust you to tell the difference between a normal dream and...a different one."

Harry's anger fades. "Oh," he says.

"Listen, I've got to go to work — I've got a meeting with the Head of Magical Creatures — but..." Hermione pauses. "Maybe Malfoy was telling you his location, in that dream."

"You think he's in Helston?"

Hermione pauses again. "From what you said, the cliffs were treacherous."

Harry blinks and flinches, like she's struck him. "He didn't go missing in Cornwall, he went missing in London — "

"Well, you haven't yet ruled out that he left of his own accord. Maybe he wanted to do something and didn't want to hurt his family."

Realisation hits Harry. "No," he says. "*No*. No, Hermione. He wouldn't have done that."

"Do you think he was depressed at all?" Hermione asks gently.

"He wouldn't have done that," Harry repeats adamantly. Hermione looks at him for a long moment.

"Well, I'd better be going," she says at last. "Let me know if you have any new leads."

"I will."

She finishes her tea and quickly scurries to the kitchen hearth, throwing a handful of powder into the flames and Floo'ing to the Ministry.

Harry slowly walks to the still-green flames and Floos away, arriving in Astoria and Matthew's fireplace.

Time for his next driving lesson.

* * *

He drives around another corner, watching the rain-slicked road ahead. The windscreen wipers flick across the windshield in an almost-soothing rhythm.

"Watch your speed," Matthew says.

Harry eases off the accelerator slightly. The autumn rains are becoming more frequent and are leaving an icy chill over the land, like a warning of winter's frosts. They're in the final week of November, and London is already full of festivity: Christmas lights line Oxford Street, and Hyde Park's Winter Wonderland is filled with excited children and bundled-up tourists.

Out here, in East Devon, the signs are more subtle. The smell of mince pies and gingerbread waft from the local bakeries, and the sweet shops are lined with bon-bons and pastel-coloured sugar mice. As Harry drives along the main road of a village, he sees the strings of fairy lights decorating homes and, every now and again, a carefully-decorated Christmas scene in a shop window.

"East Devon doesn't get much snow, does it?" Harry asks. Matthew shakes his head.

"Not really. Our winters are quite mild."

Harry slows down as a cat runs across the road, thinking of Godric's Hollow and all the lights twinkling in the snow. The only Christmas he ever truly spent at home, and suddenly he misses it more than anything.

"You know what," Matthew says, "I think you're nearly ready for the practical."

"I've only been driving for a couple of months," Harry says doubtfully.

"You've picked it up quite quickly, though. The only thing that really needs work is your parallel parking. And sometimes your three-point turns become five-point turns." Matthew laughs.

"I'll never get parallel parking right," Harry mutters. Sometimes he's been tempted to use space-squeezing charms, but so far he's resisted the urge.

"We'll focus on that this week, and then I reckon you can book yourself in," Matthew says.

Harry drives back Astoria and Matthew's home for the usual routine — a butterbeer or two in front of the roaring fire while Harry regales Matthew with stories of the wizarding world. Matthew seems to be quite fascinated with dragons.

"They're great big bloody fire-breathers, how do you hide that from Muggles for thousands of years?" he demands as Harry leans back in the comfortable armchair.

"Oh, there's all sorts of charms. And if worst comes to worst, you can always Obliviate a Muggle if they've seen something they shouldn't," Astoria says, arriving with a bowl of roasted chestnuts.

"Obliviate?"

"Remove the memory," Astoria says. Matthew frowns.

"That's not right. I don't think you should mess with people's heads like that. It's not good for them, surely."

Harry half-listens to Astoria and Matthew bicker. From Matthew's words about messing with people's heads, his thoughts flow like a river until he's recalling his earlier conversation with Hermione. He'd been able to forget it for an hour or so, while he was driving, but now it sits in his head like a heavy rock.

Had Draco been depressed?

He always looked so...distant, in the memories. He'd walk through a shop or drive a car or speak to Astoria, but he wasn't really there. Harry recognises something in Draco's face: the angular lines, as if his former self was being chiseled away, or the distant look in his eyes.

Distance.

Draco covered a lot of distance, Harry's sure, but he somehow never bridged the distance between past and present.

Do you remember when we were eleven? Let's go back to that.

"You look thoughtful," Astoria observes suddenly. Harry looks up and tries to smile.

"Just thinking," he says lightly. "I just thought...Draco wasn't on any potions, was he? Or charms?"

Astoria frowns, looking confused. "No. Why, is it important? He took an anti-pain potion sometimes, when he had a headache, but that's all."

"Right," Harry says. "Just wondering, that's all." If Draco had been taking something for depression, surely Astoria would know. He changes the subject quickly. "I'm visiting the Malfoy family solicitor tomorrow. Draco had an appointment with him."

"That's strange," Astoria says, pausing to eat a chestnut.

"Is it?" Harry says sharply.

"Yes. The solicitor only really deals with Narcissa."

Harry frowns and stands up, realising it's later than he thought. He farewells Astoria and Matthew and Floos to the apartment, grateful to find Ginny still hasn't returned from practice. He wants some time alone. Time to think.

He sits at the island counter and stares unseeingly at the patterns in the granite. *Draco wouldn't have done that*, he'd told Hermione. Not Draco, who was unbearably stubborn — he'd tried for an entire year to fix that damn Vanishing Cabinet, and even when the stupid prat had been pointing a wand at Dumbledore, hand shaking, a look of complete terror in his eyes, he still hadn't admitted he couldn't complete Voldemort's task. Harry remembers that split second before the Death Eaters arrived, when Draco began to lower his wand as Dumbledore offered a different path.

Maybe Draco would have conceded defeat after all.

Harry stands up and walks to the sliding door, pulling it open and stepping out onto the balcony. The apartment seems suffocating somehow, as if it's closing in on him. Outside, the air is crisp and Harry shivers, drawing his cloak closer around himself. It's chillier here than in East Devon. There'll be fog over the Thames tomorrow morning, he'll wager.

He watches the trains come and go, and that night he doesn't dream.

Chapter 6

Harry leaves early the next morning, before Ginny wakes; he has an 8:30am meeting with the family solicitor who, he discovers, is a tall, broad-shouldered witch who reminds him somehow of Madame Maxime. She ushers Harry into her office — a small room clearly designed by a fan of minimalism. He'd been expecting something extravagant for a solicitor worthy of the Malfoys, but there's little more than a set of filing cabinets, a glass table, and two chairs.

The solicitor — Ms Zeisel, she introduces herself crisply — takes the seat behind the table and gives Harry a look over her silver spectacles. It's a look worthy of McGonagall and Harry has the absurd feeling he's about to be told off for something.

"So," she says, "you want to know about the Malfoys."

"Draco, specifically. I'm undertaking his case." Harry hands over his badge; Zeisel scrutinises it closely before handing it back.

"If you want to know about his financial affairs, you'll have to contact the family's financial advisor," she says.

"No, actually. Draco had an appointment with you the day he disappeared. September ninth, 2003, at 4:30pm." Harry speaks without preamble. Zeisel doesn't strike him as the sort of person to indulge in light chit-chat.

"Yes, I recall that."

"You do?" Harry says with surprise. Zeisel gives him another look over her spectacles.

"I have quite the memory, Mr Potter."

"Can you give me any details about the meeting?"

Zeisel gives his badge another considered look, and for a moment he thinks she's about to say something sharp about client confidentiality.

"Draco Malfoy contacted me a week earlier, stating that he required legal counsel."

"Draco was in trouble?" Harry says with alarm.

"Nothing urgent, apparently. I asked if it was an emergency and Mr Malfoy assured me that he simply required some legal advice. He took no issue with waiting a week for an appointment."

"Did you have any idea what he wanted to discuss with you?"

Zeisel frowns and tilts her head slightly. "He required information about hindering prosecution."

"And what's that mean?"

"Generally, preventing a criminal from being prosecuted. This may include concealing a criminal sought by law enforcement, providing them with the means of avoiding discovery or apprehension — usually giving money or arranging transport — and so on."

Harry stares at Zeisel for a long moment, his thoughts whirling. "Draco knew where his father was. Or was possibly even helping him."

"I am unable to comment on the matter. All I can say is that Mr Malfoy requested legal counsel regarding hindering prosecution, and agreed to an appointment. The appointment was not kept and I have had no further communication with Mr Malfoy." Zeisel neatly smooths a crease in the sleeve of her robe and stands up. "I'm afraid I have an appointment with a client now, Mr Potter, but if you require any additional information please contact my secretary for an appointment."

"You *must* have known he was talking about Lucius Malfoy," Harry says, remaining seated.

"As I said, I am unable to — "

"Draco went missing the same day he was supposed to meet you to talk about Lucius! And you never told someone, you never said anything."

Zeisel's face closes up; all the muscles tighten and her mouth turns into a narrow, unforgiving line. "The Malfoy family has plenty of holiday houses and overseas residences. I suggest, Mr Potter, that if you want to find Mr Malfoy, you start there. Rather than throwing around baseless accusations," she adds coldly.

"You're just like the rest of them," Harry says, his voice low and angry. "Think Draco's gone off to live in some luxury villa somewhere, don't you? You don't know a damn thing about him."

"I must ask you to leave," Zeisel snaps, and Harry stands up.

"Gladly," he says, striding to the door. "Thanks for all your help." He leaves, slamming the door behind him and knowing it's childish, but he can't stop himself. He's so angry. Draco's been missing three years, three *years*, and everyone involved in the case — besides Astoria and Narcissa — has treated Draco's disappearance like it's a joke. The first case officer's notes are laughable.

But running beneath the torrent of anger at Zeisel is the anger at himself.

After all, he'd thought the same when the investigation first started. And even further back, when he first heard Draco had disappeared. He had been twenty-three then and his whole life seemed lit up like summer sky. Friends and drinks at the pub and Ginny, beautiful, bright Ginny, and they'd only just bought the apartment and there was so much energy in them. And Draco's disappearance had been nothing but a footnote in his life, a brief read of a newspaper headline, a small snort of contempt as he imagined Draco gloating in an expensive retreat

somewhere. Then he'd effortlessly moved on, never sparing the incident another thought until the file landed on his desk three years later.

Three long years.

And maybe, somehow, he's still not doing enough. He found the notebook a month ago, for Merlin's sake, but he'd only just spoken to the solicitor? What sort of investigator was he? He was rubbish.

Harry tastes blood and realises he's biting his lip.

He unclenches his jaw and Disapparates to the Ministry atrium.

* * *

Arthur Weasley is delighted to see him.

"Come in, come in, have a seat," he says, ushering Harry into his office. Mr Weasley has come a long way since his pokey little office so many years ago: as the newly-appointed Head of the Muggle Liaison Office, his new office is very roomy and well-appointed. "What can I do for you, Harry?" he asks, offering a tin of toffees. Harry accepts one and sits down in a chair opposite Mr Weasley's desk.

"I'm doing a few cold cases at the moment," Harry says, unwrapping the toffee. "One of which is Draco Malfoy's." He pauses then, in order to study Mr Weasley's expression. He frowns, but doesn't appear too surprised or unhappy. "I was wondering," Harry presses on after a momentary silence, "if I could access the Muggle database for unidentified people."

"Oh, dear," Mr Weasley says slowly. "I'm sorry to hear that, Harry. Not much hope for him then, I suppose. We have a liaison officer for the Met, so — "

"I was thinking somewhere more regional," Harry interrupts. "The Devon and Cornwall Constabulary."

"Ah." Arthur nods. "I can talk to our Law Enforcement Cooperation team and they'll arrange it all. A few police uniforms and a Befuddlement Charm or two and you'll have your files."

"Thanks," Harry says gratefully, just as there's a polite knock and a secretary pokes his head around the door.

"Report from the Muggle Prime Minister, sir."

"Ah, yes," Mr Weasley says, "He'll be wanting an update about the Welsh dragon incident." He stands up and looks apologetically to Harry. "Sorry to dash off. Say hullo to Ginny for me, won't you? Molly misses her something dreadful."

"All right. Thanks again," Harry says, standing up and leaving the office.

It will be a long and impatient wait for the files, but he has other cases to attend to, he reminds himself.

He returns slowly to his office.

* * *

That night, he dreams of Cornwall again. The cliff, the dark waves eddying endlessly around the dark rocks below.

Draco isn't there.

Harry waits. The wind nips at his face, a salt-tinted bite from the freezing Celtic Sea. He shivers and draws his cloak closer, fighting with the material as it slips from his numb hands.

This is Draco's memory. How can it exist while Draco isn't here? It doesn't make sense.

Harry steps closer to the edge of the cliff, moving slowly until he can look straight down into the wind-tossed waves and watch the water smash against the craggy rocks.

"Draco," he says, but the word is whipped away by the wind and disappears soundlessly into the dark depths of the sea. He tries again, raising his voice to call out. "Draco!"

This time, the word lifts and carries clear across the night sky, echoing twice. *Draco, Draco!*

But there's no answer.

* * *

The first day of December. London is still shrouded in morning fog when Harry arrives at the Ministry and goes to his office, unlocking the door and removing his mittens and scarf. Just as he sits down at the desk, a file comes flapping wildly into the office and nearly strikes him over the head. Harry frowns at it. Any files sent the previous day, after Harry's already left, tend to hang about in the hallways until he arrives in the morning.

His faint irritation vanishes, however, when he sees the note scribbled on the cover of the file.

Copies taken from Cornwall/Devon police database of unidentified persons.

The file is quite slim, and Harry would guess there's only fifteen or so cases. He dismisses the first twelve cases; the bodies were all found prior to 2003. The thirteenth case consists of nothing more than a partial jawbone found in woodland in Devon, and Harry dismisses that one. The fourteenth sets the age at 50-70.

The fifteenth lists the sex as male, the age 18-25. Hair and eye colour unknown. Found on the twenty-first of January 2004, washed up near Rosenithon Point, Cornwall. *Body believed to have been in the water 4-6 months*, the notes observe.

Harry stares at the page for a long time.

Then he slowly turns to the piece of parchment adhered to his desk with a Sticking Charm and writes on it.

Consultation required. Potter.

The words dissolve. It's a full five minutes later when a reply appears.

Be there in an hour. Butterworth.

It's a very long hour. Harry tries to work but he can't. The words seems to trickle away like rain. He can't focus. He reads the fifteenth page of the file over and over. *Washed up near Rosenithon Point, Cornwall...*

Harry pauses, then presses a quill to the parchment again.

Bring map.

Butterworth doesn't reply to that one, but he arrives twenty minutes later with a tattered book under one arm. *A Comprehensive Guide to the Geography of Great Britain.*

"What did you find?" Butterworth says, handing Harry the book.

"I don't know." Harry pushes the file, open at page fifteen, towards Butterworth. For a moment, the office is silent as Butterworth reads the page and Harry quickly finds a map of Cornwall, drawing his finger along the latitudes and longitudes until he's found it. Rosenithon Point. Fifteen miles north-east of Helston.

"Tell me the details of your case," Butterworth says, reading the page.

They've done this a thousand times before, but this time...Harry can't think of what to say for a long moment. He retrieves Draco's file and opens it, fumbling with the pages. "Male, aged twenty-three at time of disappearance. Went missing September 2003." After a long moment, he adds quietly, "Known to frequent the Cornish coast."

"High chance it's a match, then."

Harry nods mutely.

"You don't look very well," Butterworth says. "I hope you haven't come to work with a cold," he adds disapprovingly. There have been a number of highly contagious colds going around the Ministry.

"No, I just...I'm fine," Harry says, clenching his trembling hands around the atlas.

"Well," Butterworth says after a moment, "Magical signature available?"

"From — from *our* side," Harry says, finding his voice thanks to Butterworth's reassuringly disinterested expression. "The file you've got now — that's a Muggle one."

Butterworth frowns. "I'll need to access the remains." He pauses. "Cremated or buried by now, most likely. We'll have to do it the Muggle way. Go and arrange the Muggle Liaison office to fetch the DNA sample." He waves a hand irritably. "Contact me when you have it."

Harry nods and Butterworth leaves, taking his atlas with him.

Harry stands up and goes, once more, to Mr Weasley's office.

* * *

Harry floos to Matthew and Astoria's house late in the afternoon. He has a driving lesson, although it couldn't be further from his mind. Mr Weasley had spoken to the Magical Law Enforcement Department and explained they would be able to send along their Muggle Liaison officer to sufficiently 'negotiate' with the Muggle police officers and gain access to the DNA sample. The sample would then be sent to Butterworth, who could analyse it for a match in magical signature.

"Your indicator's still on." Matthew sounds amused. "Something on your mind? Been out of it all afternoon."

Harry turns a corner and says nothing, wondering whether or not he should tell Matthew or Astoria. No; it would be unprofessional. He shouldn't say anything until he's gotten the results back.

Which could take anything from a week to a fortnight.

"Just thinking about one of my cases," he mutters at last, and Matthew doesn't press further. Harry slows down to turn into the driveway, listening to the tyres crunch over wet gravel.

After he parks the car, they go inside and sit in front of the roaring fire. Matthew asks a few questions about billywigs but he seems to pick up on Harry's mood and draws the conversation to a close. Harry knows, distantly, that he's being a bad guest — darkly contemplative and distant — but he can't bring himself to feign smiles and easy chatter. Draco could be dead. Drowned, three years ago, before Harry even saw the first memory, before he even wrote *likes circles* in the file, before he even read the words *do you remember when we were eleven?*

Harry says his farewells to Astoria and Matthew, flooing to the apartment. Ginny's put a small Christmas tree — no bigger than an owl — on the end of the kitchen counter. Harry stares at it for a moment, remembering the lush pine needles buried beneath the snow drifts of Godric's Hollow. The cheerful pub, decorated with lights, and the distant sound of carols being sung. He could have grown up there. Built snowmen as a child, and when he was older he could've had his first drink in that pub.

Let's go back to that.

What would Ginny say if he sold the apartment and bought a country home?

Harry exhales sharply and goes to the sliding door, opening it and stepping out onto the balcony. It's cold tonight; dewdrops bead along the balcony railing and Harry's breath hangs in the air like clouds.

Far below, in the street, someone's whistling again.

Blow the wind southerly, southerly, southerly...

A faint pop, and the front door opens.

"Harry! You'll never guess who we're playing Saturday! Only two matches left of the season, and — what are you doing out there? Close the door, it's freezing." Ginny takes off her woollen hat and scarf. "We're playing the Swindon Skylarks, and their seeker is Wanda's brother, so of course it's going to be very interesting. Nothing like a bit of sibling rivalry to liven things up." She glances up at him, her cheeks flushed with cold, looking beautiful as ever. "Hurry up and come inside."

Harry pauses a moment, listening to the whistling in the streets below, then steps inside and snaps the door shut.

* * *

It's a very long week waiting for the test results. When Harry's not working his other cases, he's in the Muggle Liaisons office, badgering people about making arrangements. When he finally receives news, on Thursday, that a DNA sample has been successfully retrieved, he begins badgering Butterworth instead.

It seems strange, to be living in the apartment with its clean white walls and convenience-sized Christmas tree. To be walking along the streets of London, passing beneath the bright and extravagant festive displays: twinkling lights looped overhead, and strings of gold stars, and electric-blue snowflakes. To see the people laughing, crowded in pubs and inns, drinking spiced cider and mulled wine. *Happy Christmas*, the signs in the shop windows proclaim. Diagon Alley, enchanted to have soft, warm snow falling over its streets, is awash with festive cheer and every shop has a Wizarding Wireless playing carols and the beloved Christmas classics. Outside Quality Quidditch Supplies a sign states, in colourful lettering, *Buy the latest Skyblazer and make it home for Christmas!*

Yes, it seems strange to be here while Draco Malfoy may have died three years ago.

If he died alone in the cold and unforgiving tide of the Celtic Sea, the worst part is that Harry hadn't even noticed for three years.

Do you remember when we were eleven? Let's go back to that.

Sometimes Harry's tempted.

* * *

Saturday is the day of Ginny's big match. If the Wandsworth Warriors win this game, they'll reach the season final.

Harry can't go to the match. He apologises profusely to Ginny, saying he has to interview relatives about a recent case. Ginny's disappointed but says she understands.

"I don't know how you do it," she says. "Those poor families."

Harry feels absolutely terrible about lying, and he knows he's been behaving so distant lately, and he's been dreadfully on edge this week... He waits for Ginny to say something about it, but she kisses him and wishes him luck with the case before portkeying to Swindon.

So instead, he goes and prepares himself for the real reason for his absence from the game: his practical driving test.

* * *

Matthew drives him to the test centre.

"Got all your paperwork?" he asks.

"Yes." Harry feels as nervous as he did before he faced the Hungarian Horntail.

"Theory test certificate?"

"Yes."

"Nervous about the test, eh?" Matthew says, pulling into the centre car-park.

"That obvious?"

"You've been stressed all week."

"You noticed," Harry says slowly. Hermione and Ron had noticed too, asking Harry if something had happened. He'd told them the truth: he'd found a possible match for Draco. It'd been a relief just to tell them, and that had helped a little.

They walk into the centre and sit in the waiting area. Harry had spent the entire morning wondering if he should just call off the test. Why did he start learning to drive, anyway? He's fully qualified at Apparating and has portkeys, he can use the Floo network and the Ministry can even provide him with driverless cars.

But he wanted to do something for himself, for once.

What's the point in that? Sitting in a box, going only where someone else takes you?

Deep down, there's another reason he learned to drive, but he's not ready to voice it just yet.

"Harry Potter?" a woman asks, stepping into the waiting area. Harry likes the way Muggles say his name, in that blandly polite way. "We'll check your paperwork and take a brief eyesight test, then you'll be ready for the practical."

Harry stands up.

* * *

He returns to the testing centre forty minutes later. Matthew — apparently deeply absorbed in a very ancient-looking copy of *Good Housekeeping* — takes a minute to notice Harry's

return.

"Well?" Matthew says.

Harry smiles.

* * *

Harry Apparates back to the apartment while Matthew drives home. Matthew had been keen to celebrate over a few butterbeers, saying that Astoria had offered an invitation to dinner, but Harry politely declined, saying he had to do some work.

"On a Saturday? That's rough," Matthew had said with surprise, but they'd made arrangements for Harry to visit on Sunday for dinner instead. Right now, Harry just wants some time alone, to think about things. His happiness at receiving a full licence is negated by everything else that seems to be going on in his life.

Not five minutes arriving in the apartment, he receives a firecall from Butterworth. Unusual, as his colleagues know only to use personal firecalls in urgent situations.

"Got your test results," Butterworth says without preamble, and Harry scrambles over to the fireplace.

"You only got the sample Thursday."

"I put in overtime and carried out the tests this morning, just so you'd stop visiting my office every five minutes and requesting updates," Butterworth says irritably, but Harry's grateful nevertheless. "Here's the results." A piece of paper flutters through the fireplace and Harry snatches it up quickly, skimming past all the typical file information until he's reached the only part that matters.

Match: Negative (0.5%)

Notes: Muggle sample provided.

"It's not...they were a Muggle?" Harry asks blankly. Butterworth nods.

"The sample was Muggle. Complete absence of magical signature."

Harry stares at the paper, reading the words over and over. *Match: Negative.*

"Thanks," he says distantly. "Have a good weekend, Butterworth."

"I will if I don't see you." He terminates the firecall.

Harry slumps against the wall, sliding slowly down it until he's sitting on the floor.

Match: Negative.

He lets himself have a good twenty-minutes of reprieve before he straightens up, then stands and heads towards the dining table. He'll need to do some serious analysis of his meeting with Draco's solicitor.

* * *

Ginny comes home in an unusually happy mood, especially since her team lost the match.

"I've got something to tell you," she says to Harry.

"Me too," he says. *Everything, I've got everything to tell you.* The driver's licence will be a wonderful surprise — he can only imagine Ginny's expression — and there's so much more he wants to say. All the things they somehow never find the time to tell each other.

"Well, we can share our news Friday night," she says, smiling. "I've made reservations at a new restaurant, just opened up in Diagon Alley."

"Looking forward to it," Harry says, feeling quite gratified. It's been a long time since Ginny planned a date.

Things might be all right.

* * *

But that night, he finds it impossible to sleep. He keeps thinking about Draco's case, his mind racing over thousands of possibilities, thousands of tiny clues he might be overlooking or misinterpreting. He waits until Ginny's asleep, then gets up and picks up the box beside his bedside table, carrying it out into the kitchen and setting it upon the counter.

"*Lumos*," he whispers.

The wandlight casts a gentle glow over the Hogwarts textbooks, the bottle of aged whiskey, the origami rose the colour of a faded pink heart. Harry reaches for the first textbook. He hadn't looked at this book last time, on account of it being very firmly tied shut with a length of rope.

The Monster Book of Monsters. Harry unties the rope; a set of beady eyes open but soon flutter shut again when Harry runs a finger along the spine. After waiting a moment to ensure the book is settled, he begins flipping through the pages. He's certain Draco would never have bothered with this book —

Notes and notes of tiny writing in the margins.

Harry gazes, struck with incredulity, at the observations. *The Limax should be approached with caution... Valcores tend to have poor eyesight and rely on their hearing to locate targets, cast a Silencing Charm before approaching...*

The notes — same as all of Draco's other ones throughout the years — seem to focus on practical techniques and applications rather than theoretical knowledge. He seemed to have had an obsession with documenting each step perfectly, making sure there was no room for

error. Harry turns a page. *Hippogriffs*, the title announces, but the rest of the page has been torn away. That moment, he realises — Buckbeak attacking Draco — must have been a scene of utter humiliation for Draco. Judging from the lack of notes, Draco hadn't prepared adequately for the lesson and had consequently been thoroughly defeated by the hippogriff. Of course, Harry thought irritably, it had been Draco's own fault — the arrogant prat hadn't been paying attention.

But soon enough, his irritation turns to pensiveness as he thinks about Draco as he was in the early years at Hogwarts. Immature, always showing off his wealth and drawing attention to himself...there had been a brash confidence that had slowly melted away, taking the last of Draco's childhood with it and leaving someone else. Someone who hid away all the time, he thinks as he remembers sixth year. Someone who seemed permanently afraid, always retreating, always looking away.

"You were always so terrified of failure," Harry murmurs.

"Probably, but it's still difficult to hear someone say that about me."

Harry doesn't move for a moment. *It's just in your head, you just thought you heard Draco say that* —

He looks up. Draco stands across the room, facing away from Harry, looking out across the London skyline, one hand resting on the cool glass.

"It's a nice view," Draco continues, as if he hadn't spoken moments before. "But this isn't you, is it, Potter? This is nothing. A concrete box in the sky." He leans so close to the glass, Harry can see his breath mist over it. "You need something grounded. Something real."

Tell me, how did you get inside my head? It frightens Harry for a moment, that Draco Malfoy knows him better than most of his friends, better than his colleagues, better than Ginny. Then he remembers —

"You're not real."

Draco jumps. It's almost worth it just to see him do that. He whips around and stares at Harry.

"You can see me."

"This is a dream, another dream," Harry says, more to convince himself than actually respond to Draco.

Draco's still staring at Harry like he's a new species of dragon.

"You're not supposed to see me," Draco says at last. "Or hear me."

"Why not?" If it's a dream, Harry decides, he's perfectly fine with it.

"You didn't the other times," Draco says, his voice almost accusatory.

"What other times?"

"All those other times when you were going through my memories and possessions."

"You were watching me?" All those times Harry accessed memories and rifled through Draco's possessions...did Draco watch him when he was sitting in the Renault Mégane? "You can see me? Like a ghost, following me around?"

Draco looks amused. "There you go again, Potter," he says. "Thinking the world revolves around you." He turns away again, gazing out across the twinkling lights of London, faint under an early winter mist. "I'm not a ghost."

"Where are you? I'm trying to find you."

"I know." Draco rests a hand lightly on the glass of the sliding door again. "I can't tell you where I am."

Harry is silent for a long time. It's something he's learned from Draco, from all those endless nights spent in the memories of Draco driving, driving through dark streets and long highways. It lends Harry patience and contemplation.

Can't, Draco had said. *I can't tell you*. Not *I won't*. Some external factor was preventing Draco from disclosing his location, then. Either a person, or a spell.

He looks up. Draco is studying him. Years ago, he thinks, Draco would have said something acerbic by now. *Forgotten how to speak again, Potter?* or something similar.

"You've changed a lot," Harry says.

"So have you."

"How would you know?"

"I can see you when you're around my old possessions or memories," Draco says, looking away to gaze out the window again. "It's like watching pensieve memories."

"Watching me watching you," Harry says. "Another circle."

"There's a certain duality about it, yes."

Harry studies Draco. He should have realised. Those first few conversations with Draco, he seemed somehow far too placid, far too accepting of Harry's sudden appearance in his life. It makes sense, now, to realise Draco's been there the whole time. Right from the start, perhaps. Watching Harry in the owl emporium, watching him read through the textbooks, the notebook. Watching him as he sat in the Renault Mégane. Harry wonders what Draco was thinking as he watched Harry pull apart his life.

"Can you tell me how you disappeared?" Harry asks. There's a sharp splintering noise, as if the air around Draco is cracking like glass, and Harry takes a step backwards.

"I — " Draco says, but his voice wavers on the air like someone plucking a metal wire and the noise seems to wrap around Harry's mind, cutting into it, and he knows something is

terribly wrong.

"*Don't*," he says urgently, "don't answer — "

But there's a sound like glass exploding, like someone's thrown a mirror across the room, and pure agony flashes across Draco's face just a second before he suddenly vanishes into thin air.

Harry waits a long moment, wand held high, his heart hammering, then crosses over to the sliding door, staring at it carefully. There's nothing there. No crack in the glass, no mark, not even a fingerprint.

Draco has gone, or perhaps he was never there.

Harry says his name, just once, and it's a light question that hangs in the air like a snow cloud. For a moment, Harry's standing on the Cornish coast again, calling out into the storm-tossed sea, listening to his voice echo across the cliffs.

Draco.

That night, the windows rattle in their panes like a restless spirit caught in the winter winds.

Chapter 7

"I know he's not dead." Harry, once more, finds himself pacing in his friends' kitchen.

Ron, sitting at the table with a hot chocolate, raises an eyebrow and looks at Hermione. Hermione, however, seems to be frowning into her cup of tea.

"I don't know, Harry," Ron says at last. "Sounds like...well, sounds like a ghost."

"He's *not* a ghost, because he's *not* dead," Harry retorts.

Ron doesn't say anything for a long moment. Then he says quietly, "Are you sure?"

"I *know* he's not."

"Know, or think?"

Harry wants to snap at Ron, tell him he doesn't understand, but he recognises how Ron thinks. It's something their Auror training hammered into them: decisions should be evidence-based, made with logic and reasoning. Not intuition and 'I just know'.

However, help comes from unexpected quarters.

"This sounds familiar," Hermione says quietly, and Harry's attention snaps to her.

"Familiar how?" he says urgently. "This has happened before? There's been other cases?"

Hermione bites her lip. "Remember when you told me about your dreams, a while ago? And it reminded me of those dreams you used to have — the ones that weren't really dreams, they were Legilimency — "

Ron looks up sharply. "What, when You-Know-Who used to invade Harry's mind?"

"Not quite like that," Hermione says quickly. "But...could it be Legilimency? A skilled Legilimens could cast the spell across great distance."

"No," Harry says at once. "It's nowhere near the same — "

"Legilimency isn't as simple as that, Harry. It depends on the caster — every Legilimens has a different approach, a different style."

"Malfoy is reading Harry's mind?" Ron looks as if he's not quite sure whether he should be alarmed or not.

"It's not about reading minds! Honestly, both of you should really know better. Especially *you*, Harry. Haven't you been trained in the art of it?"

"Yes," Harry admits, feeling slightly defensive. "But I hate it. *You* try shoving your way into someone's mind. Anyway, Legilimency can do a lot of things, but it can't make someone appear — "

Hermione levels him with a look. "No, it can't. But it can construct visions, can't it, Harry?"

He stills. The visions Voldemort sent him. The dreams of Sirius in the Department of Mysteries.

Hermione, watching his face carefully, nods. "An exceptional Legilimens can construct visions, hallucinations..."

Ron stands up abruptly and starts pacing. "I don't like the sound of this. Malfoy's playing mind games with Harry?"

"He's not," Harry says slowly. "If you had the power to create a hallucination...anything you wanted...why would you choose to have an ordinary conversation with someone? Maybe this is a last resort, his last way of communicating." He thinks of the way Draco vanished at the end of the conversation. That wasn't part of the vision, he's sure of it. Draco broke an apparent rule when he tried to tell Harry his whereabouts, and suffered the consequences accordingly.

"You should be careful though, Harry," Hermione says.

"Why?"

"Well," she says quietly, "it might not be Malfoy sending you those visions."

Harry doesn't like *that* at all. He clears his throat and decides to try a different lead.

"Hermione, what do you know about hindering prosecution?"

Hermione straightens up, her eyes immediately brightening. "Well, I've got a number of reference books if you need any — "

"In her law library," Ron says.

"It's not a law library, Ron, it's *one* shelf — "

"Used to be the Chudley Cannons memorabilia shelf."

"Anyway," Harry says quickly, "hindering prosecution." He pauses, then lowers his voice although there are no other people in the house. "I think Draco knew his father's whereabouts. Maybe he was even assisting him."

"Had a chat to Malfoy's solicitor?" Ron asks shrewdly. His time as an Auror has cultivated a surprising amount of cunning.

"Well," Hermione says, "a law *used* to exist, stating that those who knew the whereabouts of felons — but didn't report them straight away — could be arrested for hindering prosecution. But the law has long since been abolished."

"So," Harry says carefully, "Draco disappeared half an hour before his appointment with the solicitor, who would have told him that there would be no legal consequences for him if he turned Lucius over to the authorities."

"Maybe he did turn Lucius in," Ron says suddenly.

"What?"

"Remember when we caught Lucius Malfoy? Everyone wanted to be the one to track down the last Death Eater, but in the end, it all came down to an anonymous tip."

Harry remembers that. Someone had activated the Salus charm. The spell, specially designed for the Aurors to respond to emergencies, was easy to cast. A simple spray of sparks into the air, and the caster's exact location appeared on the enormous map adhered to the wall of the main Auror office, setting off an alarm that would send all available Aurors rushing to the scene.

"There wasn't much speculation about who cast it," Ron says. "I mean, there was nobody there when we arrived. Just Lucius Malfoy, of course, and nobody else. To be honest, we all assumed Lucius cast it himself in a moment of doubt. Probably got sick of hiding for so long. Course, he probably regretted it the second we all showed up."

"Lucius died at the scene, didn't he?" Hermione says suddenly, and Harry glances at her.

"Yes." It had been terrible; Aurors were supposed to capture, not kill. Although there had been a royal commission into the death, it was never discovered who, exactly, had cast the fatal curse.

"Maybe Draco cast the spell and Disappeared," Hermione suggests.

"This doesn't make sense. All signs point to a forced disappearance," Harry says, frustrated. "Draco didn't just run away."

"Why not? He's always running away from things," Ron says, and Harry shakes his head vehemently.

"He's not like that anymore, he's changed. He wouldn't have run away. You don't understand, you haven't seen the memories." He taps his knuckles impatiently against the table. "If he was forcibly taken away, it doesn't make sense that he'd just show up a few months later with Lucius Malfoy, have him arrested, then Disapparate again. And it wouldn't explain why he's still missing now." Harry pauses, aware of Hermione and Ron both observing him carefully.

"Maybe," Ron says, "you should take a bit of a break, Harry."

Harry opens his mouth to protest, spots Hermione narrowing her eyes at him, and quickly changes tack. "All right," he says instead. "I'm going away for the weekend, anyway."

"Oh, that's nice," Ron says, looking relieved. "Bit of a holiday, then?"

"Celebrating my full licence. Thought I'd go see a bit of coast somewhere."

"Brighton in December, eh? Sounds awful," Ron laughs.

"Oh, Harry, you didn't say you got your licence! Congratulations!" Hermione looks genuinely delighted. "Wonderful news. Let's have a toast to Muggle transport, shall we?"

And for a few brief hours, Harry doesn't think about work.

* * *

That night, however, after he's returned to the apartment and kissed Ginny goodnight, he sits at the kitchen counter and unpacks Draco's life again.

The textbooks, the notebook. He reads the same lines over and over.

Do you remember when we were eleven?

Every now and again, he looks up, but there's no sign of Draco. Maybe he dreamed it last time. Maybe Hermione's right about her Legilimency theory, but maybe she's not. Maybe he's slowly going mad, constructing illusions, trying to conjure something that doesn't exist.

Someone who doesn't exist.

Harry stares unseeingly at the possessions before him. After a long moment, he reaches for the bottle of aged whiskey. No doubt Draco had been saving it for a special occasion.

Harry stands and fetches a glass, uncapping the bottle of whiskey and pouring himself a neat dram. The label, tinted in the colours of a fading autumn, shows a man walking down a long road.

Maybe Draco really did just leave. Maybe he's driving somewhere right now, driving down those long highways...

Harry takes a long sip of the whiskey, savouring the sweet honeyed taste. No; this is what happened last time. Second-guessing himself — dismissing the dreams and memories — and believing Draco had committed suicide. *No*, he'd said almost angrily to Hermione when she'd suggested it. *No, he wouldn't do that.* And yet he'd nearly convinced himself...

He glances up hopefully. He feels like he's being watched.

But the room is empty.

Well, perhaps Draco is still here. Just invisible, beyond human touch.

"I'm going away," Harry says to the silent room. "To Helston. I want to see what you saw." *I'll stand on the edge of world and the winds will blow southerly, southerly...*

The room remains empty, and when Harry goes to sleep, he dreams of wild waves and crumbling cliffs.

* * *

On Thursday, he visits Narcissa Malfoy. She receives Harry with an air of faint bewilderment.

"I received your owl," she says, and Harry's forced to decline the offer of tea (a house-elf lingers hopefully in the background, carrying a full tea service). Perhaps Narcissa catches the impatience in his eyes, in his restless hands, for she shakes her head slightly and takes him straight to the stables.

"I will never understand," she says, "the obsession with Muggle inventions. Rather uncouth, I think."

"Is that what you told Draco?" Harry asks, wasting no time in going over to the Renault Mégane and pulling the cover away. It feels like greeting an old friend. He smiles faintly and runs a hand across the polished metal.

"You have the same expression as Draco did, every time he looked at that terrible waste of money," Narcissa observes.

Harry doesn't respond. He accepts the plastic keycard from Narcissa and the car unlocks itself. Muggle technology is amazing, Harry thinks. 'Waste of money', indeed. No doubt Draco considered it one of his finest investments.

Harry wishes he could fix the car himself. It seems important, somehow, that he's the one to fix it all. But when he started going through the list with Matthew, it became apparent that the car needed a lot more than a new battery. Brakes, calipers, disks, cylinders, pads, steering joints and track rods...everything would need to be checked and possibly replaced, depending on how well Draco had kept his car and how it had been treated after his disappearance. Then the petrol would need to be properly drained, the engine would need to be flushed...

Harry had conceded defeat and owled Narcissa, asking permission to fix the car and — once he received an affirmative — had booked the car for a mechanic.

"I suppose you're wondering why I want to fix it," Harry says, needing a little bit of courage to say it. He'd been hoping Narcissa wouldn't ask, and she hasn't so far, but he's certain she wants to know.

But to his surprise, she shakes her head. "Astoria says you received your car licence. Much like an Apparation licence, I suppose." She doesn't look at Harry; instead, she stares at the car. "You want to drive it. And I think Draco would like to see it driven again." She glances at Harry. "Sometimes, it seems you genuinely want to find my son."

"I do."

Narcissa pauses for a long moment. Harry's Auror training begins to prickle at his skin like a long-forgotten high summer heat. She knows something.

"Do you have a memory you want to give me?" he asks quietly, careful to sound calm.

Narcissa lifts a hand to her necklace, a troubled expression on her face. "It's nothing," she says at last, and Harry exhales slowly to hide his frustration. There's no point pressing, she'll only retreat now.

"The mechanics will be arriving in a few minutes," he says, changing the topic. This is one point Narcissa had not agreed with: she'd refused to allow the car to be towed away. She seemed to regard it as far too undignified. Harry has the feeling that she'll soon realise the other option — a couple of mechanics wandering about Malfoy Manor — is far more 'undignified'. Harry suddenly has a pang of mistrust. "There's no house-elves wandering about, is there?" he asks suspiciously, and Narcissa gives him a long, cool look.

"These Muggles," she says, "will not be anywhere near the manor. They will be here. That's why I requested your presence. You can deal with them."

Harry bites back an angry retort. He didn't realise he'd been invited here solely to act as some sort of Muggle interpreter.

"Right," he says, then — because he's still feeling slightly resentful — he adds, "it'll cost a lot, particularly this time of year."

"Money is not an obstacle."

It never was for you, was it?

But there's the sound of a car in the distance and Narcissa gracefully retreats, leaving Harry to deal with the mechanics. He leaves shortly after greeting them and directing them to the car, anyway.

He can't stand to see strangers pulling apart Draco's car.

* * *

The sun is setting against the dark winter sky when Harry returns to the stables to check progress. The mechanics seem slightly peeved but cheer up considerably when Harry — following advised protocol from Matthew — pays them generously, hands over a case of beer, and wishes them merry Christmas.

"You too, mate," one of the mechanics says.

"Does it start up now?" Harry asks, looking over the car, and the mechanic grins.

"Car yours, is it? Can tell by the look on your face." He nods towards the car. "Go on, then."

Harry opens the driver's side door and gets in. Now that he's driven a car, he reacts automatically, his hands instinctively reaching to rest on the steering wheel, his feet finding the brake and accelerator, his eyes flicking to the rearview mirror.

He presses the ignition button.

The car responds immediately, the low thrum of the engine filling the room. For a long moment, Harry grips the steering wheel tightly and can't trust himself to speak. He doesn't know why, but this moment is heavy with something intangible.

This is real.

"Engine might be a little rough at first," the nearest mechanic says, "but it'll be all right with a bit of time."

Harry is loathe to turn the car off, but he presses the button again and listens to the engine die again. "Right," he says. "Thanks."

The mechanics don't take long to pack up and leave. Harry sits in the driver's seat, feeling the memories rush through him like rain.

We could go anywhere.

Anywhere?

Anywhere.

A footstep. Harry opens his eyes; he hadn't realised he'd closed them. The mechanics are long gone. Narcissa stands in the doorway of the tack room, observing him silently.

"It is fixed?" she asks.

Harry smiles and presses the ignition button. He'll never get tired of listening to that engine start up.

But the noise seems to bring little comfort to Narcissa. Her mouth trembles slightly and her head bows slightly, as if her sorrow is a physical weight.

"It is strange," she says, every word stiff with forced composure, "to hear that noise, after all this time." She lifts her wand and waves it at the southern wall; it disappears completely and Harry frowns, not understanding until Narcissa looks at him again. "You wanted to drive it," she says, and Harry feels a jolt run through him.

He takes a deep breath. If he crashes Draco's car, Narcissa would never forgive him. Harry wouldn't forgive himself either. So he carefully adjusts the seat — Draco's just a little taller than him, it seems — and adjusts all the mirrors. He puts the seatbelt on, acutely aware that he's doing the same movements Draco has done hundreds of times before. He releases the handbrake, shifts the gear into drive, and lightly presses the accelerator.

The car rolls forward, finally leaving its prison of the past three years, finally doing what it was built to do: move. There's the quiet crunch of gravel beneath the tyres. He turns slowly along the wide path until it sweeps around the manor and joins the wide driveway.

In the rear-vision mirror, he can see Narcissa watching him. How many times did she watch her son drive away, disappearing into the distance? He applies just a little more acceleration. The car quickens its pace down the long driveway and then, finally, he slows slightly to turn

onto the open road. It's a thin and winding country road. The same type of road on which Harry spent so many hours practising his own driving.

He turns onto the road and accelerates until the scenery is flying past, until the dark fields wash away like tides, until it feels like he's driving through the night sky itself, and a thousand moments seem to come together in one rush of exhilaration: Draco and Astoria driving by the river, Harry standing in his apartment and watching the train lights disappear into darkness, and for a moment he sees everything perfectly.

* * *

It's a two-hour drive to London, but Harry pulls over just twenty minutes later, in Salisbury, to check the route. When he looks up from the road atlas again, Draco's there.

He's sitting in the passenger seat and gazing out the window, forehead pressed against the glass. Harry wonders if he's been there the whole time and he studies Draco's face. Is he unhappy that Harry is driving his car? Does he hate seeing someone else in the driver's seat?

Draco's gaze suddenly refocuses and Harry realises that Draco's staring at him in the reflection of the window. Watching Harry watching him.

It's like a circle.

Then Draco smiles. It's a crashing relief to Harry, who remembers only too well the agony on Draco's face when he last vanished. *I'm sorry*, Harry wants to say. *I won't ask questions, I promise, I won't make you disappear again...*

"We could go anywhere," Harry says instead, his voice quiet.

Draco turns away from the window, then, and looks at Harry. "Anywhere?"

"Anywhere." Harry studies Draco. "You look tired."

Draco glances away. "It's hard, trying to do this."

"Do what?"

"Come back."

For the first time, Harry realises that for Draco to make himself real like this — to appear to Harry, to manipulate visions of reality — he must have to invest a great deal of energy and perhaps magic. He wonders if that's the reason why Draco didn't appear again for nearly a week after the incident at the apartment; perhaps it had taken Draco that long to simply recover and gather the energy to try again.

"Is this Legilimency?" Harry asks, changing the subject. He won't ask Draco where he is; that sort of question clearly extracts a price.

"In a manner of speaking."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Harry's completely bewildered.

Draco studies him for a long moment. "You know," he says at last, "when I first realised you — of all people — were managing this case, I was angry." He pauses and glances out the window again, staring at his reflection. "My last chance, and it was wasted on you."

"Thanks a lot."

"You're impulsive, you never stop to think about things, you can't compartmentalise — the worst person for detective work."

Harry opens his mouth, thinks for a moment, then shuts it again. Draco looks at him.

"And look how you've changed," he says. "Is it just me, or did you just pause to actually *think* about what you were about to say?"

"I'm still impulsive."

"Well, over the course of my observations, I've decided that your impulsivity is not necessarily a negative quality."

"Was that a compliment?"

"It was an observation."

And Merlin, it feels so close to being perfect — they're sitting here, bickering like they used to be, but there's a faint familiarity that was never there before — and Harry just wants to stay here for a little while longer. Just a little while, until he can forget everything else in his life.

"Does it take a lot of effort to stay here?" Harry asks, wondering if Draco will suddenly vanish again. "Are you going to leave again?"

A car passes them, headlights ghosting across the Renault Mégane, illuminating Draco for a moment. Then the car continues on and they are cast into darkness once more.

"Coming home is hard. Going away is easy," Draco says.

"I suppose we have something in common, then." Harry hesitates, thinking he shouldn't be sharing something like this with Draco, when he hasn't even told Ron or Hermione, but...

"Most of the time, I don't want to go home," Harry says at last. "I don't even know where home is, really."

Draco studies him. "I suppose we do have something in common, then," he says after a long moment.

They lapse into a natural silence. Harry starts the car again, his route decided, and merges onto the road. He hopes Draco will stay there, just watching the world pass by, but after a few minutes Draco speaks again.

"I have to leave."

"Are you in danger?" Harry can't keep the worry from his voice. Draco shakes his head.

"Too tired. I can't focus anymore."

"Oh." Harry suddenly remembers another question. "Listen — if this is Legilimency, is it you doing it, or someone else? Is someone there with you?"

Draco pauses. "I'm alone," he says. Then he hesitates again. The air seems to shimmer around him and his body tenses. Harry realises what's about to happen and shakes his head.

"Don't," he says urgently, braking hard and pulling onto the shoulder of the road, "don't do it, it's not worth it — *stop* — "

"In incepto finis est," Draco says, the words lashing through the air like electricity, and his final words are choked out in a fit of obvious agony. "My father — "

And the rest is lost in a strangled cry before he vanishes with another sound like glass shattering.

Harry sits for a long moment, listening to the engine idle, waiting for his hands to steady again. How long will it take Draco to recover this time? What price is he paying right now?

An impossibly high price, it seems, for six little words.

By the time he arrives in London and parks the car in the apartment block's garage, it's past ten o'clock and Ginny will be asleep. He walks slowly to the apartment, his body feeling heavy and his mind weary. He doesn't want to deal with anyone or anything.

Coming home is hard. Going away is easy.

Draco Malfoy knows him better than Harry knows himself.

* * *

Friday is the day that Harry tells Ginny he's never coming home.

The evening starts beautifully. It's the week before Christmas, and the streets are resplendent with their festive displays and twinkling lights. Couples are holding hands as they skate around the Tower ice rink; carollers sing beneath the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square. In Diagon Alley, the shops are open late to accommodate holiday shoppers. As they hurry past Quality Quidditch Supplies, Harry glances at the sign in the window. *Buy the latest Skyblazer and make it home for Christmas!* He remembers reading the same sign in the first week of December and it feels like a lifetime ago.

The restaurant itself is a small and cheerful establishment with a fire crackling merrily and wreaths of holly twined around the windows. It reminds Harry of the Three Broomsticks. They're ushered to a discreet corner, where Harry won't be bothered with stares and Ginny won't be badgered by ardent Quidditch fans. Harry orders a spiced mead and Ginny spends

some time perusing a list of festive cocktails before she orders something called a Peppermint Dragon.

"Harry," she says, just after the waitress has disappeared, "they'll be doing the big announcement next week, so I wanted to make sure you knew first. But I had to wait for everything to be properly confirmed, of course."

"You've been made captain?" Harry says with surprise. Ginny's always had a lot of ambition, but Gwen loves her job and has no plans to resign, as far as Harry knows.

"Better," Ginny says, her eyes bright with excitement. "Harry...I've done it. I've made the English National Team."

Harry sits back. "That's...that's really...congratulations, Ginny."

"This is amazing," Ginny says. "I'm on the reserves, of course, but it's generally a stepping stone to a full-time position. I know one of their Chasers is heading into early retirement from a bad back injury, and I've been told that if I prove myself in practice, I have a legitimate chance at filling the position."

The waitress arrives with the spiced mead and a cocktail the colour of a candy-cane. Harry sips at the mead if only to have something to do.

"The good thing is, we don't have to move," Ginny says. "We're perfectly located for international travel. Of course, a bit closer to central London would be nice, but we'll see what happens. I'll have to travel a lot more, of course, but it's a necessary part of joining the team."

Maybe, a few months ago, Harry would have nodded and smiled and convinced himself he was happy, or at least that it was selfish to be unhappy. But his conversation with Draco circles his mind like a flurry of snow: *Most of the time, I don't want to go home*. It was the most truthful thing he'd said for a long time. The apartment isn't home. He's never called it home. And he never will.

And then, the second realisation rolls in like thunder when Ginny smiles and asks Harry what his big announcement is.

"I learned to drive," he says.

"Did you really? That sounds fun, you'll have to take me for a drive sometime."

And Harry opens his mouth to say *I learned to drive from Matthew Venn*, because then the whole story can unravel: Matthew, who's married to Astoria. Astoria, who Harry met through working Draco's case and speaking to Narcissa. Narcissa, who gave Harry the Renault Mégane, which is right now parked at their apartment. The Renault Mégane, which is so important because Draco loved to drive it everywhere. Draco, who appears in memories to help Harry, who has observed him for months, who's changed his mind about Harry in the same way Harry changed his mind about Draco. Draco, who once said *What's the point in that? Sitting in a box, only going where someone else takes you* and Harry can't let go of that

because every time he hears Ginny call the apartment a box in the sky he experiences a crippling sense of loss and self-doubt. Draco, whose absence Harry can't stop thinking about, and isn't it funny that Draco is never *physically* there, but it always feels like he's there *mentally*, but for Ginny it's the other way round?

Or maybe it's not funny, maybe it's just depressing and makes Harry feel like going back to the Renault Mégane and driving, driving, driving, until Draco comes back again and then everything will be all right.

But Harry doesn't say any of that. He smiles instead, and nods his way through dinner, and waits until they've Apparated home. And just as they're standing in the bedroom, with Ginny folding her robes and Harry sitting on the edge of the bed, he says "I didn't even notice."

"Notice what?" Ginny asks, pausing in her folding.

"Our relationship ending."

Ginny goes very quiet then. Harry waits. It seems like the sum of their relationship, these days. Silence.

Then Ginny says, "Neither did I."

* * *

That night, they lay on the bed together. Harry holds her one last time.

"Are you happy?" he asks her. She's silent for a long time.

"I don't know. Are you?"

"No," Harry says truthfully.

"I didn't even notice," Ginny says, and he catches the sadness in her voice and holds her tighter.

"It's all right."

"I should have noticed."

"It's all right," Harry repeats.

In the morning, he wakes up alone.

Ginny's gone to Quidditch practice.

Chapter 8

Hermione and Ron are aghast.

"You *cannot* break up with Ginny two days before Christmas," Hermione says angrily, putting a mug in front of Harry and sloshing tea over the coffee table.

"What were you thinking?" Ron adds. "Mum's going to completely lose it! She's already knitted matching Christmas jumpers!"

"And she told me she's expecting you to announce the wedding date!" Hermione snaps.

"Oh, come on," Harry protests. "We've been engaged for three years now, and dating for seven!"

"That's the whole point, Molly said what better time than your seven year anniversary? Seven is considered a *very* lucky number among wizards and witches, Harry. Molly has her heart set on another wedding, she's already designing invitations — "

"Oh, *no*," Ron says with horror. "Mum's at the stage where she's designing invitations?"

"It gets worse," Hermione says ominously. "I caught her making a list of possible grandchild names."

Ron slowly sinks into an overstuffed armchair, clutching his glass of firewhiskey. "Harry," he says, "we shared many adventures and while our friendship was tested at times, I treasure the time we spent together. You were a terrific bloke and will be sadly missed by many."

"It's not that bad," Harry says. "I mean, Ginny's not devastated or anything, it was really quite mutual —"

"Doesn't matter. Mum's got visions of weddings and grandchildren." Ron takes a swig of his firewhiskey. "I know a bloke up Norfolk way, does fake passports quite cheap. I'll give you his details."

Harry looks at Hermione. "Would you listen to him? Merlin, can you tell him it's not that bad?"

Hermione sips her butterbeer and says nothing.

* * *

Harry sits in Ron's old bedroom, poking miserably at a Christmas pudding. The pudding giggles and runs away; he sighs and looks up as Ron and Hermione come through the doorway.

"Is it over?"

"Not yet. Mum's on her fifth sherry now."

"The good news is," Hermione says anxiously, "she's stopped shouting."

"Yeah, now she's crying into the mince pies. Can't make out much, but apparently 'Celeste' was always on her top girls' names list."

Harry's indignant. "Get out, I wouldn't call a kid Celeste anyway."

"Yeah, Percy said it was a terrible name too. Then they all started arguing and George turned Percy's ears into turnips and Bill couldn't stop laughing, so Percy called him a long-haired pillock and..." Ron winces as there's a thump from downstairs followed by laughter and, moments later, an outraged squeal.

"Well, every family has little arguments at Christmas," Hermione says with determination, upending a small bag of sweets and pastry treats. "No reason why we can't enjoy the festivities still."

Harry reaches for a gingerbread newt and bites a foot off. The newt looks displeased.

"Still got the contact details of that Norfolk bloke," Ron says.

Despite it all, Harry can't help but smile.

* * *

It's a reprieve, at least, and he's always grateful for Hermione and Ron granting him these moments: fleeting scenes of amusement and light smiles, a chance to surface for air.

Because all day, he's still thinking of the look of agony on Draco's face as he disappeared again. As if a Crucio had just been cast on him. And he doesn't feel like he should be here, celebrating with friends and family, unwrapping gifts and eating sweets while, somewhere in the world, Draco is drifting alone and, in all probability, seriously hurt or exhausted. Hermione catches him deep in thought a few times and frowns at him, and Ron takes him aside.

"Remember what they said in Auror training? You can't spend all your time thinking about the case or you're going to burn out, and then you won't be able to help anyone."

So Harry does his best to enjoy the day and, in the evening, he Floos to the apartment. Ginny, left behind due to an apparently very absorbing conversation with Fleur, will no doubt return soon as well. For now, the apartment is completely dark save for the small Christmas tree. It's still sitting on the end of the counter, dusted in tiny lights.

Draco is standing beside it, the faint glow of the light dancing over his face like clouds drifting across the sky. Behind him, through the windows, Harry can see the London night illuminated. There's the lines of trains, moving slowly from station to station. High above, the crescent moon is struggling through the misty winter night.

"You're here," Harry says slowly, testing the words just to see if they'll fall and shatter.

Draco looks at him. He looks terrible, Harry thinks. Thin and exhausted. Shadows beneath his eyes. Clearly, these efforts to appear are taking their toll.

Going away is easy. Coming home is hard.

Draco opens his mouth and speaks, but the words are silent. Harry bites his lip.

"I can't hear you," he says quietly, and Draco stops speaking. His shoulders slump slightly. He walks towards Harry, and the moonlight filters through him like he's no more substantial than water, and Harry realises that Draco is struggling just to exist here. Whatever is left of his strength is not enough to speak, not enough to appear solid. He's like a ghost. When he's just a few steps away from Harry he reaches out, and Harry responds without thinking, outstretching his own hand.

His fingers grasp at nothing. Draco fades completely.

Outside, in the streets below, someone is whistling again.

Blow the wind southerly, southerly, southerly...

* * *

Boxing Day. The city will be crowded with shoppers: fashionable couples sashaying along the luxury labels of Bond Street, young families and bargain-hunters caught up in the masses at Westfield.

Harry stands on the balcony, watching the people hurry below. Earlier in the day, the streets were eerily empty, but now — in the last remaining hour of daylight — people are beginning to trickle home from their trips.

"Close the door," Ginny says. "It's freezing out there."

She stands in the middle of the kitchen, wearing jeans and her latest Christmas jumper. Her hair is unbrushed and Harry finds it reassuring somehow. It's easier to talk to Ginny when she's like this, instead of dressed in her full Quidditch uniform, dashing away to a debriefing or another practice. She wears her uniform like other people wear armour.

Harry steps inside and closes the door. They say it might snow next week, although it rarely snows in London. This city moves and breathes like an enormous beast, breathing in the lives of eight million people and turning snow to sleet with the sheer heat of life contained within.

Ginny paces around the kitchen, then puts the kettle on.

"Do you think," she says at last, "we could fix this?"

Harry puts his hands in his pockets. The Renault's keycard nudges against his fingers and there's something reassuring about the cool, smooth plastic.

"No."

Ginny looks away. "I thought we could," she says, "until the morning after, when I left for Quidditch practice. We'd just broken up, and I still got up and went to practice. And I realised that it's because to me, practice is more important than trying to fix this. My career is my first priority." She looks up at him, and it feels like they're being honest with each other for the first time in ages, and Harry's suddenly so sick of wearing masks and reciting from scripts someone else wrote, and so he speaks the truth, the thought that he's kept hidden for so long during the last year of their relationship.

"Sometimes, I think all we have in common is the war. We were so different back then, and I didn't know if either of us would live to see the end. It was easy to fall in love." *And then, later on, when we became ordinary people, our old selves faded quietly away...*

He wonders if he spoke the truth too directly, but Ginny doesn't seem offended. She tilts her head, thinking.

"I never thought about it that way," she says slowly. "I suppose you're right. Falling in love is easy. Falling out of love...you don't notice until it's too late."

Going away is easy. Coming home is hard.

They finish their tea in silence, then Ginny says she's meeting up with Wanda, the team's seeker and her best friend.

"Telling her about us?" Harry asks, and Ginny nods.

"I just want to talk to someone. Besides you," she adds, and then she winces. "Oh, I didn't mean like that — "

"It's all right. I understand." Harry hesitates. "I've got to talk to someone too. I won't be back until tomorrow."

"All right. Tell Ron and Hermione I said hello." Ginny pauses, then turns and leaves.

Harry stands alone in the apartment for a long moment, then departs too.

* * *

When Harry was very small, he used to think cars were like spaceships and they could take him anywhere. He would race along the milky way, slip along the curve of the moon, run along the exploding stars and come to rest among the cold, glittering nebulae.

The universe never ends.

He drives on, following the winding roads and highways until they feel like an infinite loop, a Möbius strip of rain-dark asphalt and winter-bare fields. It takes him six and a half hours to reach Helston. He stops in Launceston to buy fuel and ends up spending an hour poring over the maps in glovebox. There's a thousand journeys marked along the pages and he wonders if Draco took all the trips so carefully traced along the maps.

The flat, pastoral farmland soon gives way to deep valleys and rising cliffs as he nears the coastline. The air becomes cool and crisp, a promise of the chilly ocean and he turns the heating up. He goes through Helston, to the small parish of Landewednack; it proves to be a collection of stone cottages and a small church with a kissing gate. The roads are deserted — it's two o'clock in the morning and he imagines the villagers are all sleeping in their warm homes, fires burning low in the grates.

He follows the signs until he's slowly crawling along a narrow road toward the Lizard Lighthouse. He can hear the distant rush of waves, breaking in a ceaseless rhythm against the cliffs. Harry parks the car and pauses for a moment. It's in the heart of winter, and he's in the middle of nowhere at two a.m, listening for the sound of a wave breaking, listening for the sound of another human voice. Listening to the wind blow southerly, southerly, from the edge of mainland Britain, listening to it whistle through the cracks in the rocks and the secret hollows and coves along the coast.

He opens the car door and steps out. The wind is fierce now, nipping at his face, lashing at his hair, snapping at his clothes. He holds his wand aloft and whispers.

"Lumos."

A soft blue glow lights the path before him. There's a sign saying South-West Coastal Walk and he follows the pointing arrow. The wild winter sea is a roar now and the wind is strong and bitterly cold, sweeping straight along the Celtic Sea and licking the crests of the waves before bringing a salted sting to Harry's skin. Even with the wandlight, the path is treacherous in the wet weather and dark night, and Harry nearly falls a few times. If Draco's here, surely he's laughing.

The sound of the sea grows ever closer. The wind is unrelenting now, catching ahold of Harry's clothes and yanking like a demanding child; it reddens his face with sharp slaps of sea air. At last, Harry's reached the edge of a cliff. The dark waves churn around the rocks below, the sea-foam the same colour as a stormy December sky. Somewhere out there, in the inky black horizon, the light of a ship winks as it cuts through the ocean. Harry edges closer to the cliff.

He looks up. It's a half-moon tonight. The same lunar phase as when he first dreamed of the Cornish coast.

It's a long walk back to the car alone, and a longer drive back to London, but Harry thinks he could get used to long trips.

* * *

New Years comes and goes. Harry moves out of the apartment on the second of January; Hermione and Ron set up the guest room in their home. He solves one of his cases on the fifth of January when he tracks the missing man to eastern France, where the man has a new life and, unfortunately for his distraught wife in England, a new family.

But he's always, always elsewhere. His mind is ghosting along highways and winding roads; it's drifting around corners and hearing the roar of the sea and the song of winter's chill. He

wakes at three a.m every night, dreaming of crumbling cliffs and a voice crying out. He sits in the Renault Mégane and stares at nothing for hours.

Are we getting closer, or just getting lost?

Lucius Malfoy. Those had been Draco's words to Harry, the last time they spoke. *My father.*

In incepto finis est.

Harry flips through the file, stares at those two words he wrote so casually seven months ago.

Likes circles.

He needs a memory from Narcissa, he knows it. He's been patient, but she's not telling. How do you extract a memory from someone who doesn't want to give it?

He straightens up. No. It would never work.

Well...it worked once before.

* * *

When Harry arrives home from work, he makes a beeline for the guest room and dumps his cloak there, then returns and sits at the dining table, looking at Hermione. She's enjoying a cup of tea and seems deeply absorbed in a book, but when she notices him there she slowly looks up.

"Oh, no," she says warningly. "You want something. Possibly illegal, certainly difficult, and definitely dangerous."

"Wouldn't happen to know any good potion brewers, would you?"

Hermione shuts her book and levels him with a look. "Good potion brewers, or shady potion brewers?"

"Good. Really good."

"Good enough to brew, for example, Veritaserum?"

"Course not, I'm not a barbarian," Harry says. "I was thinking...good enough to brew Felix Felicis."

Hermione's gaze softens. "Well, at least it's legal," she says, returning to her book. "Ron wanted to know if I knew anything about Essence of Insanity last week. Well, really."

"So, can you get it?"

"I might. It will cost you, though."

"How much?"

"If you take out a second mortgage, you should be all right." Hermione glances up and catches Harry's expression. "That was a joke, Harry. It *is* very dear, though."

"Just let me know when you find a potioneer, and I'll do the rest."

"Is this...for work?" Hermione asks after a long moment. "Harry...you know the potion doesn't work like that. It doesn't miraculously give you all the answers, it just offers paths to the best possible outcome. And the side-effects can be very dangerous..."

"I know." Harry looks away.

Hermione sighs. "It's a desperate last resort, Harry."

"I know," he repeats.

"There might be a high price."

But whatever the price, he thinks, it'll be worth it.

* * *

He owls Narcissa. A date is set. She thinks he's doing a routine visit just to assure her the case is still being actively managed. Wednesday, the fourteenth of January. It's been three weeks now since Harry last saw Draco. Standing in the apartment, looking little more than a fading ghost.

Will he ever come back?

Harry drinks the Felix Felicis an hour before he leaves. Twelve hours of liquid luck. He has to pause a moment to let the feeling of carefree euphoria wash over him as he downs the potion. Then he heads towards the front door, planning to Disapparate once he's outside the door, but somehow he just keeps walking.

To the Renault Mégane.

It will take two hours to drive to the manor, but Harry doesn't feel particularly concerned about this. He'll just be two hours late, that's all.

The Renault is recovering very well from its three-year abandonment, and the engine purrs smoothly when Harry starts the car. He pauses for a moment, then reaches for the maps kept in the glovebox. Why not take a scenic route to Wiltshire? He'll be two hours late anyway; what's another hour matter? Draco has drawn a line along the coastal roads. Draco likes the coast, Harry thinks. Liminal places. People are drawn to those sorts of areas, where lines are blurred and dualities are drawn. Land and water but not quite both, not quite either.

He places his hands on the steering wheel — one hand on each of the faintly worn patches where Draco so often rested his own hands — and drives.

* * *

He arrives at the manor just as the sun is setting. An anxious-looking house-elf answers the door and stares at him.

"I have a meeting with Narcissa," Harry says pleasantly, tapping the Renault's keycard against his palm.

"Please be waiting in the reception hall," the house-elf says, bowing hurriedly. "I will be fetching Mistress, yes." The elf backs away, then scurries up the sweeping staircase. Harry, left to his own devices in the reception hall, wonders if anyone has ever been hours late to an appointment with a Malfoy. Normally, he'd sit uncomfortably on the antique chaise nearby, but this time he unconcernedly wanders about the hall. There's a row of framed photographs of the Malfoy family on the hall-table and he scrutinises them closely. In the first few, a young Draco is smiling proudly between his parents. As Draco ages, however, the smile slowly disappears and the distance between all three Malfoys lengthens, until the very last photo. Taken just before Lucius disappeared, Harry would wager. Lucius is standing on the far left of the photograph; Draco is standing on the far right. Narcissa is between them, looking helplessly from one to the other. As Harry watches them, Lucius glances at Draco and reaches towards him. Draco gives him a look of cold anger and edges farther away until he's nearly disappeared entirely from the picture.

Footsteps on the stairs. Harry glances up. Narcissa walks towards him, one hand trailing along the banister.

"You're late," she observes.

"Sorry. I decided to drive here instead."

"I saw." Narcissa descends the rest of the stairs and stands on the last step, one hand still resting on the banister and the other rising to touch at her necklace. "When I saw the car, I thought — for a moment — Draco was coming home."

"I'm sorry."

Narcissa shakes her head. "Foolish thoughts."

"I took a scenic route through Portsmouth. It's nice, driving the coast this time of year. Not much traffic."

Narcissa looks at him for a long moment, then glances away. "Perhaps," she says slowly, "that's why I allowed you to have the car."

"Why?"

She inclines her head slightly, towards the drawing room. Harry wonders if the motion is conscious or not.

"You remind me of him. Strange, isn't it? But I think Draco would have liked to see his car being driven by someone who..." She trails off and moves away, perhaps to call a house-elf, but Harry quickly intervenes.

"Someone who likes driving too? Someone who takes the scenic routes?" Harry smiles. "I went to Cornwall. Tracing Draco's last journey. Have you ever seen the southernmost point of the British mainland?"

Narcissa gazes at him for a long moment, then clears her throat. As if responding to an unspoken command, the anxious-looking house-elf reappears by her side.

"Refreshments," Narcissa says, and the house-elf bows low before vanishing again. Narcissa sweeps away, leaving Harry to follow until they enter a formal sitting room. Harry looks around the room: there's plenty of places to sit, but he opts to walk over to the window. Narcissa is silent, but Harry doesn't feel the need to speak. He waits, staring out over the manor grounds until the house-elf appears again. He doesn't turn from the view, waiting as he hears the clink of glasses and the fading footsteps of the house-elf.

"Draco would be furious to hear me speak of it," Narcissa says. The sun is nearly set and he can see her reflection in the dark window. She's looking at him with an expression of sadness and he thinks that if she knew he could see her expression, she would quickly hide it. "But there is something about you that I see in him too."

"I don't think Draco would feel angry about the comparison," Harry says, and surprise flits over Narcissa's face.

"Perhaps," she allows. She walks to the tray of glassware and picks up a highball tumbler, filled with some sort of clear beverage and garnished with lime. Gin and tonic, Harry thinks.

"*In incepto finis est*," he says, and Narcissa starts. "I know of a saying similar to that. *I open at the close*." He shoves his hands in his pockets, studying Narcissa's reflection in the window. The stars are coming out now, cold and white against the dark January sky. "I remember that night, the night of the battle. I walked to my death but I wasn't alone. I remember the spirit of my mother walking alongside me." He turns around, leaning his back against the cold glass of the window. "Do you think Draco ever felt he walked alone?"

Narcissa turns away from him. "You have no right to ask these questions," she says in a low voice, but Harry can hear the tremor beneath her words and knows he's struck a nerve. "I did my best for Draco."

"And what about Lucius?" Harry remembers the photographs downstairs. "By the time he disappeared, I'd wager Draco barely spoke to him."

Narcissa takes a long sip of the gin and tonic, and she seems inclined to rebuke Harry for speaking of such personal matters. However, she catches sight of the Renault keycard in Harry's hand and seems to change her mind.

"They argued," she says at last. "Draco always adored his father, and used to listen to every word. I think it was very difficult for Lucius, to have Draco suddenly withdraw. I think Lucius expected everything to be the same after the war...but after the battle, Draco wouldn't talk to us. There was just so much distance, and it felt like Draco was so close to just leaving completely...Lucius took it badly. He told Draco to pull himself together. I'm afraid he became quite angry with Draco. But the angrier he became, the more Draco retreated..."

"Until..." Harry prompts, and Narcissa looks away.

"I'll give you the memory," she says at last. "If only because, for a moment, I thought it was Draco returning tonight, when I saw that car. And you gave me that one moment, if nothing else, so I'll give you the memory."

And, lifting a wand to her forehead, she lets wisps of silver drift in the air.

Possibly, Harry thinks, the final piece of the puzzle.

* * *

He leaves the manor soon after, retracing the same route. The vial is heavy in his pocket, and it's a long drive back to Ron and Hermione's house. Hermione answers the door, a mug of tea in one hand.

"I need a pensieve," he tells her. She yawns, looking unsurprised.

"In Ron's study. He uses it for work."

"I'll need to destroy the memory afterwards."

"All right."

He appreciates her lack of questions, or perhaps she's too absorbed in her work; she soon retreats to a pile of books in the sitting room and Harry makes his way to Ron's study. The study has a slight chill to it, for the warming charms — concentrated around the busier parts of the house — are less effective here.

Within moments, he's immersed in the memory.

The first thing he hears is Draco's voice. Raised and angry.

"I won't do it, I will *not* run away — "

The surroundings construct themselves around Harry. He's standing in a hallway — most likely in the manor. Narcissa is beside him, listening intently — eavesdropping, he realises. The raised voices are drifting from a room just across from them, the door slightly ajar.

"You are being very ungrateful, Draco," Lucius is saying angrily. "I have spent quite an amount of money preparing the estate in Crete — "

Draco laughs bitterly. "I'm sure you have."

"You are being very obstinate," Lucius snaps. "This is an opportunity, Draco. Stay here if you wish — hiding in the manor, where those who will seek revenge cannot harm you — and when you are tired of that caged existence, I will contact the appropriate people and organise your journey to Crete. I am doing this to protect you and your mother — "

"If you want to protect your family, Father, I suggest investing in a time-turner and reconsidering some key choices you made twelve years ago."

"And you made some choices of your own, as I recall."

Narcissa flinches.

"I was sixteen," Draco says, fury coursing through his voice.

"Old enough to show some responsibility for your own actions, Draco. Your decision to accept the Dark Mark was yours alone, as I recall. Your mother advised against it, and I did not comment on the matter."

There's a long silence. Then Lucius speaks again, sounding impatient.

"And now you're sulking again, I see. I've had enough of this childish behaviour. Tomorrow, I leave for Crete. You and your mother will stay here for three months, until the Ministry's attention has since moved on, and then you will receive communication from a reliable contact and you will travel to Crete."

There's another long silence. Harry, desperately wanting to see Draco's face, moves closer to the door and peers into the room. But as Narcissa herself never witnessed the scene, the room is nothing but a beige-coloured blur.

"The day the war ended," Draco says at last, "I promised myself I would never take orders from anyone again."

And then the door is swinging open and Draco strides straight through Harry as if he's a ghost. Harry stumbles back automatically, then watches as Draco disappears down the hallway.

He nearly forgets that the memory belongs to Narcissa, but then Narcissa is stepping through the doorway and staring at Lucius. The room sharpens into view: a study, with an oak desk in one corner and two armchairs by a marble fireplace.

"You should not have spoken to him like that," Narcissa says. Harry can't tell whether she's sad or angry.

Lucius looks a lot older than Harry remembers. His face is more lined, and he looks tired.

"I'm doing this for you and him, Narcissa. Draco may be angry now, but he will thank me when he's older."

"He *is* older. Our son is twenty-two years old, Lucius. Not some disobedient child to be lectured and sent away."

Lucius sinks into one of the armchairs. "You were always better at dealing with his moods."

"His *moods*? Lucius, he has been in a war — "

"As have we all," Lucius says sharply. After a long moment, he looks away. "I cannot afford any errors. In three months, make sure Draco comes to Crete with you."

Narcissa studies her husband. "Unfortunately," she says, "Draco is his own person. We no longer control his choices."

Lucius says nothing. Narcissa turns and leaves, and the memory fades.

Harry surfaces from the pensieve and decides to drive.

Somewhere.

Anywhere.

He doesn't know why, but the Felix Felicis — fading from his body, but still there — seems to know. So he allows the potion to control his decisions.

He stands and walks out to the car, the gravel crunching under his feet. He touches a hand to the chilly handle and pulls the car door open, then slides into the driver's seat and rests his hands on the wheel.

"We could go anywhere," he says quietly.

There's no response, only silence, but he expected that.

He starts the engine.

Chapter 9

The headlights illuminate the endless highway and there's something mesmerising, paralysing about it. He could go anywhere. He could just keep driving, heading into that unknown journey.

He glances to the passenger seat.

Draco is there.

"You're here," Harry says quietly.

"Yes."

"I can hear you this time."

Draco stares ahead at the road disappearing beneath the car wheels, the white lines flashing past as if the world is turning beneath them and they are standing still.

"I've come to say goodbye," Draco says.

"No." The word is out before Harry can stop it.

"I've got something for you." Draco looks away. "A memory. But it will cost a lot to give you."

"Don't." Perhaps it's the potion, perhaps it's because the realisation is hitting Harry like a wave against a cliff: this might be the last time he ever sees Draco. He doesn't know if he can ever find him. "I'd rather have you than a memory."

Draco looks back at the road. "After I've given you the memory," he says, "I won't be able to come back again."

"Did you hear me?"

"I heard you."

Harry drives in silence for a long time. He keeps his eyes trained on the road ahead, but he can feel the weight of Draco's gaze upon him. Then, Draco speaks quietly.

"Pull over."

"What, now?"

"Yes."

They're passing through some small village in Hampshire. There's a playground nearby, the night dew gathering on the empty swings. Harry pulls into the parking lot next to it. He turns

the engine off and waits. Draco is silent for a long time and Harry thinks he's collecting his thoughts. Draco's methodical like that. Everything has to be in its correct order.

"What do you think happened to me?" Draco asks at last. Harry frowns.

"What do you mean?"

"How I disappeared."

"Well — a forced disappearance, of course —"

"No."

Harry waits a long moment, concentrating on the feeling of the steering wheel beneath his hands. Something solid, something real. He exhales slowly.

"No?" he repeats at last, trying to hide the betrayal in his voice, but it comes through anyway.

"No. I chose to disappear. Originally, at least."

Harry is silent for a long time. He glances at the playground, staring at the empty swings, the worn tracks from where people made shortcuts across the grass. Desire paths, he thinks they're called. When people create their own paths as opposed to using the set footpaths.

"You're angry," Draco says, and Harry tries to laugh, but the sound comes out as little more than a choked cry.

"You left people behind, Draco. God, do you ever think about other people? Your wife, Astoria — and your mother, she never stopped searching — damn it! Damn *you*, and your selfish —" Harry cuts himself off, hating Draco, hating himself. He tries laughing bitterly but he can't even do that, and he reaches for the door handle, feeling claustrophobic suddenly, needing to escape.

"Are you leaving?" Draco asks.

Harry pauses.

"I'll understand," Draco says after a moment. "It's easy to leave."

Coming home is hard.

Harry exhales slowly and drops his hand from the door handle.

"Why?" he says.

Another long silence. Then, "I don't know. I just left for three months. I decided to come back after that, to fix some mistakes, but...something happened."

Frustration lances through Harry like a needle. "Draco —"

"Are you practised in the art of Legilimency?"

Harry's heart drops. He glances away, gazing out into the night. A wind is picking up around the playground, making the swings sway. If Harry listens closely, he can hear the rattle of the chains.

"I can perform the spell," Harry says at last, "but it won't work very well. They told me to practise it for my role as Head Auror, and..." he trails off. "I hate it," he says at last, staring at the swings slowly swaying. Then he turns to Draco and lifts his wand. "But I'll try."

"Wait."

Harry waits. Draco touches a hand to the window, his fingers ghosting across the cold glass as if he's trying to ground himself somehow.

"All right."

"Legilimens."

* * *

It has been a long time since Harry last cast that spell and he winces as soon as he says the word, waiting for the chaotic memories to smash into his mind, waiting to be caught helplessly in the riptide of someone else's consciousness.

But there is nothing but darkness and silence, and for a moment he thinks he's failed completely.

Then a scene slowly brightens around him until he's blinking in the sunlight. Everything seems so bright and crisp; he can see every colour, feel every texture. This is nothing like the pensieve memories. He's standing in the middle of a field. He holds out a hand, feeling the gold-coloured wheat feather across his fingers. There's the smell of high summer in the air, the scent of dry air and splintered grass.

He tilts his head back, staring at the sky. That cloudless blue, so pristine and perfect. Maybe he can stay here forever. In an endless summer. Here, in his mind.

Then he slowly turns and walks across the field. The wheat rolls away in every direction, an ocean of gold. In the distance, there's a thin black road cutting across the land like a scar, a Renault Mégane parked along it.

Harry walks towards it. He feels strangely disconnected from everything. Not happy, not sad, not angry.

Nothing.

He opens the driver's door and sits down, glancing into the rearview mirror. He can see himself, but at the same time it's not him. For a moment, his green eyes fade to grey.

He starts the engine and drives. For a moment, all he sees is the road.

Then the images flash through him like a series of photographs, like a wild rush of unhappiness. His parents — *no, those are Draco's* — young and smiling again. Lucius will always be the strongest person in the world, and Narcissa the most beautiful, and their family is perfect —

— and then they're growing old, and Lucius looks so weak and afraid and that's *not* supposed to happen, fathers are *supposed* to be invincible — and it makes him feel sick to his stomach, it makes him terrified —

— Narcissa and Lucius are arguing again, that's all they seem to do these days, but her voice is getting quieter and quieter because there's too many people in the house now, Aunt Bellatrix who makes the prisoners scream, scream, *scream*, until Harry wants to beat his head against the wall or just go to the cellar and Avada Kedavra them all just to put them out of their damn misery —

— or maybe he'll just Avada Kedavra himself. Then it will all be over. Nobody can control him then. Nobody controls a dead person. But he can't even do that, and he's standing in front of a mirror with his wand held to his forehead but he can't bring himself to do it, it's pathetic —

— and then the emotions, all the anger and confusion and rage die away along with the war, and Lucius has gone and Narcissa says they'll join him soon, but he can't go away. If he runs away, he'll be just like his father, and isn't that a cruel irony when he spent half his life wanting to grow up *just* like his father —

— no, he's master of the house now, so he has to be the perfect son now, and he can't run away, he has to set all the finances in order and make sure Narcissa doesn't fade away to nothing and takes care of herself properly, and he has to make sure everything is perfect, he'll marry someone and they'll have a house and respectable lives and everything will be perfect —

But it's not.

And he feels nothing inside, like the war has cut away everything that used to make him human and and left nothing but a paper cut-out.

I can't run away, I won't, I won't do it —

Harry is suddenly yanked sharply forwards, like an invisible hand has grabbed his collar, and he recognises this place.

He's standing in an owl emporium.

It's a warm September day. Summer is still fading from the earth. He'll purchase a new owl and go home and...

...and start again, every day the same, and he can't take it anymore. This emptiness, this ceaseless routine, it's like singing the same song over and over, it's like drawing lines on maps for journeys he'll never take, it's like running on air. He needs to run, run, *run*, until he

can't hear anybody calling his name anymore, until he forgets everything. Until he's lost. Until he's gone.

He walks out of the shop. It's a warm September day. He could go anywhere.

He Disapparates.

* * *

Harry feels the cold first, and then the rest of his senses filter through. He's sitting in the driver's seat of the Renault, but he's him again. In his own head. It's night-time, and he's parked beside a playground in a small village in Hampshire. He glances into the rearview mirror, just to look at his own reflection, just to make sure he's himself.

He looks beside him, to the passenger seat. Draco sits there, but he looks exhausted, insubstantial as smoke, and Harry realises he's already fading.

"The worst thing," Draco says, each word weighted with exhaustion, "is that even now, I'm not sure I want to come back. I ran away, just like my father. It's all pointless now, isn't it?"

"You didn't run away," Harry says, his heart heavy with emotions, and he can't tell whether it's his own sadness or simply remnants of sorrow from Draco's mind. "You just left for a little while. We all do." He thinks of Ron leaving them during the search for the Horcruxes; he thinks of himself and the many times he wished for an easy death to deliver him from the choices the war imposed upon him.

"Do you remember," Draco says, "when we were eleven?"

Harry looks out at the playground, listening to the wind whistling through the chains of the swings.

"Yes," he says.

When he looks back to Draco, he's not there.

He's finally lost.

He's finally gone.

* * *

Harry arrives at Ron and Hermione's house a little after midnight. Hermione takes one look at his face, then immediately sets about making a pot of tea. Ron ushers him over to the fireplace.

"What happened? Didn't the luck potion work?" Ron demands. "You look like you've had the day from hell."

"It worked, I suppose," Harry says. "Still working now. Twelve hours, you said, didn't you Hermione?"

She nods, coming over to sit in the armchair opposite Harry. “When did you take the Felix Felicis?”

“One o’clock this afternoon.”

She checks her watch. “Twenty minutes left.”

“You need something stronger than tea?” Ron asks. “Got some firewhiskey if you want it.”

“No thanks.” Harry gazes into the flames of fire. It’s burned low in the grate and the flames are small, wavering gently over glowing coals. “Draco’s gone.”

Ron drags over a nearby footrest and perches on it, looking worried. “That’s the whole case, isn’t it? I mean, you’ve been searching for months. Not really a revelation.”

Harry laughs humourlessly. “He’s been appearing, remember?”

“Oh, yeah. I remember you told us about that.” Ron frowns. “To be honest, I thought you were just...”

“Imagining things?”

Ron looks abashed. “Sorry, mate. But this case...you’ve been a bit obsessed with it. I dunno, it can play tricks with your mind sometimes.”

Hermione reappears with three mugs of tea, handing one to Harry. “How do you know he’s not coming back?” she asks gently.

“He told me.” Harry stares down into the cup of tea. “He said he can’t come back. Not enough energy or magic left.” He wonders whether he should tell them about the memories. Normally he wouldn’t, but he has the feeling it’s something to be shared. “He asked me to cast a Legilimens on him and see some memories.”

“Oh, no,” Ron says, looking wary. “You’re bloody awful at that. What happened?”

“I saw a memory,” Harry says. “Clear as a photograph. Then I sort of...well, all these memories and emotions unravelled, like a ball of string.” The realisation of Draco’s skills only hits Harry now. “It’s the best Occlumency I’ve ever seen, including all the Auror trainers that worked with me. You wouldn’t believe it. I didn’t see his memories...I *lived* his memories.”

“What was it like?” Hermione asks, looking intrigued. “I’ve never done Occlumency myself, and I always wondered...”

Harry wants to answer her, but he doesn’t know how to phrase it. It was like flying, he thinks, but with no broom, no spells, nothing. Just rushing through the sky, and he’s reminded so strongly of that night Draco drove by the river and it felt like they were travelling through the sky, the world disappearing beneath them and the stars falling like rain.

“It was like running on air,” Harry says at last.

“Oh, *that* clears it up, then,” Ron says. “Anyway, don’t worry about it. You’ll figure out this case eventually. Especially if you have a brilliant Auror like me helping you.” He grins. “And Hermione, of course.” Ron turns to Hermione. “Right?”

She stares blankly at him. There’s a glazed look on her face and Harry recognises it instantly. He slowly sets his mug of tea aside and leans forward.

“Hermione,” he says quietly, but she quickly shushes him with a dismissive hand.

Ron and Harry wait. At last, Hermione stands up slowly.

“Ron,” she says, “fetch my copy of *Thaumic Mathematics and the Nature of Causality*, will you?”

“I — what? What the bloody hell have you been reading about, Muggle rockets or something?” Ron gets up and disappears, reappearing a few minutes later with a very large book under one arm. “You really need to control your library, I got attacked by an angry kickstool,” he says grumpily.

“Quiet,” Hermione says distractedly, and Harry, unable to stand still, jumps to his feet and begins pacing endlessly. For the next few minutes, all he can hear is his own footsteps and the occasional turn of a page. “I remember now,” Hermione murmurs. “Let’s see...it really represents a form of phase space, that’s the key...the three rules...do not interfere with the nature of causality...” She looks up at Harry, her eyes bright.

“Harry,” she says, “I think Malfoy had a time-turner.”

The clock chimes one o’clock.

Harry’s luck has run out.

* * *

“Space and time are always unstable when it comes to magic,” Hermione says, drinking her third cup of tea. “Space, yes — that’s why they advise avoiding Disapparating over large distances — but especially time. It’s dangerously unstable. And it works on similar principles to space — travelling over large eras of time is very dangerous.”

“But where would he get a time-turner from?” Ron interrupts. “They were all destroyed by the Ministry, remember?”

“I don’t know, Ron. But it’s a possibility.” Hermione sets her mug of tea back down. “I can’t believe I didn’t think of it before. When you Disapparate and something goes wrong, you get splinched, and the same thing happens when you use a time-turner incorrectly.”

Ron winces. “Malfoy’s splinched between two dimensions?”

“Sort of. He doesn’t exist completely in either space, but he doesn’t *not* exist, either.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

“It doesn’t *need* to make sense,” Harry says, pacing in front of the fire. “Hermione, how do we fix this?”

She shakes her head. “I’ll need to research it. Perhaps talk to some Unspeakables — they know about this sort of magic. But Harry, you must know that there’s only three recorded cases of this happening. It’s so rare to diagnose because nobody ever knows — someone’s usually secretly using a time-turner, and one day they just vanish and that’s it. But of the three recorded cases...”

“Yes?” Harry asks impatiently. Hermione looks down at the book in her lap.

“Each one required a time-turner to rescue the trapped person,” she says quietly. “And not just any time-turner, but the same one the person used to travel to the other time.”

“Impossible,” Ron says, but Hermione shakes her head.

“In two of the cases, the person placed the time-turner somewhere safe, where it could be found and used by the rescuers in the future.”

“Brilliant, so we’ll just — “

Hermione shakes her head. “The rescuers had to spend *months* figuring it out. The time-travellers had to abide by the rules of causality — they were not able to tell anyone how or where they placed the time-turner, or even where in time they were.”

“Draco couldn’t,” Harry says suddenly. It all makes so much sense in hindsight. “He’d try, but — “

Hermione nods. “Trying to break the rules of causality...it would be like trying to Disapparate to two different places at once.”

Ron winces again. Harry stares into the flames of the fire.

“So all I have to do,” he says quietly, “is find the time-turner?”

“Well, there’s a lot of complicated magic involved, but — it’s somewhere for you to start, yes,” Hermione says. “Find the time-turner, and we’ll do some research.”

“We?” Ron repeats gloomily.

“You do want to help, don’t you?” Hermione says.

“Only because Harry’s a right pain when he’s obsessing with Malfoy,” Ron says, sliding off the sofa and ambling towards Hermione’s library room. Harry’s too distracted to reflect on that particular remark. He looks at Hermione.

“How’d you figure this all out, anyway?”

She smiles faintly. “Running on air.”

“What?”

“Running on air. You said being in Draco’s head was like running on air.” She pauses. “The first person who ever used time-travel — a witch in the seventeenth century — said that travelling through time was like running on air.”

“You remembered that?”

Hermione smiles. “Yes. Now go and get some rest.”

But that night he dreams of the river again, the road, and Draco’s driving on and on and Harry thinks he’ll stay there forever.

* * *

It had been difficult to arrange everyone’s schedules to coordinate, but here they are. Astoria is pacing in the kitchen. She makes another pot of tea before Matthew gently reminds her that she’s already made one.

“She’s late,” Astoria says, turning to Harry. “Just tell me, please. Have you found Draco?”

“I’d like to wait for Narcissa,” he says, and Astoria bites her lip hard and looks away.

“Three years,” she says. “Three years. Merlin, I just want it to be over. You never really stop searching...”

The faint pop of someone Apparating. Matthew — calm and steady, standing by the warm fireplace like an immovable rock — speaks just as Astoria begins to rush away.

“Harry, why don’t you get the door?”

“I’ll answer it, this is my house,” Astoria protests, but Matthew shakes his head and Astoria falls back, allowing Harry to disappear down the hallway.

Narcissa looks quite formidable, Harry thinks when he opens the door. Dressed in heavy and formal robes, a string of pearls about her neck and her hair elaborately styled. She looks at Harry with a look of undisguised anxiety, however.

“Draco — “

“Come in, I’d like to talk to everyone at the same time,” Harry says, and Narcissa quickly follows him inside.

Astoria greets Narcissa with a perfunctory hullo, but both women’s eyes are trained on Harry. It would be cruel to make them wait any longer. He takes a breath.

“Did Draco ever have a time-turner?”

Their reactions tell him everything he needs to know. Astoria blinks, looking completely bewildered. Narcissa begins to shake her head, and then a flash of realisation and then fear

crosses her face.

“Narcissa,” Harry says, and Astoria starts and turns to Narcissa.

“Draco had a time-turner?” Astoria demands, her expression accusing. “You — “

“It’s all right,” Harry says quickly. “Narcissa, if you know anything about this, you need to tell me right now. I think Draco’s used a time-turner and something’s gone terribly wrong.”

“He’s been trapped in time for three years?” Astoria says, staring at Narcissa.

“Astoria,” Matthew says quietly. She glances at him but doesn’t respond. Narcissa looks at Astoria, then stares at Harry.

“Draco...Draco never had a time-turner,” she says, one hand reaching for her necklace.

“But...Lucius did.”

Astoria opens her mouth, but then looks across at Matthew and seems to catch an unspoken reassurance. She moves closer to him and he puts an arm around her shoulders. Narcissa gazes unseeingly at the fire.

“Lucius spent nearly all the family fortune acquiring it,” Narcissa continues. “It was madness, but he could not be dissuaded. He had already fled to Crete by then, but he frequently visited us to speak of his future plans.”

“And he and Draco used the time-turner?” Harry says quietly, and Narcissa glances sharply at him, her gaze refocussing.

“No,” she says, sounding scandalised. “Draco would never use it. Never! He’d said something to Lucius in an argument about using a time-turner, once — “

That last memory of Narcissa’s, Harry recalls. *If you want to protect your family, Father, I suggest investing in a time-turner and reconsidering some key choices you made twelve years ago.*

“ — and Lucius seemed to become obsessed with returning in time to alter certain choices. But Draco was *horrified* when he found out about it.”

“I know Draco wanted to return to the past,” Harry says, thinking of the letters he’d found in Draco’s diary. *Do you remember when we were eleven? Let’s go back to that.*

But Narcissa shakes her head firmly. “No. Draco regretted many things, but he made it very clear the past should never be revisited. The more Lucius spoke of using the time-turner, the more Draco argued about the danger of it and criticised Lucius’s obsession with the past.” She hesitates, then glances away. “In the end,” she says, so quietly that Harry has to lean forward to hear her, “Draco said that if Lucius insisted on this madness, he would report him to the authorities. In the end, Draco...Draco took the time-turner and transfigured it, to disguise it. He refused to tell his father where it was.”

Astoria moves suddenly, but when Harry looks at her, her arms are crossed and her expression is indecipherable.

“And then what happened?” Harry asks. Narcissa’s mouth trembles slightly but she speaks clearly.

“Draco disappeared.”

This time, Astoria speaks. “How could you? I was worried sick! I was a complete mess when Draco disappeared, and you *knew* — “

“I didn’t,” Narcissa says, looking distraught. “When Draco first disappeared, I had no idea. I owed Lucius, thinking perhaps Draco had gone to Crete after all. But Lucius said he had no idea where Draco was.” She’s twisting her necklace so hard in her hands that Harry thinks the string will snap and send pearls rolling everywhere. “Then, three months after Draco disappeared, Lucius wrote to say Draco was arranging a meeting with him. Lucius was pleased. He thought Draco had come to see the error of his ways and wanted to join him after all.”

“But you didn’t think that was the purpose of the meeting,” Harry says, watching Narcissa closely. Narcissa shakes her head.

“No. I...I had the feeling Draco was going to stage a meeting, then call the Aurors with his father’s location.”

“You don’t know Draco,” Astoria says suddenly. “You don’t know what he was going to do.”

“I know Draco better than you think,” Narcissa retorts, looking at her. “I know your engagement was false, and Draco only did it to please me.” She looks away again.

Secrecy and silence, Harry thinks. If only everyone had been honest with each other...

“I think I know what happened,” Harry says quietly, and both Astoria and Narcissa turn to look at him. “I think you’re right, Narcissa. Draco left voluntarily for three months, but he decided to return and report Lucius’s whereabouts. On the morning of Lucius’s capture, an anonymous tip-off told us his location. But I think perhaps Lucius realised what Draco was going to do, and tried to take both of them back into the past. And it went terribly wrong.” He can imagine the struggle all too well. Perhaps the time-turner broke, or slipped, but either way — only Draco was taken into the past, while Lucius remained behind. In the ensuing chaos as Aurors arrived, Lucius didn’t have the chance to tell anyone what had happened before he was killed.

“Oh, Merlin. Oh, no,” Astoria says, looking pale and wretched. “No, no. All this time, and Draco’s been stuck in the past somewhere...” She begins to cry. It’s strange to see her cry — bright, breezy Astoria, always smiling — and Harry looks away uncomfortably as Matthew soothes her.

Narcissa doesn’t cry. She stares into the heart of the fireplace, at the bright flames flickering behind the grate, and her eyes are dry. All she ever wanted was her family to be complete,

together again, and Harry's heart suddenly aches for her.

"If Draco hid the time-turner somewhere in the past," he says, "do you have any idea where it might be? Perhaps a favourite place in the manor, or a hidden area he sometimes used?"

Narcissa shakes her head.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I don't even know what it was transfigured into."

Harry nods and tries to think of something optimistic to say.

He can't.

* * *

He spends the next week going through the old files, re-reading the details of Lucius's capture and death over and over. There was a Ministry commission into the death, of course, and that required a coroner's report. A full list of all clothing and items found on Lucius at time of death, and there is nothing listed to suggest a transfigured artefact. Lucius only had his wand and a small bag of Galleons.

Harry Disapparates to the location where Lucius was captured and tries to Accio the time-turner, to no avail. Perhaps Draco left it behind; perhaps he dropped it just before vanishing. It could be a possibility, Hermione tells Harry, but her voice is doubtful.

Still, he searches.

* * *

Winter slowly melts to spring. Ginny sends Harry a postcard from France, where she's visiting the French National Team to gauge their performance. A letter follows soon after: she's purchased a studio apartment closer to central London.

You'd be surprised (or perhaps not) at how much international Quidditch players earn, she writes. My finances are in good order, so if you'd like to move back to the Westminster apartment, it's fine. I'm not fussed if you don't sell it. I suppose we should transfer ownership, unless you're happy to co-own it. I hear the rental market is steady at the moment.

He feels as though he's outstaying his welcome at Ron and Hermione's home, although he'd never dare tell them that. He can only imagine the wrath and indignation it would invoke. He's been there since Christmas and it's March now.

So he moves back to the apartment, convincing Ron and Hermione that yes, he honestly wants to be there, he'd like a little space right now, and he's grateful, for the first time, that neither he nor Ginny really moved into the apartment to begin with. There's no memories to deal with or possessions to remove. It's as bland and impersonal as he ever remembered it. It will do as a temporary base until he finds his home. The home he always wanted. The home he's spent his whole life looking for.

It's a nice view. But this isn't you, is it, Potter? This is nothing. A concrete box in the sky. You need something grounded. Something real.

The first night he moves back into the apartment, he stands by the kitchen counter and remembers how Draco stood there once, the small Christmas tree casting light over his face.

“I’m sorry,” Harry says, and his words echo across the white walls, the polished floorboards.
I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry.

It sounds an awful lot like the sound of defeat.

Chapter 10

Narcissa owls Harry at the end of April.

Nothing found.

It's taken her this long — nearly three months — to completely search the manor, investigating every item, every room, to make sure no possible time-turner hid within. If the time-turner had gone with Draco, rather than being left behind, surely Draco would have hidden it at the manor.

Or the Renault Mégane, but then Harry remembers it might not exist in whatever time era Draco is caught in. Regardless, he searches the Renault and finds nothing. The time-turner would need to be hidden extremely well to prevent it from being stolen or found by the wrong sort of person, but surely Draco would have left clues...

Hermione tells Harry she's finalised the details of an extraction. That's what it's called, she explains. Rescuing someone from the past. An extraction. The process sounds complicated and involves some very difficult magic, but she's written it all up neatly, like a recipe, and says that at any moment, a team of Unspeakables can carry it out.

All they need is the time-turner.

And it makes it worse, somehow, looking at a puzzle with just one piece missing.

Harry drives a lot more these days. He drives along the coastlines of the country, he drives past the gritty skylines of cities and through the rolling hills of the countryside. He just drives.

Like he's looking for something.

And he can recognise the cyclical irony of the situation. *In incepto finis est*, he thinks wryly.

In the beginning is the end.

* * *

And, on the second of May — the eighth anniversary of the Battle of Hogwarts — Harry finds the time-turner.

The realisation dawns the day before, on the first day of the month. It's a mild spring day. Summer is beginning to approach the land again; he can feel it like the distant glow of a fire. There's warmth in the breeze that stirs the leaves of the trees, and he thinks a drive to Cornwall sounds nice. In the soft glow of a warm spring day, Helston looks far more friendly and cheerful, and the coastline itself seems gentler. The waves seem less furious and more playful as they roil and roll around the base of the cliffs. There's a young family taking photographs of the lighthouse, the children giggling and chasing each other around in circles.

Circles.

Harry walks along the south-west coastal track. Maybe he'll just keep walking and one day he'll find himself back here again. Making circles, making meaningless patterns.

Do you remember when we were eleven?

The familiar ache settles into Harry's heart. He knows that nostalgia well. Back when his biggest obstacles were homework and detentions. Back when the cruelest thing Draco ever did was throw a Remembrall across the sky.

A silver snitch.

Harry stops. In the distance, he can still hear the children laughing. Closer to him is the soft sound of the waves breaking over the rocks.

It's a five-hour drive back to London, but he barely remembers the journey at all.

* * *

He liked that silver snitch clasp. It was a gift from his father.

Yes, of course Draco had told Narcissa that. The coded meaning now becomes clear as pristine glass.

Do you know why he liked that clasp? He likes circles.

Of course. In the beginning is the end. A time-turner.

As soon as Harry enters his office, he goes straight for the file in his desk and opens it up. The photograph of Draco that Narcissa gave Harry so many months ago. Draco stares at Harry, his mouth small and serious, his eyes unblinking. The silver snitch clasp is neatly pinned to his robes.

All this time, and it was right here. Right in front of him.

But where would Draco have left it? The manor, of course, but they'd searched it so thoroughly, all the places they thought Draco was particularly fond of or liked to use as a storage place —

In the beginning is the end.

Harry's heart beats like a galloping Thestral. He slowly leaves his office and makes his way to the ministry atrium, lining up at the nearest fireplace. When it's his turn, he steps into the green flames.

"Diagon Alley."

* * *

Owls hoot softly; there's the smell of living creatures in the air. The rustle of feathers, the creak of sun-warmed wood. The smell of sawdust as the field mice nest in their cages. The shop is dark and enclosed, with overhead roosts dotted with owls and the walls lined with teetering boxes of pet supplies.

The shopkeeper, when he sees Harry, looks at first astonished and then delighted.

"Harry Potter," he says. "What an absolute honour!"

Harry had forgotten to disguise himself, in his rush, but he couldn't particularly care now.

Where?

"Sorry, I have to find something," Harry says, and the shopkeeper blinks at him.

Draco came back here. It may have been ten, twenty, fifty years ago, but Draco came back here and hid the clasp. Somewhere safe, but easy to access.

"*Accio* time-turner," Harry tries, but nothing happens. The shopkeeper's eyes grow even wider.

"There's a *time-turner* in my shop?"

Harry turns around, scanning the shop. *Draco, help me, give me something, a memory, it's all I need* —

The bell chimes softly and Harry turns, half-expecting to see Draco walk into the shop and speak: *I am in need of an owl. Speed is less important than accuracy.*

"Speed is less important than accuracy," Harry repeats, murmuring it to himself, trying to trigger something. Anything.

"I thought you were looking for a time-turner?" The shopkeeper, at this point, is completely bewildered. "Well...our eagle owls have quite a sense of direction...they know exactly where to go, although they don't always return home. Rather difficult to tame." He laughs nervously. Harry doesn't smile, too wrapped up in his thoughts.

Going away is easy. Coming home is hard.

"Where're the eagle owls?" Harry demands.

"Oh, we always keep them in the back corner. They can get a bit territorial, so it's best to keep them away from other birds."

Harry lets the shopkeeper chatter on as he leads Harry over to the back corner of the shop. The owls are roosting along the wooden beams, blinking sleepily as Harry walks beneath them.

There. On the underside of the beam, carved into the wood in tiny numbers.

Someone has written a set of coordinates.

* * *

Harry owls McGonagall that night, explaining the situation, and it's an agonising wait until he receives a reply late the next afternoon. He immediately departs for Hogsmeade; Hagrid is the one to greet him there, hale as ever, stomping along and cheerfully calling out to the villagers.

"Evenin', Pickerill," Hagrid says, nodding at a man carrying an oak barrel over one shoulder.

"Evening, Hagrid." The man disappears into the Three Broomsticks. It never changes, Harry thinks. Even the gold lettering over the Three Broomsticks is the same; the same infinite-chocolate fountain is in the Honeydukes window, and the same handpainted sign hangs over the doorway of the Hog's Head. Evidently it's a Hogsmeade weekend for the Hogwarts students, a few of them lingering despite the setting sun.

"Let's go to the Shrieking Shack — I heard it's haunted!" a student says to their friend as they pass by.

Yes, Harry thinks. It never changes.

The trek to the castle is far shorter than Harry remembers. As Hagrid chatters happily about a nest of baby vampire-hornets he's bred, Harry watches Hogwarts slowly emerge into view. His first home, he thinks, and a piece of his heart will always belong here, where he lived and died. He remembers Hagrid carrying him like a child from the forest... He glances at Hagrid, striding happily beside him, and has to smile.

In the beginning is the end.

Strange, how Draco brought him to Hogwarts. Brought him home, in a way.

When they enter the castle grounds, Hagrid pauses to consult the scrap of parchment Harry's given him, the coordinates scrawled untidily across it. Harry doesn't pause, however. He turns and begins walking to the Quidditch pitch.

"How'd yeh know, Harry?" Hagrid asks, following after him. "Nearly got it, I reckon." He taps the parchment and fishes a small brass contraption from his pocket, opening it like a compass.

Harry looks skyward, as if he'll see a Remembrall arcing through the dusk-tinted sky, and waits. Maybe, if he half-closes his eyes, he'll see two seekers chasing each other across the sky.

Running on air...

He smiles to himself. Hagrid — busy pacing about and muttering to himself — pauses and glances at him before pointing at the ground near his feet.

"There yeh go," he says, and Harry walks over to him.

"Right here?"

"Accordin' to this." Hagrid gives the brass contraption a shake.

Harry points his wand at the soft, rain-damp earth. Deep down — even though he owled ahead and received express permission from McGonagall — he's still half-expecting her to come storming across the grounds and dock twenty points from Gryffindor for vandalising the Quidditch pitch. But there's nobody here — just him and Hagrid, in the last rays of the evening light — and Harry takes a breath.

"*Defodio*." The soil carves itself out of the ground.

It doesn't take long for Harry to spot a flash of silver.

* * *

Harry drops the clasp onto the middle of Hermione and Ron's dining table. Hermione stares at it, her eyes wide.

"I can't believe you found it," she says. Ron sits opposite Harry, a mug of tea steaming in one hand.

"How?" he asks.

"Found it from coordinates Draco carved into a beam in the owl emporium."

Ron stares at him, mouth agape. "Well," he says at last. "I take back everything I said about you being a terrible investigator, Harry."

"We can do it, though, can't we?" Harry asks. "We can bring Draco back."

"I...well..." Hermione taps the clasp with her wand and the transfiguration melts away, revealing a time-turner. "Merlin," she whispers. "This is the last time-turner. I wonder..."

"Focus, Hermione," Harry says sharply. This isn't the time for intellectual curiosity. "Can we bring Draco back?"

She blinks and looks at him. "What? Oh, yes. The spells are very complicated though, and it will take a few days. But Harry, you must understand two things. Firstly, it's not guaranteed to work. This is very unstable magic. I mean, it might even have some very detrimental side-effects for Malfoy. Secondly...it might bring him back, but I don't know where. He might reappear at the manor, or in London somewhere, or even farther away."

"I don't care, as long as he's here. In this time."

"Well." Hermione reaches for the time-turner and pockets it. "I'll contact the Unspeakables, and I'll let you know when they've completed the spell."

Harry opens his mouth, but Hermione beats him to it.

"And no, you can't help. This is very tricky magic and you will most certainly make serious errors."

He closes his mouth again.

* * *

Hermione gives him the news three days later. She Floos to his apartment very late at night, looking rumpled.

"It worked."

"What?" Harry, making himself a cup of tea in the kitchen, nearly drops his mug.

"The extraction worked."

He doesn't know what to do. He wants to smile, laugh, cry with relief. He settles on hugging Hermione tightly.

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me, this is all your investigative work," she says warmly.

"Draco's returned?"

"I presume so. The spell indicated it was complete."

"Where would he have appeared?"

"I don't know, Harry, but I'm sure he'll turn up at the manor any second. Narcissa will let you know, won't she?"

Harry nods and, after Hermione's left, he stays up all night waiting for something. A firecall from Narcissa, an owl from Astoria.

But there is nothing.

* * *

A week passes.

Harry feels like someone is slowly squeezing his heart. Suffocating him. He can't focus at work; he tries driving but even that has become meaningless now.

He's no longer searching.

He remembers the last conversation he had with Draco. *The worst thing is that even now, I'm not sure I want to come back.*

And that *is* the worst thing, Harry realises. Draco could be anywhere right now, and the worst part is knowing that Draco doesn't want to be found. Harry can search all he want, but he'll

never find him. Only Draco can bring himself home.

That night, he stands out on the balcony and listens to someone whistling *Blow the Wind Southerly*, and he feels so angry with Draco that he wants to cry.

But he doesn't.

* * *

The next day, Harry calls in sick to work. It's unusual for him, and even Holdsworth looks concerned, saying she hopes he'll feel better soon.

He gets into the car and drives all the way out to Godric's Hollow, a three-hour journey. He doesn't mind. Time and distance is all relative now. He looks at some of the properties for sale. There's a cottage on the outskirts of the village, but he's not immediately drawn to it. He'll know home when he sees it, he thinks.

The journey back to London is slow and it's seven o'clock when he reaches the apartment. He parks the car, slowly walks up the stairs feeling insurmountably weary, and unlocks the door. The apartment is dark and the curtains open. He gazes across the kitchen, to the view beyond the balcony. He'll miss those trains, if nothing else.

But then again, he only loved them because they were going places.

A knock on the door. Ron will be there — *heard you were sick today, mate* — and Hermione will be there too, looking sympathetic.

He opens the door.

Draco stands before him.

Harry's breath catches. He doesn't know what he should say, what he should feel. He wants to be angry, snap questions, demand answers; he wants to ask Draco *why*.

But he doesn't. He stands in the doorway, a hand still resting on the door handle, and he sees the exhaustion in Draco's face, the thinness in his shoulders, and he steps backwards. Draco opens his mouth, and Harry quickly cuts him off.

"It's all right. You don't need to explain anything," he says.

"I wasn't going to." Draco's voice sounds rough, hoarse, but it brings a rush of relief to Harry.

"Good."

Draco steps inside then, and Harry closes the door.

He doesn't know what to do. And it's ridiculous, but he's terrified of saying the wrong thing, of sending Draco straight back out that door. He wants to demand explanations and answers, yes, but now isn't the time. Draco looks so exhausted, like he's been through hell and back, and so Harry simply remains silent and waits.

Draco stands in the middle of the room. "It's the same," he says, surveying the apartment.

"What is?"

"This place. I wondered if it would look different than to my earlier visits."

Earlier visits. Harry wonders if that's an invitation to speak about the last three years, about Draco being trapped in the past, about everything that happened.

No, he decides.

"Back in a minute," Harry says. He just needs a moment to collect himself, without Draco observing him.

Draco frowns. "Are you going to owl my mother? Or Astoria?"

"No. Unless you want me to," Harry says, and Draco shakes his head.

"Not yet."

Harry nods and leaves, and finally — in the privacy of his bedroom — he can bite his lip hard enough to taste blood, and sit on the edge of his bed with his head in his hands, his palms pressed against his eyes until he sees sparks. The anger's still there, but now a rush of sorrow is coursing through him, and there's confusion too, and worry and almost panic, and hidden in all of that is a hint of happiness and relief. He takes a slow, deep breath, and stands, taking another moment to compose himself before returning to the kitchen. Draco's made himself a cup of tea, Harry sees, and somehow it's reassuring.

He looks so tired, Harry thinks, studying Draco, and then he realises that if Draco's not planning on contacting his mother or ex-wife yet, he's probably planning on staying the night here.

"I'll make up the bed in the guest room," Harry offers, wondering if he's mistaken and Draco's planning to leave, but Draco just nods and Harry disappears into the guest room and takes a stack of clean linen from the dresser. The room is quite small, with a single bed and a matching bedside table. The dresser is currently in use as linen closet of sorts, and one of the drawers is crammed full of old Quidditch gear that Ginny clearly forgot. Still, Harry doesn't think Draco will complain.

And he doesn't. He walks into the room, surveys it for a moment, sets a glass of water on the dresser, and sits on the edge of the bed. Harry takes it as his cue to leave.

"Let me know if you need anything," he says, wishing Draco had at least helped himself to the pantry. He looks desperately in need of a good meal or two.

Draco nods. Harry pauses for a moment, then shuts the door and turns off the kitchen lights before going to bed.

He can't sleep.

He tosses and turns, trying to wrap his head around the fact that Draco is here. In this same apartment, just a few steps along the hallway. Some part of him is saying it's a dream. Nothing but a dream, and when he wakes in the morning, Draco will be gone.

How many times has he imagined Draco coming home?

Home.

It was so much easier when Draco was nothing but an insignificant memory of a selfish, petty teenager. Long ago, when Harry read headlines about Draco missing and threw the paper away without another thought. When he loved Ginny, when he had his whole career ahead of him, when Draco Malfoy was nothing but a footnote in the pages of Harry's life.

And now...

Things fall apart.

He's having serious doubts about his career, he drifted so far apart from Ginny that seven years together crumbled like cliffs into the sea, and...

All those nights spent driving. The memories wash over him like waves: a shop door swinging open — *speed is less important than accuracy* — a wedding ring spinning across the floor. The first time Harry saw the Renault Mégane— *what's the point in that? Sitting in a box, only going where someone else takes you* — the fields rushing past in a weave of summer-spun gold. The long nights spent reading old Hogwarts textbooks, the handwritten notes like lonely postcards — *Spell didn't work when attempted to cast on self*. The Cornish coastline rises like a ghost to greet Harry, and he can hear the winds blowing southerly through craggy cliffs, rushing along endless highways, whistling through the chains of empty swings in empty playgrounds.

And somewhere between here and the southernmost point of Great Britain — somewhere between now and the past — somewhere between *I am in need of an owl* and *Do you remember when we were eleven?* — somewhere between standing still and running on air — Harry started to feel something for Draco. Affection, maybe even attraction.

And it's a dizzying, devastating realisation, but he can't avoid it. Even now, Draco's voice whispers through his mind like snow.

Going away is easy. Coming home is hard.

Maybe home isn't a place.

Maybe it's a person.

* * *

Harry wakes up the next morning. Saturday, he realises after panicking for a moment and thinking he's running late for work. There's a voice calling from the kitchen. Hermione. She must have Floo'd here.

"Give me a second," Harry calls back, dressing quickly in yesterday's clothes. He half-hops into the kitchen, still putting socks on. Hermione's already rummaging through his cupboards, searching for teabags.

"Still asleep? It's nearly noon," Hermione says. "Ron says you weren't at work yesterday. You know, the last thing you need is to get sick. You've been so stressed lately, Harry, and I know things have been very difficult, especially with Malfoy's case — "

Harry starts, then thanks Merlin that Hermione's still turned away from him. He doesn't know why, but somehow he knows he shouldn't say anything. Draco had made it clear that he didn't want to contact anyone else just yet, and Harry — if he's to be honest with himself — feels rather protective about the entire matter. If Draco doesn't want to anyone to know yet, then they won't.

" — but you really need to focus on other things," Hermione says, fetching two mugs and tapping her wand against the teapot, warming the water. "Harry, I know you don't want to hear this, but..." She looks at him with a gentle expression. "Sometimes, even after we've done everything we can, things still don't work out. Sometimes we have to let go."

"I know," Harry says, and Hermione blinks at him.

"Do you?" She absently rearranges the teabags. "I know you've been rather obsessed with this case, Harry, and everyone can see it's taken its toll on you. Just promise me you'll rest, all right?"

"Right."

Hermione quirks an eyebrow. "Is everything all right?"

"Fine." Harry tries to smile. "Where's Ron?"

"Oh, he promised Molly he'd help clear out the broomshed, so — oh! That's another reason I'm here! Ginny mentioned she'd forgotten to grab her old Quidditch stuff and I said I could pick it up for her." Hermione's set her mug on the counter and is heading towards the spare room before Harry can utter a single response.

"Don't — " he says, just as she opens the door and strides inside.

"Said it was in the dresser," Hermione says conversationally, and Harry quickens his pace until he's standing in the room.

Empty. The bed is neatly made, the bedside table covered with a thin layer of dust. Hermione is rummaging through the dresser.

"Oh, here it is." She casually taps her wand against the various Quidditch items until they're reduced to pocket-sized pieces. "Well, I'd better be off. I just wanted to pop in to check that everything was all right — I'd love to stay but I promised Ron I'd meet him at the Burrow for lunch. You're quite welcome to come along," Hermione adds, waiting expectantly, and it takes Harry a moment to respond.

"I...no. I..."

"...want some time alone?" Hermione asks. "It's all right. Just...take care of yourself." She stands up and walks from the room. Harry remains there for a long moment, staring at the white walls and dusty furniture. He's only dimly aware of Hermione still speaking to him, and it takes much effort for him to walk out of the room and go through the motions of farewelling Hermione. She gives him a suspicious look before she leaves.

"I can see you're still worried about him, Harry," she says accusingly. "You look awful. Promise me you'll do your best to relax and take a break, all right? Look after yourself. Go for a drive, you've been enjoying that lately. And I know it's very unmanly and everything, heaven forbid, but please *talk* to me or Ron if you need to."

She hugs him briefly and then steps into the fireplace, Flooing away. Harry stands alone in the empty apartment, the silence seeming to ring out around him like ripples.

A few minutes later, when he reaches for the Renault keycard — always kept on the corner of the kitchen counter — he realises it's gone.

* * *

Harry opens the door to the underground parking. It's a bright and sunny afternoon, the weather delightfully mild, and most of the residents have already left, off to enjoy a lazy Saturday with family or friends. The car park is nearly empty.

But the Renault Mégane is still there.

Harry walks towards it. As he walks closer, he can see the faint outline of someone sitting in the driver's seat. He puts a hand on the passenger-side handle and opens the door, pausing a moment before getting in and shutting the door again.

Draco sits in the driver's seat, looking straight ahead as if there's an open road in front of them instead of a concrete wall. His hands rest on the steering wheel. He doesn't speak, and Harry lets the silence envelope them. It feels terribly strange — somehow disorientating — to sit on the passenger's side, after so many months being the sole driver.

Draco won't say anything, Harry thinks, glancing at him. Always compartmentalising, always in perfect control...the only time he ever let Harry inside his head and heart was when he thought he'd be stuck in the past forever. Harry will need to choose his words carefully, or he has the feeling this moment between them could shatter like glass and send Draco away forever.

"We could go anywhere," Harry says quietly.

And he knows it was the perfect thing to say, because Draco's mouth twitches and he almost, *almost* smiles.

"Anywhere?"

"Anywhere."

Another short silence. Draco inhales slowly, then presses the ignition button. The engine purrs to life and Draco's breath catches. Harry wants to say something, but he recognises the moment doesn't belong to him.

Draco adjusts the mirrors. "I see you've been rearranging things, Potter," he says coolly, but Harry isn't bothered. He can see the faint tremble in Draco's hands, the way Draco hides his nerves by looking at the fuel gauge, checking the mirrors, readjusting his grip on the steering wheel.

At last, he releases the handbrake.

Go, Harry wants to say. *Drive*. But he holds his tongue.

Draco shifts the gear into reverse. His eyes flick to the mirror again and the movement is so familiar that Harry has to look away to hide his smile.

Are we getting closer, or just getting lost?

It doesn't matter, Harry thinks.

* * *

Draco drives.

It's almost terrifying because Draco's so damn decisive. When he sees a yellow light, he hits the accelerator; when he steers around a corner, he only slows down minimally. When he stops at the lights, he stops very close to the next car. He maintains the speed limit precisely and never pauses — even when a car swerves in front of them unexpectedly, Draco simply steers smoothly to the right and eases off the accelerator slightly.

Harry ends up with a white-knuckled grip on the edges of his seat, leaning far back and biting his lip to stop from rebuking Draco — *careful, look out, why don't you let me drive* —

"Stop panicking, Potter."

Harry glances across at Draco. "I'm not panicking." He pauses. "It *has* been three years since you last drove, though, maybe you should — there's a car in front of us, it's slowing down for that red light, I hope you know — " He can't help the feeling of panic.

"I know." Draco eases the car to stop.

"You're lucky you didn't hit them — "

"It's not luck. It's precision. I know exactly when to stop, exactly how much to slow down, exactly when to turn. Don't mistake my confidence for recklessness."

Harry, to his despair, realises he never finds Draco more interesting than when he's calmly delivering a lecture, his level tone belied by the fierceness in his eyes. Harry glances away and after a long moment, Draco leans across to the glovebox and — without ever looking away from the road — opens it and removes the atlas, handing it to Harry.

"What?" Harry asks, uncomprehending for a moment.

"Find somewhere."

"Where?"

"Anywhere. Draw a line on the map and I'll take us there."

Harry opens the atlas at a random page. "We're going to Sutton-on-Sea." He flips back to the pages of outer London, trying to figure out the best route, focusing on the task of navigation.

Point me.

* * *

They're burning down the A120, the bright skyline of London — silhouetted sharply against the pale blue sky — disappearing in the rear-vision mirror. The suburbs sprawl around them as Draco drives on into the clear spring day. Then the suburbs are melting away to gentle valleys and rolling hills, and Harry maps the land before him, fingers following the unravelling threads of rivers and the wide green swathes of woodland.

They stop in Huntingdon to refill the fuel tank and have a break. Draco leans on the side of the car and looks up at the sky; Harry reads a nearby sign declaring Huntingdon the birthplace of Oliver Cromwell.

"It's interesting," Draco says, "to openly advertise their town as the birthplace of a dictator."

"Well, some people think he was a hero." Harry looks at the sign. "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, as they say."

They get back in the car. Harry watches the world roll past, and it reminds him of his memories: scenery constructed around him, only to vanish again a moment later. Rebuild, dissolve. The scenes collapse and fade like waves breaking on the shore.

Harry falls asleep somewhere between Algarkirk and Wyberton, just as they cross a river.

River and the sky, he thinks just before he falls asleep. An endless circle.

In incepto finis est.

Chapter 11

The coastline of Sutton-on-Sea is flat and linear, unlike the meandering cliffs of the Cornish coast. The yachts skim across the water like bright kites, their sails catching the ocean breeze. The beaches are wide plains: soft and deep close to the footpath, but then the sand firms up, like packed brown sugar, as it nears the shoreline.

They sit on the sea defence wall and watch the yachts. There's a thin line of jagged wood, like teeth, farther along the beach and Harry suggests it's a shipwreck. Draco, far less inclined to think so fancifully, says it's the remains of a pier. A light argument ensues but soon dissolves when their attention is caught by two swimmers braving the sea and wading out past the breakers.

"They must be freezing," Harry observes. Even in summer, the sea here would hold an unwelcome chill.

The sun slowly sinks in the sky, casting long shadows over the land. Soon enough, the sky is darkening into a hazy dusk and the yachts slowly come in. Even the swimmers find their way ashore, pausing on the wet sand to towel themselves off and walk briskly towards the car park.

Draco and Harry return to the car and Harry wonders if Draco will ask him to choose another place. Maybe they'll keep driving, until spring melts into summer. A high summer, he thinks, with a propane-blue sky and fields of gold.

But Draco sits on the passenger's side and opens the atlas, and so Harry takes his cue and sits in the driver's seat. He readjusts the mirrors slightly and reverses out, half-expecting Draco to say something about his inadequate driving skills. Harry's realised, over the course of their journey, that Draco is indeed a very skilled driver.

But Draco doesn't say anything except, "Turn onto Sutton Road," and it doesn't take Harry long to realise Draco's taking them home again.

As the last of the sunlight dies across the land and night slowly settles in, Harry wonders if they'll travel beside a river. He wants to see those stars reflected, falling around him as he drives on into the darkness.

Somewhere past Huntingdon, Draco falls asleep.

* * *

London appears as nothing more than a faint orange haze on the horizon, a blur of lights illuminating the smog hanging low over the city. The city creeps up slowly, like a tide slowly encompassing them. The rows of houses soon rise and fall, crescendoing into apartment blocks and office buildings, and soon, Harry realises, he's nearly home.

They arrive at the apartment at nine o'clock. Harry realises he hasn't eaten all day and neither has Draco; Harry's loathe to pester Draco about his lack of appetite but nevertheless sets about making a pot of tea and an enormous stack of toast, too tired to bother with a proper meal. Draco seems in agreement; he eats the toast without comment and disappears into the guest bedroom without another word. No doubt in need of a very long sleep, Harry thinks. Draco started the day easily enough, but it was obvious that he tired throughout the day and, by nightfall, he was clearly exhausted.

Going away is easy. Coming home is hard.

Hermione had warned him about this, he thinks. She'd specifically mentioned side-effects, but she hadn't gone into any detail. Draco probably needs proper medical care, Harry thinks with worry. People who might actually know about causes and symptoms and that sort of thing. Places that could provide appropriate medication. Or even the manor, where Draco could be surrounded by familiar rooms — luxurious ones, not a tiny spare bedroom in Harry's apartment — and have the attention of his mother, who knows him far better than anyone else, and be doted on by the house-elves.

But Draco didn't go to any of those people or places.

No; he came to Harry.

And perhaps Harry's not doing anything right. He's not organising things and owling people and telling them Draco's back. He's not doing any of the things he should be doing — he realises Draco hasn't even got a change of clothes, Harry didn't even think about that — and he didn't even prepare a meal for Draco until tonight, if tea and toast could be called a meal — and he's not doing anything that people normally do to help.

No. Instead, he hasn't said a single word about everything that happened. Just sat in silence with Draco, and gone with him on long car trips that are obviously very exhausting for Draco, and talked about stupid things, like Oliver Cromwell and shipwrecks.

And maybe, he realises, that's exactly why Draco chose to turn up at Harry's apartment rather than anywhere else.

* * *

On Sunday morning, when Harry wakes, he reaches for his glasses and then his wand. His glasses are exactly where he left them; his wand isn't.

He sits up, puts his glasses on, and carefully considers the situation. After a long moment, he checks the floor in case his wand rolled off the bedside table. When his wand still fails to appear, he opens up the drawer. Maybe he mistakenly left the wand somewhere else.

But he knows he put it next to his glasses. He always does. It's been his routine for a long time.

If Draco took Harry's wand, surely it was for a good reason. Draco hasn't got a wand, Harry remembers. He'd borrowed his mother's, Harry knows, but he left it behind when he vanished

and, Harry realises, he's been wandless since. Maybe he needed to perform a spell, for some reason, and he didn't want to wake Harry so...

...or maybe he took the wand and left. Maybe Draco finally came to his senses, realised the complete madness of the entire situation — sleeping in Harry Potter's apartment, taking road trips together— and left. Perhaps Draco remembered their hateful school-years and reminded himself of the hundreds of reasons they could never be friends, and stole Harry's wand in vengeance for Harry stealing his, so many years ago.

Harry stands up and slowly opens his door, stepping out into the hallway. Water is running somewhere, he realises, and he glances at the end of the hallway. The bathroom door is open, and Draco is tapping Harry's wand against a paperclip, transfiguring it into a toothbrush. His hair is damp, Harry realises — he must have had a shower — and Draco's clothes look freshly Scourgified.

Draco hasn't seemed to notice him yet. Harry stands and watches him brush his teeth, feeling terribly guilty about his earlier thoughts. He'd so easily assumed Draco had just stolen his wand and left.

At any moment, he thinks, Draco will notice him. But Draco's attention seems elsewhere, and Harry stands in the hallway for a long moment, watching Draco hunt through the mirror cabinet for floss. It's strange to watch him so unguarded. Many people, Harry has learned, have little tells and habits that give away their emotions or thoughts. Ron's ears reddening, for example, or Hermione chewing her lip. Narcissa playing with her jewellery, or Astoria tucking her hair behind her ears.

But Draco doesn't seem to have any nervous habits. He does everything precisely, efficiently, Harry thinks, and he remembers Draco's way of driving. Every movement a conscious decision.

"Going driving today?" Harry asks, deciding to make his presence known. He half-expects Draco to jump, but he just turns and glances at Harry as if he knew Harry was there all along.

"No." He takes a dreamless sleep potion from the cabinet and shuts it.

Harry frowns slightly. "Having problems sleeping?" He takes a few steps closer and Draco stares at him for a moment. There's something distant in Draco's eyes, Harry thinks, and it worries him. "Is everything all right?"

"Fine."

Harry says nothing. Draco seems to be a little slower than usual, as if he's still exhausted from the journey yesterday. They shouldn't have gone, Harry thinks.

"Got my wand?" he says, and Draco looks bewildered for a moment before he glances at the wand beside the sink.

"Oh. I borrowed it." He picks it up and walks toward Harry, holding out the wand. When he's within reach, however, Harry ignores the wand and takes Draco by the wrist instead, pulling

him a little closer.

"Is everything all right?"

"I said I'm fine." Draco looks away. "Just tired."

"Having nightmares?"

Another long pause. Then Draco speaks quietly. "I dream of the other time, the one I was trapped in. Sometimes, when I wake up, it's...confusing." His grip tightens on the potion vial. "I'd rather not lose my mind, so..."

You're going to St Mungo's. That's what Harry should say. He should owl Narcissa and ask for the family Mediwizard, try and organise a Healer...

"You want me to contact anyone?" Harry says instead, and Draco shakes his head.

"I'm tired."

"All right."

Draco hesitates. "Don't contact anyone."

"I won't."

"I know I should tell them."

"It's all right. They can wait," Harry says, and he knows it's a terrible thing to say, but it *can* wait. *I'm not sure I want to come home*, Draco had said, and Harry's just grateful Draco's here. It's enough, and he tells Draco that. "You've done enough. Go and get some rest."

Draco hesitates a moment. "When I wake up," he says, "we'll go somewhere."

"How about Dover?" Harry says. "I've always wanted to see those famous white cliffs."

Draco nods. "To Dover," he agrees, and then he turns and walks away, Harry's hand slipping from his wrist.

Reassured by their plans for Dover, Harry lets Draco sleep for the rest of the morning. He spends the time going through the boxes of Draco's possessions — he'd completely forgotten about them, but the box of clothes, for example, will no doubt prove useful. Draco probably has less use for the old textbooks and the calendar diary, but at least they're there. Something familiar.

Harry knocks on the guest bedroom door at some point in the afternoon, thinking Draco might want a cup of tea. However, there's no response. He runs a few errands, Disapparating to Gringott's, and returns to the apartment at five o'clock.

He knocks on the bedroom door at six, then again at eight, thinking Draco might want a meal. When there's still no reply, he begins to worry.

Well, perhaps Draco's just *very* tired.

At around ten o'clock, Harry goes to bed. He checks on Draco first; Draco appears to be fast asleep, the empty potion vial on the bedside table and a half-glass of water. Harry watches Draco's face for a long moment. Even asleep, he looks troubled somehow, his mouth a thin, unhappy line and a faint tension in his face.

Harry hesitates, then reaches out and rests a hand on Draco's shoulder.

"Draco," he says quietly.

Draco doesn't move.

"Draco."

Draco stirs, then, and makes a noise indicative of slight annoyance.

"Just checking if you need anything," Harry says, feeling relieved. Draco makes another noise that, although open to interpretation, has strong hints of 'go away'.

Harry straightens up and leaves, quietly closing the door behind him.

* * *

Monday morning.

Harry wakes early and has a leisurely shower before dressing and considered whether to call Holdsworth and plead sickness again. The white cliffs of Dover await him and Draco, after all.

He firecalls Holdsworth, whose sympathy is slightly limited this time but still present.

"Get plenty of rest, you can't afford to take tomorrow off too," she says.

Harry ends the firecall and paces around the kitchen, impatient for Draco to waken. After an hour or so, he finally goes to the bedroom door and knocks.

No reply. He waits a moment, then opens the door.

Draco looks exactly how Harry left him.

Still asleep? Harry thinks with exasperation, reaching for Draco's shoulder and shaking him gently.

"Draco. Wake up."

No reply. Draco feels very warm, though, and Harry, after some hesitation, places a hand against Draco's forehead.

Feverish.

Harry stands up abruptly. Is this another side-effect? Or just a cold? Merlin, why did he agree to that stupid trip to Sutton-on-Sea? It's clearly been too much for Draco, why didn't Harry behave like a responsible adult for once and drag Draco to the Healers as soon as he returned, like any normal person would do —

He tries, unsuccessfully, to wake Draco again, but Draco seems completely unresponsive. Almost comatose.

Don't tell anyone. That's what Draco had said, and Harry had promised. Draco doesn't want anyone to know, so they *won't* —

Harry realises he's mindlessly pacing around the room. He stops and leans against the door, staring at Draco.

Don't do this to me, Draco.

Slowly, feeling as though his body is immensely heavy, he walks to the fireplace and firecalls his two best friends.

* * *

He wishes they were angry with him. It'd be easier if they were angry. They'd speak crossly with him, and Harry would nod and agree that yes, he's clearly had a lapse in judgement...

But Ron and Hermione — both perched on the stools by the island counter — look at him with identical expressions of hurt and betrayal.

"It's about trust, Harry," Hermione says.

"Yeah, did you really think we'd go running off to tell everyone?" Ron adds. "All you had to do was ask us not to."

"I know, but it's just...I don't know." Harry feels terrible. "I don't know," he repeats. "Anyone in their right mind would have told Narcissa and Astoria, and taken Draco to St Mungo's, and — "

"Well, it's no use blaming anyone," Hermione says suddenly. "You said Malfoy was sick, didn't you? What happened?"

Harry looks away, embarrassed that he only involved his friends when it got to this point. "He said he was tired. He's been tired a lot, since he came back Friday night, but he's slept for nearly twenty-four hours straight, now. And he's got a fever."

Hermione frowns and says nothing.

"What do you think?" Harry prompts, worried, and Hermione looks at Ron, then back to Harry.

"I don't know."

"Well — we'll research it, right? You'll have a book or something..." Harry trails off as Hermione shakes her head.

"There's only ever been three recorded cases. I know one of them mentioned fatigue, but...I'm not a Healer. I don't know." She exchanges another look with Ron, and Ron speaks quietly.

"Look, mate," he says to Harry, "I know you said that Malfoy doesn't want anyone to know, but...I reckon it's time to go to St Mungo's."

"No," Harry says instantly. "I promised him."

"Think Malfoy'd prefer to be alive than to keep a promise," Ron says, and Harry turns away, knowing Ron's right and hating the choice he must make.

For a moment, silence eclipses them. Then Harry speaks, his voice laced with defeat.

"Call St Mungo's," he says wearily. "I'll owl Narcissa and Astoria."

Hermione puts a reassuring hand on his arm. "You're doing the right thing, Harry," she says.

It doesn't feel like it, he thinks.

* * *

Astoria is the first to receive her owl. She arrives at St Mungo's at midday, Sophie clutching her hand, and when she sees Harry sitting in the waiting room she turns a worryingly pale colour.

"You said you found him?" she says breathlessly. Harry nods. He'd been deliberately vague in the letter, saying Draco had been found but was seriously ill and currently at St Mungo's.

"Oh, thank Merlin," Astoria says, sinking into the chair beside Harry. "Oh, thank Merlin. All this time..." She looks around the room, as if expecting to find Draco there, smiling at her. "Where is he?"

"Fourth floor. They won't let anyone in," Harry says, and the anger he initially felt bubbles to the surface again. "Those bloody Healers, they're treating him like an experiment. Their eyes lit up like Christmas trees when they learned he'd been splinched in two time eras. They're running every test under the sun, and they wanted to bring in a team of Healers from the Research Division."

"So I can't even see him?" Astoria looks like someone's hit her with a hex. "What absolute rubbish! I'm practically family, if I want to see Draco then they can't stop me."

"Good luck. I'm Harry bloody Potter and they still kicked me out."

Astoria's worry is quickly turning to fury. Harry listens to her rant about the injustice of it all; he went through the exact same cycle of emotion and so he simply nods along sympathetically until Astoria has stalked away to furiously accost Healers. Harry also went

through that particular phase. In fifteen or twenty minutes, he thinks, she'll reappear and collapse, defeated, into the chair again.

Hermione turns up at five o'clock, after work's finished. Harry had sent her and Ron away when they first arrived, saying they couldn't do anything anyway and they both had to return to work. They left reluctantly, promising to return in the evening.

Hermione is very cautious around Astoria and stiffly introduces herself, but Astoria's frankness soon wins Hermione over.

"Oh, there's no need for stuffy introductions," Astoria says irritably. "You're Hermione Granger, who *doesn't* know your name?" She pauses, then sighs. "Sorry, I've been stuck here all day waiting for a Healer to give us some news, any news — Sophie, don't touch people's hair, it isn't polite — and it's just been a nightmare."

Hermione is appropriately sympathetic and Astoria warms up to her. Harry leaves them talking to each other — Hermione soon bouncing a giggly Sophie on her lap — and tries to find a Healer. He waits outside Draco's room and grabs ahold of a Healer's assistant trying to exit with armfuls of potions.

"Draco Malfoy — "

"Oh, we just finished the last of the tests," the assistant says cheerfully. "Minchin the Marvellous reported similar effects after he was time-splined — it's certainly very interesting, isn't it? The senior Healer says he might run some more tests tomorrow, actually, because this is a very good opportunity to write a paper on..." The assistant trails off.

"A good opportunity?" Harry says angrily.

"Well...er, my condolences for the situation, but on the bright side, we now know a lot more about the chemical reactions within magical cores when..." The assistant pauses again.

"If you're done treating Draco like a research paper," Harry snaps, "I'd like to see him."

"Well, of course, but you won't get much out of a visit."

The Healer assistant is right, as much as Harry hates to admit it. Draco is still asleep when he goes into the room, and the assistant returns to tell Harry that Draco will remain asleep for at least the next twelve hours.

"He's in a magically-induced sleep," she says brightly. "Just to make sure everything recovers completely. Minchin's nervous system was completely shot when *he* woke up, but..."

One of the other Healer assistants, industriously writing on a chart, looks up and gives her a look.

"Never mind," the assistant says meekly, and disappears to find Astoria.

Harry thinks he should give Astoria a moment alone. Narcissa should be here soon; he'd expected her to rush into St Mungo's very shortly after sending the owl, but it's possible she's

been out all day and is yet to receive the message.

He watches Draco a moment longer, then turns and leaves.

* * *

Going back to the apartment feels strange. Draco was only there for three nights, but somehow the apartment feels despairingly empty.

He should have taken Draco straight to St Mungo's. When Astoria and Narcissa realise he kept Draco hidden for nearly four days, they'll be furious with him. And he'll deserve their wrath.

Kept Draco hidden.

Because sometimes, that feels like his intentions. He wanted to hide Draco, just have a moment — maybe a bit longer. Just him and Draco. Driving and speaking about nothing important and falling asleep in the English midlands. Stars and rivers and fields, and if he closes his eyes he can remember the sun-warmed stone of the sea defence wall, solid and real beneath his skin. The breakers rolling in, quiet and constant. The dunes of the beach subsiding into long, smooth plains.

They never did find out whether the buried wood was a shipwreck or a pier.

Harry spends most of the night staring at the ceiling.

* * *

He goes to work the next morning. There's four owls waiting outside his office, and Harry's heart slowly sinks. That can't bode well.

"*Scourgify*," he mutters, getting rid of the owl droppings around his door, and steps over a sleepy pygmy owl. Ginny's.

It's the first time he's stepped into his office since Draco came back. It's strange how everything's exactly how he left it five days ago, last Thursday. Draco's file is still in his drawer. The pensieve, filled with memories, sits undisturbed in its cabinet. Harry takes off his cloak and hang it on a peg before sitting behind his desk. The owls flutter around him, eventually settling into a neat line. One particular owl — a large hawk owl — pecks the other owls until they've shuffled aside.

"Oh, you're the most important, are you?" Harry mutters at it, taking its letter and narrowly missing an angry peck.

It's a rushed letter from Narcissa. She had been visiting a friend's country estate in the Highlands and has only just returned. The letter is short and consists of little more than a brief reason for her absence and a sentence stating she will be along to St Mungo's directly.

The next letter is from Astoria and is uncomfortable to read; it's full of heartfelt gratitude for 'bringing Draco home' and tells Harry that he's always welcome to visit her and Matthew,

even though the case is closed.

Would he still be welcome at her house if she knew Draco had actually returned five days ago and Harry had kept it secret? Guilt blossoms in his heart as he sets the letter aside.

The third letter is from Hermione and consists of an envelope full of clippings and notes from books, detailing side-effects of time-splinching. *Not much research available*, she's written, *and I don't know if it'll be useful — but thought you might like to read through the notes, at least.*

The fourth letter is from Ginny. *Hope everything's well*, she's written. *Ron told me you solved the Malfoy case. Congratulations! I know you've been working hard all year on it. Anyway, you wouldn't believe the formations the English National Team is developing at the moment. Quite interesting, the way the Chasers communicate...*

It's nice of Ginny to make the effort, Harry thinks. She's never been one for writing letters, but now they've broken up she occasionally sends postcards or brief letters. Perhaps trying to reassure Harry they can still be friends, and Harry appreciates the gesture.

The owls — their letters finally delivered — perch along the hatstand, all of them looking prepared to briefly nap. Harry looks down at his desk, then opens the drawer and slowly removes the latest case — a young Staffordshire witch, with known mental health issues, has gone missing after she was supposed to attend an appointment with a Mind Healer. Harry writes a note for the Muggle Liaisons team to check local hospitals and homeless shelters, but after that he has problems concentrating. He feels like he should do something, but what? Draco needs Healers, not a...friend.

Friend. Not quite the right word. They were never friends. They went from strangers straight to enemies, and then nothing but an insignificant memory, a distant figure easily dismissed and forgotten. Then...

...this strange thing between them. Disconnected memories, thoughts racing through a Legilimens spell, driving lessons and a Renault Mégane, a long-forgotten letter written in the back of a calendar diary, stars in a winter sky as the Celtic Sea stormed ophiolite cliffs.

A knock on the door, although it's open. Harry glances up.

"Hey."

"Hey." Ron glances at the owls roosting on the hatstand. "All right?"

"Yeah."

Ron takes a seat in one of the armchairs and helps himself to the bowl of toffees.

"Those are for interviewees," Harry says. It's an old joke between them. Ron grins and unwraps the toffee.

"Ask me a question, then." Ron pauses. "Or maybe I should be asking you a question." He points the toffee wrapper at Harry. "You and Malfoy. You've got this weird thing going on."

Harry's mouth drops open. "Did you just practice Legilimency on me?"

Ron laughs so hard he nearly chokes on his toffee. "Course not. But I suppose that tells me everything I need to know. Bloody obvious, really. Malfoy turns up at your place, you decide to go on road trips together — "

"I know, I know, it's stupid, I should have notified Narcissa and — "

Ron waves a hand dismissively. "If you're looking for a lecture about responsibility, go find Holdsworth. I, on the other hand, just think it's weird. Are you friends with Malfoy now?"

Harry hesitates. "No," he says at last.

Ron gives him a long, shrewd look. "Right."

"Stop looking at me like that," Harry says, feeling slightly peeved. "I'm not one of your cases, to be put under a magnifying charm and analysed." Ron's gotten rather cunning during his Auror training — surprisingly good at picking up details that may have escaped him in his younger years — but Harry just wishes Ron didn't apply his newfound skills to friends and family as well.

"You're getting rather defensive," Ron says, and Harry narrows his eyes. Ron grins. "All right," he says, "I'll stop winding you up. Got to go. See you at the Mad Alchemist later?"

"Maybe," Harry says evasively, but Ron doesn't look bothered by the lukewarm response.

"Yeah, better check St Mungo's visiting hours first," Ron says, his eyes bright and mischievous. Times like this, he reminds Harry strongly of Ginny or George.

"I will."

"Good." Still looking far too amused about something, Ron leaves, narrowly missing a dropping from one of the owls.

"*Scourgify*," Harry mutters.

It's going to be a long day.

* * *

Five o'clock. Harry can hardly wait to leave, rushing to the atrium so he can Disapparate directly to St Mungo's. Visiting hours finish at five-thirty.

Draco still hasn't woken, a Healer's assistant tells Harry as she fusses about the charts at the end of Draco's bed. There's not much he can do.

He sits beside Draco, anyway, and wonders if Astoria and Narcissa have been and gone. Narcissa may still be in the hospital — perhaps she's left to find a Healer for more information, or perhaps she's left to have a meal.

So he sits and waits until the Healer leaves.

Silence. That's fine. Draco always liked silence. Space to think, space to breathe.

He studies Draco's face. Whatever potions they've given him have transformed him into a blank canvas. In his sleep, Draco always looked faintly unhappy, as if he slept with purposeful focus, with deep concentration. But the potions have washed all of that away.

Harry never held much with speaking to the unconscious or the dead. His final experience with death — when he held the Resurrection Stone — taught him the finality of death. Speaking to someone who clearly isn't there is pointless.

But Harry, so long ago, had spoken to Draco — Draco, who hadn't been seen for three years, who was clearly absent — and Draco had answered him.

Harry sits silently in the room for a long time, watching the sun slowly diminish in the sky. The sun won't set for another hour or so. Summer is slowly unfurling across the country. Distantly, he can hear the faint chimes of Big Ben, marking half-five. Someone will no doubt be along shortly to usher Harry out. Footsteps echo along the corridor and Harry exhales slowly, then looks at Draco.

"You promised we'd go to Dover," he says quietly.

A Healer steps into the room and clears their throat. "Apologies, but — "

"Visiting hours are over. Right."

He stands up and leaves.

Chapter 12

In the apartment, the boxes of Draco's possessions sit neatly on the dining table. In the guest bedroom, there's still a half-glass of water on the table, the bed unmade.

Harry sits on the edge of the bed and removes the wand from his pocket. Hawthorn, ten inches, unicorn hair core.

He'd fetched it from Gringotts on Tuesday afternoon, when Draco had still been sleeping and Harry hadn't started worrying yet. The wand had sat forgotten for years; Harry had meant to return it to Draco after the war, planning to owl it off and spare the awkwardness of meeting in-person, but he'd simply forgotten. Too busy with other things, and the wand had ended up packed away in his crates of possessions at Gringotts after he and Ginny purchased the apartment. He'd never bothered retrieving the crates and unpacking. It took him quite some time to find the wand, and he wished he'd at least organised the crates in some way, or labelled them. The wand was amongst a jumble of other things: stacks of old *Quidditch Weekly* magazines that should have been thrown out long ago, one of the fake galleons Hermione made for Dumbledore's Army, a broom compass, a Weasley jumper, Sirius's penknife.

And Draco's wand.

Harry had been surprised when he first disarmed Draco, seizing the wand and fleeing with it. He'd expected the wand to be resistant and somehow unfriendly (though he'd absolutely dreaded using Bellatrix's wand). But the wand had been no different than using, for example, Hermione's, and had proved itself an excellent wand in lieu of Harry's own.

It makes Harry feel guilty again. Draco — judging by the letters written in the back of the calendar diary — had never forgotten his original wand and had agonised over the obstacle of asking for its return. But for Harry, the wand hadn't even deserved a second thought. He'd made vague plans to return it, but had been too busy with stupid things, smiling and busy with his friends, his life, and he'd thrown it into a box of other forgotten items and left it to gather dust in a Gringotts vault.

I'm sorry, Harry wants to say, but Draco can't hear him. He's not here.

He lifts the wand. "*Tranquillo*."

Draco was right. The spell doesn't work when attempted to cast on self.

* * *

The next afternoon, as Harry's halfway through revising the latest case, Ron strides into the office.

Ron only ever strides for something important, Harry knows. The rest of the time, he ambles into the office, eyes roving around for bags of sweets. Ron never quite grew out of his lanky

and meandering gait.

"Malfoy's awake," Ron says without preamble. Harry looks up sharply.

"When?"

"He woke up last night, around nine o'clock. Went to sleep again, but they said it was a natural sleep this time. He woke up at around six this morning and stayed awake."

"How'd you know?" Harry demands, pushing the case file aside and standing up.

"Just dropped one of the junior Auror trainees off at St Mungo's — he'd been practising duels and accidentally replaced his own fingers with carrots. Thought I'd ask about Malfoy while I was there."

"You — you asked about Malfoy? Why?"

"Thanks a lot," Ron says, looking exasperated. "I behave like a decent human being and you interrogate my motives. Real nice, that is."

Harry's too distracted to feel apologetic. "Nobody told me."

"Well, they notified his mother this morning." Ron gives a sympathetic shrug. "You're not family or even a friend, you're just the case manager."

Harry frowns. "How'd you get all this information from the Healers? They don't tell me anything."

"What can I say? Natural charm."

Harry grabs his cloak from the peg. "I'm going."

"Oh, really?" Ron says. "Holdsworth's going to be madder than a brooding dragon if you leave without a word. Suppose I'll just go and make some excuses, sort it all out for you, then?"

"Thanks Ron, you're the best," Harry says, ignoring Ron's sarcasm and stepping out the door. Ron's voice drifts after him.

"You owe me, mate!"

Harry heads straight for the atrium.

* * *

Draco has gone.

The witch at Reception has to tell Harry three times. She must think he's especially slow, as he can only stare uncomprehendingly as she smiles patiently and repeats the words cheerfully.

"Mr Malfoy signed out at eleven o'clock this morning. May I help you with anything else?"

Eleven o'clock. Five hours ago. Harry nods, at last, and slowly turns away from the witch.

He returns to the office. Follows a lead on the Staffordshire witch, who was sighted near a hospital, and by the time he returns to his office again it's half-six in the evening. He takes a long time to file paperwork, tidy his desk, fetch his cloak from the peg even though they're on the cusp of summer and the weather really isn't warranting of extra layers.

He knows the reason for his lingering.

He's hoping Draco will be standing by the apartment door. But he knows it won't happen. And as long as he's not there yet, still standing in his office, he doesn't know. Draco might be there, or he might not. Schrödinger's Draco, Harry thinks with a very wry smile.

He Disapparates to the apartment, appearing in the foyer, and takes the stairs rather than the elevator. Level one, level two, level three, level four...

Level five.

He steps into the corridor. The apartments are half-floor, and thus there are only two doors in the corridor: on the left side, Harry's apartment. On the right, his neighbour's.

No visitors await at either door.

He takes his key from his pocket. Every noise is amplified in the empty corridor: the faint jangle of the keys, the scrape of metal in the deadlock. The door swings open and he steps inside, noting the apartment is the same way he left it. The curtains are wide open, the setting sun casting the apartment in a gentle amber glow. He walks from room to empty room. The spare bedroom still has a glass of water on the bedside table, half empty.

A faint scratching noise comes from the living area. Harry leaves the bedroom and hurries over to the glass sliding door leading to the balcony; an owl is scratching at the glass, looking displeased.

Narcissa. His friends know not to owl him at home — the owls constantly arriving and departing would no doubt confuse or bother his Muggle neighbours. *Owl me at the office* has always been his rule. And aside from his friends, Narcissa is the only one who knows his address.

His guess is correct. He reads the letter briefly.

Dear Harry,

Thank you for all your efforts in finding my son. I shall speak to your supervisor and suggest a commendation for your work.

Best wishes,

Narcissa Malfoy.

He reads it again and again. It's nothing. A polite thank you, a polite goodbye. A commendation, like Harry did all this for a pat on the head and a compliment. He feels nauseous, but after the queasiness recedes he begins to feel angry. Angry that nobody's told him anything, angry that Narcissa so clearly considers him to be of such little personal importance. She hadn't even mentioned Draco, where he was or if he was all right.

Even Astoria didn't bother to contact Harry. But why would she or Narcissa have bothered, after all? *You're not family or even a friend, you're just the case manager.*

And, caught in a seething fog of anger, Harry throws a handful of Floo powder into the fireplace.

"Astoria Venn's house."

* * *

Matthew greets Harry first. He's sitting in an overstuffed armchair by the fire, reading a newspaper, and he jumps sharply, cursing, when Harry steps out of the flames.

"Scared the living daylights out of me! I taught you to drive — why d'you have to pop out of fireplaces, for heaven's sake?"

"Sorry," Harry says unapologetically. "Is Astoria about?"

Matthew frowns. "She's just putting Sophie to bed. Listen, is this about her ex-husband? She's been very upset lately. Maybe you should talk about it tomorrow."

"No, I'm talking about it today," Harry says firmly, and Matthew looks at him. For a moment, Harry thinks he's about to tell Harry to leave, but then footsteps sound and a voice cuts through the tension.

"Harry." Astoria stands in the doorway, a shadowed look on her face. She's had a long day, Harry thinks, noticing the smudges of darkness beneath her eyes.

"I heard Draco's awake," Harry says, his voice still a little curt.

"I'm sorry I didn't send an owl." Astoria looks away.

"Where is he?"

Astoria makes a sound that could be a laugh or a cry. "You don't know?"

"No."

"He went back to the manor." Astoria's quiet again for another moment. "Merlin, it was awful. Narcissa and I had the biggest row. We wouldn't have argued, normally, but I suppose emotions were running high. I'd promised myself I'd be calm, but I couldn't help but feel angry. I know, it's terrible, but honestly. Three years, and *look* at what he put his mother through! The first thing I asked him was *why*. And then Narcissa arrived, and it was terrible because she was crying, and I'd *never* seen her cry — "

"Did Draco say anything?" Harry demands. Draco had never spoken of his three-year ordeal and Harry had left it alone — but all this time, if all Harry had to do was *ask* —

Astoria shakes her head. "I don't know. I think he tried to say something a few times, but I was a bit — angry, really — still trying to ask questions, and Narcissa was speaking over him. She kept telling him he *had* to come home, to the manor, and everything would be all right."

"And then?"

"Narcissa and I got into an argument. Draco still looked terrible and I said he should at least stay for another day. But Narcissa was insistent that he return to the manor and kept going on about quality of care." Astoria exhales sharply. "Honestly, she can be so *stubborn* — "

"And what? He just left?" Harry says, stumbling over the words slightly. He repeats them again, his voice stronger. "He just left."

Astoria nods. "While we were arguing, he went and changed into his clothes. As soon as he reappeared, Narcissa took him down to reception to sign out — just *left* me there, like I was a bit of furniture or something!"

Harry doesn't reply. He stares into the flames. He just left. Draco just left. Went back to the manor.

Of course he went back to the manor. What did Harry expect?

He thanks Astoria for talking to him, telling him everything that happened. She offers tea; he declines.

When he floos back to the apartment, he sees the Renault Mégane keycard sitting on the counter. Well, Draco has to come back for that, at least.

He takes the keycard and puts it in his bedside table drawer.

* * *

Harry tries to distract himself with his other cases. Two weeks after Draco woke and returned to the manor, Harry closes his ninth case, the Staffordshire witch. In just a few more weeks, his time with the Investigative Division will end.

He goes home that night and finds Draco waiting outside his door.

He looks...

Like the old Draco Malfoy. He's wearing well-tailored clothes and a set of neat black robes. His hair is neatly combed, his cloak pinned with a small gold owl. All that's missing is the air of faint contempt.

Harry tries to say something casual, something nonchalant, but his mouth dries up and all he can do is nod once at Draco as he fetches the keys from his pocket and unlocks the door.

"Malfoy," he says at last, and Draco looks at him. There's something in his gaze that is reminiscent of sixth year. A fragment of sadness hiding in the corner of his mouth; a trace of resignation in his eyes.

"Harry."

Harry turns away quickly, making his way to the bedroom. When he returns, the keycard is in one hand. Draco looks at it, not moving.

"Your keycard," Harry says, holding it out.

"I know."

They stand that way for a long time, neither moving. Then Draco takes the keycard and looks to the dining table, where his boxes of possessions are still neatly packed. He draws a wand — his mother's, Harry thinks — and waves it at the boxes.

"Reducio."

The boxes shrink until they're pocket-sized. Harry watches as Draco picks them up and moves towards the door.

"Wait," Harry says, and Draco pauses. Harry reaches into his pocket and throws the wand to Draco; he catches it deftly, staring at it. "There you go," Harry says, trying to make his voice sound light and casual. "Couldn't give you a time-turner, but I gave you back your wand."

Draco finally looks up, glancing at Harry before tapping his wand against the owl clasp on his cloak. It immediately curls in on itself, smaller and smaller, until it resembles a tiny marble. It fades to silver a moment later, and small wings form along it.

A small silver snitch clasp.

"Leaving, then?" Harry asks, still trying to keep his voice light.

"Yes." Draco holds out a hand and Harry stares at it uncomprehendingly, wondering if he's supposed to shake Draco's hand and politely say goodbye. The thought makes him feel sick.

After a long moment, Draco drops his hand.

Then he turns and leaves, stepping out the door and closing it behind him. Harry listens to the quiet snick of the door, followed by fading footsteps.

Harry stands in the middle of his empty apartment. The sun has nearly set now, eclipsing the apartment in cold shadows. He slowly, methodically pours a neat scotch and goes out to the balcony, listening. But nobody's whistling songs about southerly winds tonight, and the lights of the trains seem even more distant.

Harry closes his eyes and leans over the railing of the balcony slightly, just to remind himself what it feels like to fly.

* * *

When he returns to his office the next day, he solves his tenth case.

It's easy to do.

He takes the file from his desk drawer and opens it up to the first page.

Case number: L10-332-5

Date filed: 10 September 2003

Case Classification: Missing

Name: MALFOY, Draco

Other names: None.

He turns the pages slowly. The photograph of Draco smiles up at him. He doesn't ever remember Draco smiling in the picture — he always looked so serious and solemn — but he smiles at Harry now, a faint but present smile.

Harry turns the page, covering the photograph with a blank leaf of parchment. Then, he slowly taps his wand against the blank page.

"Case closed," he says, the words falling like weights. Words slowly appear across the parchment, echoing his statement: *Case Closed*.

Beneath the words, more letters appear. *Reason*.

"Subject located."

One more word appears on the parchment. *Status*.

"Alive."

And with that, the file flutters shut like a bird settling its wings.

He goes home that night and finally pours out the glass of water on the bedside table. Rinses out the glass, dries it, puts it away. Strips the bed and re-makes it with fresh linen.

It's like Draco was never there.

* * *

It's the first day of summer when Harry receives his promotion to Head Auror. Williamson is sitting there, looking pleased, with the two division heads nodding and smiling along on each side of her.

"...very pleased with your investigative work, Potter," Williamson is saying, but all he can think about is the way she says *investigative work* like it's a hobby, something to occupy

spare time, something to use as a training exercise.

But it's not. It's people's lives, lost family and friends, people desperate to know. *Three years*, Astoria's voice whispers, *and you never really stop looking*. People trying to come home, because coming home can sometimes be the hardest journey they'll ever make.

"Can I keep working in the Investigative Division?" Harry asks suddenly, and Williamson pauses mid-sentence to give him a startled look.

"Well, no. Your duties as Head Auror will be demanding enough. You will be responsible for coordinating projects and — "

"And if I stay where I am?"

Williamson exchanges a look with her colleagues.

"You can't stay where you are. You're Head Auror."

"Not yet."

Williamson says nothing for a long moment. "This is a serious decision, best not rushed. Perhaps you should take a few days to consider our offer."

"I want to stay in the Investigative Division." Harry pauses. "Maybe even apply for a transfer."

Williamson coughs. "Potter, I suggest you heed my recommendation and take a few days to think about it. Let's not make decisions we may regret later."

"No." Harry's tired of other people telling him what to do. *Going only where others take you*. "I'm continuing my investigative work. And if that means refusing a promotion, that's fine."

"Look, you're one of our finest Aurors," the man to the right of Williamson says suddenly. "You've got a stellar record. You've had a direct hand in catching at least half the Death Eaters — "

"I caught the last one three years ago," Harry says sharply. "Lucius Malfoy, who died in custody. That doesn't feel like a victory, strangely enough."

"The Auror division has certainly been downsized, now that the war is over. However, that doesn't mean your work is any less important," Williamson says firmly. Harry could almost smile, if he wasn't so bitter about it.

"The last job I took before I worked in Investigative, I spent a week — the entire *week* — serving as a glorified bodyguard for the Minister. Standing about in a smart uniform, twiddling my thumbs."

"As Head Auror," Williamson says, "you could delegate those sorts of roles."

"Delegate? You're seriously offering delegation as a benefit of promotion? Wow, brilliant. I always base my decisions on how much potential power I'll have over others." Harry laughs.

Williamson flinches, but recovers quickly. "We'll reconvene at the end of the week," she says crisply. "Potter, why don't you take the rest of the week off?"

Harry bites down a response and stands up. "I'll see you Monday," he says, and they all nod and awkwardly farewell him.

He takes the train home. The first day of summer is blossoming into a lazy afternoon; couples stroll leisurely along Regent Street, gazing at window displays, and even the punishing crowds of Oxford Street seem less rushed than usual.

He watches the trains. Always taking people away, always bringing people back.

* * *

Four days later, on the fifth of June, Draco comes home.

A Sunday. Summer is early and settles like a warm cloak over the city, creating a long, sun-steeped afternoon. Harry stands on the balcony and watches the people wander past, children clutching ice lollies as parents stroll along beside them. The sun slowly begins to set, a clear bright dazzle of light on the blue horizon. A single cloud, wispy as a dandelion, slowly disintegrates across the sky.

Harry goes inside, setting his empty glass on the counter. He takes the ice-tray from the freezer, popping ice cubes into the glass and listening to the tink of glass against ice. Then he pours honey-coloured rum over the ice, pausing when he hears a knock at the door. He sets the bottle down and crosses the room, half-expecting a surprise visit from Ginny as he opens the door.

Draco Malfoy stands there.

"Oh," Harry says.

Draco looks at him. He looks like he did when they last met — all formal robes and impeccable appearance — and Harry's still waiting for that coolness, that raised eyebrow and faint sneer, but Draco walks straight in as if he owns the place, unclasps his cloak, and tosses it on the kitchen counter. And there's something reassuring about the way he does it, as if he's casting aside a mask that he wears for everyone else except Harry.

"Come for a drive?" Draco says, as if it's a casual invitation, as if he turns up and asks this question all the time. Like it's a routine between them.

"All right," Harry says. There's some sort of restless energy about Draco. He paces to and fro, a hand trailing along the side of the counter, and Harry thinks he's like a seeker about to dart after a snitch.

And he'll do anything to stop Draco from disappearing into that blue aether.

Or at least, disappearing without Harry.

They walk to the Renault together. Harry waits for Draco to choose the passenger or driver seat; to his surprise, Draco takes the passenger side and opens the glovebox, retrieving the road atlas. Harry takes the driver's seat.

"Where are we going?" he asks Draco.

Draco smiles faintly, as if secretly amused by something.

"What?" Harry says, frowning.

"Don't you keep your promises, Potter?"

"Yes?" Harry says it uncertainly, bewildered.

"Let's go to Dover, then."

Harry looks away, unable to hide his smile.

He starts the ignition.

* * *

It takes the best part an hour to leave London, but soon they're speeding along the M2. Draco speaks only to give directions, and Harry follows them wordlessly. They follow the lines of the land, curving along the wide highways and then breaking away to the smaller roads, the narrow and winding arteries that span the countryside and converge briefly upon a small parish before, once again, dividing and unravelling. They drive alongside a river for a long time. Harry asks for its name.

"The River Medway," Draco says, one hand resting lightly on the atlas. "It joins with the Thames and, eventually, the North Sea."

All rivers lead to the ocean. Harry can't remember where he heard that.

They stop in Gillingham to purchase fuel. Draco, absorbed in navigating the next part of their journey, hands Harry a card.

"What's this?" Harry asks blankly.

"Well, you see, Potter, there was this marvelous Muggle invention in the 1960s, called a 'bank card' — "

"I know what it is," Harry says, rolling his eyes. "It's just...why have *you* got one?"

"Muggle shops don't tend to accept galleons," Draco says with a shrug. "Easiest way to buy petrol."

Wonders, Harry thinks, will never cease.

They continue on, driving into the endless night. The clouds come rolling in over the sky, shrouding the moon, and it begins to lightly rain around midnight. It's almost mesmerising. Harry stares at the silver rain, illuminated by the headlights, and thinks he can see a thousand different patterns. Draco is silent and a few times, Harry thinks he's fallen asleep. Whenever he glances over, however, he sees the light reflected in Draco's eyes as he gazes ahead.

They take quite a meandering route to Dover, leaving the M2 to weave around the coastline, and the relatively short trip soon becomes a lengthy journey. They reach Margate at midnight — Dover is still about an hour away, Harry calculates. He's beginning to feel tired. Draco seems to notice, for he tells Harry to pull over and they switch seats.

Harry doesn't remember falling asleep, but when he wakes up the lights of Margate have long disappeared. Inky black fields surround them, and there's not another car in sight.

"Where are we?" he mutters groggily.

"Nowhere. Go back to sleep."

He does.

* * *

They arrive in Dover at one o'clock in the morning.

Harry wakes up when the engine stops. They're parked at a lighthouse, he realises. The only car in the windswept parking lot.

Draco opens his door; Harry does the same. They step onto the ground at the exact same time, gravel crunching against their shoes, and the wind rushes through Harry's hair like a crashing wave. Harry smiles and shuts the passenger's door. A second later, there's an echoing slam as Draco closes the driver's door.

They set off across the car park, past the lighthouse. Its curved wall gleams white in the moonlight, but it quickly recedes into the distance as they walk onwards, onwards, until the earth is soft and green beneath their feet and the white cliffs are rising from the darkness like pale ghosts. Harry sits on the edge of a craggy rock, listening to the waves roll in and looking at Draco. He stands with his back to Harry, gazing out into the sea. The moon, shrouded in cloud, affords little illumination.

"She sold it," Draco says.

"Sold what?" Harry asks.

There's a long silence.

"Sold my home," Draco says, and his voice cracks on the last word and Harry realises the long silence was because Draco was trying to compose himself.

Sold my home.

Draco's East Devon house, Harry realises with a sudden heartache. Narcissa sold it. And all the furniture had been sold as well. Draco's possessions — four tidy little boxes, sitting in the manor for years — were all that remained.

Another long silence before Draco speaks again, still not turning to look at Harry.

"She said I could stay at the manor as long as I liked, of course." His voice — so level until now — suddenly lifts with suppressed anger. "I left once, isn't that enough? Merlin, I can't *stand* it there, I can't stand her clinging to me — " Draco breaks off abruptly and, at last, turns to look at Harry. "Astoria's worse, demanding explanations. She wants answers I don't have. My mother wants reassurances I can't give. Everybody wants something, but I've got nothing left to give."

Harry is silent. The thin light of the moon does little to show Draco's expression; Harry looks away instead, tilting his head to listen to the rush of waves eddying around the base of the cliffs.

He knows that feeling well. The empathy runs through his veins, threading its way beneath his skin. People wanting something, everything. Throughout the war, that feeling followed him like a distant Dementor, hovering over his thoughts and clouding his days with self-doubt and misery. The worst part was knowing they didn't want the real Harry. They wanted a charade, a false and brittle brightness. A normal person, a confident person who knew exactly what to do. *Tell us*, their unspoken pleas said. *Tell us you're perfectly all right*.

"You know," Harry says, "I have no idea what I'm doing."

Draco stares at him. "Potter," he says eventually, "that's not exactly reassuring."

"It's not supposed to be. I have no idea what I'm doing, you have no idea what you're doing either." Harry shrugs. "Doesn't matter."

Draco considers that. "I don't have any plans," he says.

"All right."

"I don't know where I'm going."

"Took us to Dover, didn't you? And tomorrow, you'll take us somewhere else. Anywhere, nowhere, wherever."

Draco falls silent.

They stay where they are for a long time, until dawn begins to faintly tinge the sky.

Chapter 13

As morning rolls across the sky, Draco suggests to driving to Brighton but Harry pleads exhaustion and they check in at a local bed-and-breakfast. The receptionist — an elderly woman who types with only one finger, one painful letter at a time — can't seem to stop staring at them. Harry is suddenly aware of his rumpled robes.

"Are you together?" the receptionist asks.

"No," Harry says.

"Yes," Draco says.

The receptionist pauses.

"Yes," Draco repeats firmly, and the woman nods, turning back to the computer. "She meant if we're paying together, Potter," Draco mutters to Harry.

"Well, we're not," Harry says, slightly embarrassed but trying to cover his error. "I've got some Muggle money on me — "

"Don't be stupid, I've got my card. I'm paying."

Harry subsides into — if he's honest with himself — a sulk. Draco pays for two rooms and makes the fatal mistake of inquiring about the east-coastal walking track; the woman immediately launches into an enthusiastic (if one-sided) conversation about the local flora and fauna. Draco manages to politely extract himself fifteen minutes later and they make their escape to their rooms.

Draco is directly across the hallway, Harry notes as he unlocks his own door to reveal a spacious and neatly-presented room. There's an excellent ocean view but he's too tired to appreciate it. "I'm having a nap," he tells Draco, half-expecting him to say he's going for a walk. But Draco just nods and unlocks his own room, disappearing inside.

Harry shuts his door, crosses to the bed, and collapses upon it.

Within minutes, he's asleep.

* * *

They explore the cliffs the next day. The lighthouse, Harry learns, is called the South Foreland Lighthouse. The lighthouse went out of service in 1988 and has been converted to a small museum, manned by an elderly guide. Draco lingers over a wall-mounted diagram of the electric light and is accosted by the guide, who latches with enthusiasm onto Draco's apparent interest and proceeds to deliver a fifteen-minute lecture on carbon arc lamps. Harry, though greatly amused, takes pity on Draco and rescues him.

"We should get going," he says, walking over to Draco and tilting his head towards the door.

"Yes, quite," Draco says casually, though there's a hint of gratitude in his voice, and he politely nods at the guide before retreating hastily. Once they're safely out of earshot, Harry starts laughing and Draco frowns.

"They always do that," he says, looking peeved. "Always. I'll be standing there, minding my own business, and they'll come up to me and start chatting away. It's maddening."

"How awful," Harry teases. "People being nice to you. How *do* you put up with it?"

"Very funny, Potter." Draco turns onto the coastal walking track. "My father was quite masterful at appearing cold and aloof, discouraging anybody approaching. I rather hoped to have a similar effect on people."

Harry pauses to study him. "You don't, you know. Quite surprising, really, but you don't." It's true, he thinks. Strange...in school, Draco always gave off that cold air. But now...sometimes he seems distant, but in a different way. Whether he's gazing silently at lighthouse diagrams or standing patiently in an inn's reception, he seems the sort of person who might not be a good conversationalist, but certainly a good listener.

He tells Draco that.

"You're a good listener. People like that."

Draco doesn't seem to know how to respond to that, but Harry catches the faint flush in his face.

* * *

They drive to Brighton. They stop in Hopper's Crossing, a small wizarding community, at Harry's request. Keen to avoid slack-jawed gazes and awestruck expressions, Harry uses a quick charm to change his hair colour and lengthen it slightly, covering his scar. It's not a particularly genuine effort, but it will work well enough. People won't be expecting to see him here anyway, and Harry's learned that people often see only what they expect to see.

He converts some galleons to Muggle money at the local exchange, then visits the stationary shop for some parchment and an Ever-Inking Quill. Draco — who has long since vanished into a nearby clothing store — reappears with a frown and armfuls of bags.

"What are you doing?"

"Writing to my friends. I don't want them to worry."

Draco's frown deepens. Harry, guessing at his concerns, adds, "I won't mention you at all." He shoves the letter toward Draco; he's kept it short and succinct, telling Hermione and Ron that he felt like a short break, he's gone away for a short trip, he's completely fine, and he looks forward to seeing them again soon.

Draco reads the letter once, twice, three times, before he speaks quietly.

"You can say I'm with you."

Now it's Harry's turn to hesitate.

"It's all right," Draco says. "It's fine."

Harry lifts the quill and writes a postscript.

P.S: Draco's with me, we're both perfectly all right.

Five minutes later, Harry watches a hawk-owl fly out from the owlery, its wings spread against the blue sky, the faint outline of a letter upon its leg as it disappears into the distance.

* * *

Later on, when they're back on the road and on their way to Brighton again, Draco says he should return to the manor.

"My mother will be worrying," he says.

Harry switches the indicator on and overtakes a car in front. "Hermione and Ron will tell her they got the letter. She'll know you're all right."

Draco glances out the window, watching the scenery flash past.

"I should return," he says. "I have obligations. My mother has organised several social functions for me to attend, and Astoria wants to meet with the solicitor — "

"Forget your obligations."

That gets Draco's attention. He turns to stare at Harry.

"What?"

"Forget your obligations," Harry repeats. "You're not going back because you need to attend whatever social affairs Narcissa has organised or because Astoria's made appointments. I remember what you said to me once: 'What's the point, sitting in a box going only where other people take you?'. It's the reason you left, and it will be the reason you leave again."

Draco's still staring at Harry.

"I never said that to you," he says at last.

Harry frowns. "What?"

"I never said 'what's the point, sitting in a box' to you. I said it to Astoria. You just saw it in a memory."

Harry laughs incredulously. "*That's* what you took away from this conversation? God, Malfoy, you can be so..." He shakes his head.

Draco doesn't deign to reply to that, but when Harry glances at him five minutes later, he can see Draco smiling.

"What?" Harry asks.

"What?"

"What are you smiling at?"

"Nothing."

They lapse into silence again, but twenty minutes later, as they're halfway across a bridge over the River Ouse, Draco speaks again, not lifting his gaze from the window.

"You're far too knowledgeable about me, Potter."

Harry hides a smile.

* * *

They arrive in Brighton. Harry, sick of transfiguring items into toothbrushes and combs, goes to the nearest chemist. Draco, despite his familiarity with cars and petrol stations, seems fascinated with the many items available and Harry has to drag him away from the bottles of cough syrup.

"They're just like Pepper-Up Potions," Harry says.

"They most certainly are not. We use lacewings and beetle eyes — they use..." Draco tilts his head, staring at the label, "...Dextromethorphan."

"Yes, well, no doubt Muggles would be equally horrified to learn that we ingest insect parts."

"*Everybody* ingests insects. The average chocolate bar has eight insect legs in it."

"What? That's complete rubbish."

"The process of harvesting cocoa beans means that insects are inevitably present. Trying to produce completely insect-free chocolate is far too expensive."

Harry looks down at the Double Decker in his hand and considers putting it back. Then again — if Draco's telling the truth — there's bits of insect in every chocolate.

"Want one?" he asks instead, holding up the Double Decker with a hint of a challenge in his voice.

"Why not?" Draco says, returning the challenge with a raised eyebrow.

They pay for their items — or at least, Draco pays with his card. Harry feels a little uncomfortable about Draco paying for everything so far, but Draco doesn't seem to care and he hasn't made Harry feel like he owes him anything.

"Where did you learn that about chocolate, anyway?" Harry asks later on, when they're wandering past the Royal Pavilion.

"Travelled to Birmingham and went to Cadbury World."

Harry laughs. "You went to Cadbury World? Here I was, thinking you did very serious and soul-searching road trips all over Britain."

"*You* try finding something to do in Birmingham," Draco retorts.

It's a mild summer's day. The domes and onion-shaped minarets of the Royal Pavilion open into the sky, shining white in the light of the noon sun, and gardens stretch away from the buildings in lush sprawls of verdant green.

Harry wouldn't mind staying a while.

* * *

They go to a café for lunch. Harry considers the day's specials; Draco quickly puts a stop to that.

"You do know that the 'special' is usually food that's about to expire? They're desperate to get rid of it."

"You do know," Harry retorts, "that you're systematically destroying everything I used to enjoy about food? Insects in chocolate, now this..."

"And yet you won't change your choices." It's not intended as an insult, Harry thinks, judging by the tone of Draco's voice and the way he shrugs afterwards. Merely a casual observation.

He thinks about it all through the meal, though. People make bad choices; people become informed; people continue to make bad choices despite being informed.

He wonders at what point Draco's loyalty to Voldemort became an informed choice.

* * *

Harry insists on visiting the beach before they leave.

"When I was a child," he says, "everyone I knew went to Brighton for the beaches." And now he finally has his chance.

Draco doesn't seem too enthusiastic, but he doesn't outright argue as Harry finds his way to the pier. The beachfront area is filled with confused tourists, irritated locals, and cafés with loud music. The beach itself is crowded with families. School holidays, Harry remembers. There's far too many children shrieking and kicking sand about.

"It's crowded," he observes at last, looking out over the sea of sunburned noses and pasty legs.

"It's Brighton."

Harry had been expecting a triumphant I-told-you-so. Something smug, something irritating. But that smug Draco was long ago washed away by war and weariness.

Do you remember when we were eleven? Let's go back to that.

But Harry's happy to leave the past where it is.

* * *

Later that evening, they drive on to Southampton. It's a two-hour drive; Harry, who is the navigator for the journey, takes the direct route. He wonders if Draco would prefer the scenic and meandering side-roads, as he usually does, but Draco doesn't say anything about Harry's choice of road. They speed along the M27, Draco as confident as ever. In the hazy light of the summer dusk, a fox darts across the road and Draco swerves neatly around it.

They arrive in Southampton at eight thirty, the sun setting over the city, but Draco doesn't seem inclined to remain there. Harry mentions that observation and Draco shrugs.

"I've been here before."

They stop at a level crossing, the gates swinging closed, the red warning bell blinking like a beacon in the night. As they wait for the train to come though, Draco's eyes flick to the rear-vision mirror.

"This is real," he says.

Harry pauses. Draco's voice lilted at the end, morphing the statement into an uncertain half-question.

"You don't think it is?" he asks carefully.

"I don't know." Draco glances away from the mirror, his gaze locking onto Harry instead. "I have...difficulties sometimes, telling the difference between dreams and memories and reality."

Did you tell the Healers? Harry wants to ask, but he bites back the urge. No, of course Draco didn't tell the Healers. They wouldn't have let him leave. No, of course he didn't tell his mother. She's clinging to the mask of normalcy.

No, he's only told Harry. And Harry knows that's important.

"Look," he says, reaching for Draco's hand. Draco looks startled, but doesn't pull away when Harry wraps his hand around Draco's. "When you were trapped in time, we couldn't make contact, could we? So this must be real."

Draco looks at Harry, then glances down at their linked hands.

"You've got a scar," Draco observes and Harry, surprised, follows Draco's gaze. The streetlight faintly shines silver on Harry's skin, picking out the thread of letters. *I must not tell lies.*

"So have you," Harry says, disentangling his hand slightly to brush a fingertip over the faded curve of a serpent's tail.

The train rushes through, roaring along, the carriages clicking over the rails with precise repetition. Draco stares ahead and Harry's wondering if he's counting carriages.

The last carriage rushes through and soon the dark line of the train has disappeared around a curve of the rails. The warning bell abruptly stops its constant noise; the red light flickers and dies. Draco pulls his hand away, takes the handbrake off as the crossing gate rises, and drives over the tracks.

The headlights dip for a moment before illuminating the endless stretch of asphalt again.

* * *

They stop for the night in Bournemouth. After they've found a suitable bed-and-breakfast and booked their respective rooms, Draco asks Harry if he's going to tell the Healers.

"Tell them what?" Harry asks, walking slowly along the hallway as he searches for his room number.

Even Draco's newfound patience has its limits, apparently. He gives Harry an irritated look and Harry suddenly remembers. Reality and memories, melting together and falling apart like sand thrown into the sky.

"No," he says. "I mean, it's not any of my business, is it?"

"My mother would worry endlessly if she found out."

"Well, don't tell her then," Harry says, arriving at his door.

Draco looks at him, opens his mouth, then evidently changes his mind and closes his mouth again.

"See you tomorrow," he says instead.

"Tomorrow," Harry echoes, opening the door and stepping inside. He closes the door behind himself and looks across the dark, empty room.

He dreams that night, of rain beating a dark tattoo across the skin of the land.

* * *

Harry had meant what he'd said to Draco.

Don't go back for them. Go back for yourself.

He wonders who he'd go back for.

He went back for everyone else, during the war. At least, that's what he likes to think. He did it for them, the faceless thousands, the Muggleborns crushed beneath the cruel hand of Voldemort's regime. The witches and wizards whom so desperately hoped for a better future. His fellow Hogwarts students, filling the halls of Hogwarts with their screams as the Carrows tortured them.

He did it for his friends. Hermione and Ron, always there no matter what. Luna, kidnapped and left to languish in the dark cellars beneath Malfoy Manor. Neville, shouting he'd never, never give up. Ginny, bright and beautiful, always battling on.

He did it for them. Of course.

...But some part of him always hoped he would join his parents. Strange; at the beginning of it all, he feared death. He dreaded his own mortality.

But towards the end, he kept thinking it would be nice. Pleasant, even, to simply let go. He'd be with his parents again, and Sirius, and — as the battle raged on — Remus. All of them smiling, welcoming him. *Dying?* Sirius had said. *Quicker and easier than falling asleep.*

Of course it is.

Coming home is easy.

But Harry has never come home.

Always, always, going away.

* * *

They drive on the next day, but not far — they stop somewhere between Poole and Exmouth, spending three days in the small parish of Salmouth-on-Sea. Harry doesn't mind. Sometimes they walk together along the beaches — so empty and windswept after Brighton's busy bustle — and other times Draco disappears by himself, to look at the shops or follow the coastal walks or visit the old lighthouse.

On the third day, Draco traces a finger along the maps of the south-west coast and says they're going to Cornwall.

"All right," Harry says.

They leave the coastline, joining the inland A31. Harry listens to the sound of the waves dying away. He'll miss it. The constant crash of the waves crescendoing ashore has, over the past few days, begun to felt like an echo of the blood rushing through his veins, keeping time by the beat of his heart.

"You're taking the direct route," Harry says somewhere around midnight as Draco drives through Launceston. "I thought you liked the scenic routes."

"Sometimes," Draco allows.

Silence eclipses them again. Harry's gazing out the window, watching the city lights blur past and fade into the distance, when Draco speaks again.

"Why'd you do it?"

Harry, nearly lulled to sleep by the fading streetlights, takes a moment to register the question.

"Do what?" he asks drowsily.

"Come with me."

"To Cornwall?" Harry's still trying to wake up properly.

"To anywhere, to everywhere," Draco says. "Why'd you fix my Renault? Learn to drive? Come with me on this trip? To Dover, to Brighton, to anywhere?"

To the heart of nowhere.

"For you, I suppose." Harry's on the cusp of surrendering to sleep.

"What?"

"For you," Harry repeats.

There's silence for a few minutes — or maybe more, Harry's not sure, for the call of sleep whispers to him and, soon enough, he succumbs to it.

* * *

He wakes up as they're driving along some side road in the middle of nowhere. He blinks and slowly draws himself back to wakefulness, watching the fields rush past.

Then —

"Wait," he says. "Stop."

Draco flicks his indicator on, although there's no other cars on the road. He's never reckless.

Do not mistake my confidence for recklessness.

He pulls over to the side of the road. "What is it, Potter?"

"Give me a minute," Harry says slowly. He opens the car door; Draco kills the engine.

The field stretches out before him, dark as a pot of spilled ink. But he knows this place.

Harry steps onto the shoulder of the road, feeling the loose gravel give way to soft earth. The stalks of wheat bend gently as he runs his hand over them. Summer has bleached the colour from the field; it's a pale gold, almost the colour of bones...

"The bones," Harry says.

"What?" Draco asks sharply. "There's bones?"

"No." Harry shakes his head, then he laughs. The sound is far louder than he expected. Rather than being absorbed into the land, it echoes far across the field, flows up into the clear night sky. "Not anymore. Last summer, when I was working another case, I found some bones here." He exhales in a quick huff of air. "Now here I am again."

He looks over at Draco and catches a quick flash of uncertainty crossing his face.

"All right?" Harry asks.

Draco hesitates.

It's all it takes for Harry to walk over to him and take his hand.

"It's real," he says, his hand tightening reflexively around Draco's. "Not a memory."

Draco looks down at their joined hands. "Sometimes I forget," he says quietly.

"I know."

"I can't quite tell."

"It's all right."

Harry's watch ticks quietly, marking the seconds. It's midnight and they stand together, holding hands, beneath a sky so clear that Harry can see the luminous stars of Orion, the interstellar plumes of the Milky Way. He can see Sirius burning bright, he can even see the faint star of Eltanin, the head of the Draco constellation.

Harry lowers his gaze to look across the field. Maybe it's the same place, maybe it's not.

It doesn't matter.

In incepto finis est.

* * *

They stop in Truro to refuel. Harry suggests an overnight stay. If his guess is correct, they're heading to Landewednack. By the time they arrive in that tiny parish, everything will be closed and they'll have to sleep in the car or remain awake all night.

The first few places they try have no vacancies. It's the start of the summer holiday season and Cornwall has proven a preference for many travellers. At last, they find an inn with a room available. Just one, but at least it's a twin share. Harry thinks Draco might make a fuss regardless, but Draco just shrugs and pays the security deposit. When they manage to locate the room — the numbering system has been forsaken in lieu of twee room names — Draco lays claim to the bed nearest the window and immediately opens the window. Harry wonders

if it's a habit. At Hogwarts, Seamus zealously left windows open regardless of season or weather, and it often led to quarrels amongst those less keen on the biting cold of Scotland's climate. In the end, Ron had — in a fit of frustration — used a ferocious application of Spellotape to permanently close the window.

There's a brief and childish tussle over the bathroom. Draco wins after clocking Harry over the head with his toothbrush.

"Fine! Have the first shower, then," Harry says sullenly. "Hope you slip on the tiles."

Draco just gives him a smug look and closes the door. A few seconds later, the hum of the shower begins.

Harry goes over to the window and shuts it just to annoy Draco.

* * *

Of course, once Harry's returned from his own shower, the window is open again. Draco is already asleep, apparently, despite the noise of drunken singing drifting from the neighbouring room and the lamp on Harry's bedside table casting a glow over the room. For some reason, Harry had always imagined Draco to be a light sleeper.

He sits on the edge of his bed and removes his glasses, listening to the familiar click of the frames as he closes the endpieces. This is a routine he's kept throughout his life, no matter what happened — whether it was falling asleep beneath the stairs at Privet Drive, or his first night at Hogwarts, or finally going to bed after the Battle of Hogwarts after they'd identified all the dead — at the end of the day, he's always removed his glasses and set them safely aside.

And later, of course, he'd place his wand beside the glasses. During the war, when he was hunting Horcruxes, he began sleeping with his wand beneath his pillow. Hermione wasn't fond of it — she said too many wizards did some serious accidental spell damage that way — but Harry wasn't willing to risk a night-time attack and a missing wand.

Now, he puts the wand beside his glasses, listening to the quiet tap it makes. There's something very reassuring about the fact he still has this wand. The same wand containing a phoenix feather donated by Fawkes, the same wand that was stolen by Crouch Jr. and conjured the Dark Mark. The same wand that destroyed Lucius Malfoy's wand, that cast Harry's first Patronus, that saved Sirius from the Dementors, that forced Voldemort's wand to give up the ghosts of the killing curses it had cast.

As he's falling asleep, he thinks he can hear the ocean.

* * *

When he wakes, Draco is gone. Harry isn't too bothered. Draco's toothbrush is still by the bathroom sink, his wand on his bedside table. Harry thinks it odd for Draco to leave his wand behind. He wonders whether Draco forgot it and, after a moment's hesitation, picks it up.

He's expecting to notice a change. The wand has switched allegiances again, of course, and there will be some resistance. But the wand seems to greet him like an old friend.

"*Lumos*," Harry whispers, just to see if it will resist.

But the wand immediately casts a white-blue glow across the room.

There's a faint click of a handle and, across the room, the door swings open. Harry fumbles quickly.

"*Nox*," he blurts out, dropping the wand.

Draco stares at Harry, then looks at his wand, then back to Harry again.

"That was subtle," Draco says after a long moment.

"I — I thought you'd forgotten your wand," Harry says, reddening.

"I went to breakfast," Draco says curtly, crossing the room and picking up his wand.

"What, and didn't take your wand with you?"

"This is purely Muggle accommodation. My wand isn't required to eat toast and read the newspaper."

"You should always take your wand with you, just in case," Harry says quickly. "What if you were attacked?"

"Calm down, Mad-Eye," Draco snaps. "And keep your hands off my wand."

Harry reddens even further. "I was just...I thought it'd be...unfriendly, that's all, so I thought I might try and cast a spell...I mean, it should have changed allegiances...you haven't had any resistance from it, have you?"

"Of course not." Draco disappears into the bathroom, apparently considering the conversation complete. A moment later, he starts brushing his teeth.

Harry miserably trails downstairs to eat breakfast.

* * *

They drive to Landewednack. Harry remains silent most of the trip until Draco loses his patience somewhere past Helston.

"What?" he snaps. Harry, gazing mindlessly down at the road atlas, frowns.

"Nothing."

"You've been sulking since we left Truro," Draco says tersely. Harry turns to stare at him.

"Me?" he says incredulously. "You're the one giving the silent treatment!"

"What are you talking about?"

"You're mad at me," Harry says with irritation. "Just because I cast one spell — and all right, I shouldn't have done it, I should've just — "

"You're seriously still sulking over that?" Draco demands. "Unbelievable, Potter. Yes, I was slightly annoyed at the time, but I was well over it by the time we checked out. Unlike you, I don't hold grudges."

"Don't hold grudges? Are you *insane*? When you were a teenager — "

"*Every* teenager holds grudges! Give me an example of one teenager who *wasn't* self-absorbed!"

Harry opens his mouth, then remembers Hermione and Ron excitedly kissing while a war waged around them. "Neville," Harry mutters instead, glaring at Draco. "Neville wasn't self-absorbed."

"Longbottom also enjoyed watering plants and wore argyle jumpers. Let's face it, he was never a teenager."

"Don't insult my friends!"

"How was *that* an insult? All I said was — "

"Yeah, I heard you! And at least I *have* friends — "

Draco veers sharply off the road and Harry panics for a moment.

"Are you *trying* to kill us?"

"No." Draco kills the engine, yanks the keycard from his pocket and tosses it at Harry. It takes Harry a moment to register what's happening as Draco opens the door, steps out, and slams it shut.

"Wait — where are you going?" Harry snaps, fumbling with his seatbelt.

Draco turns and looks at him. "Away from you," he says.

With that, he Disapparates.

Chapter 14

Harry sits in the passenger side of the Renault for a long time, listening to engine tick as it cools.

At first, he's still angry and begins mentally preparing the long rant he plans to deliver upon Draco's return.

But an hour passes and still Draco doesn't reappear, and soon Harry's anger melts into regret as he replays the argument. Draco had been irritable and snappish right from the start, but so had Harry. It could have been a simple miscommunication — *oh, I'm not angry with you*, Draco could have said.

But a little voice of reason adds, *you could have been a lot clearer too*.

Harry flushes guiltily, thinking how the argument had reminded him of their schoolyard rivalry. He'd been quick to feel defensive and take every remark as an insult. Now that he analyses the entire argument, he thinks that he would have interpreted Draco's comment about Neville as a harmless joke or even a playful jest had Ron or Hermione said it.

Well, he won't apologise, he thinks stubbornly. Draco hadn't been reasonable either, after all. Harry might take a little blame, but only, for example, a quarter.

No more, no less.

* * *

When two hours have passed since Draco disappeared, Harry grimaces when he thinks of what he said. *At least I have friends*.

That hadn't been fair at all, Harry thinks, feeling ashamed. It's just...Draco had sounded a lot like he used to whenever they were slinging insults at Hogwarts, and even though Draco's expression had been anger rather than a smirk, Harry had just sort of responded automatically with a personal insult...

Maybe he'll take half the blame. But no more.

* * *

When three hours have passed since Draco disappeared, Harry thinks he'll accept *all* the blame. He sits in the driver's seat and places his hands on the wheel; he stares unseeingly at the road atlas; he leaves the car and paces restlessly around it.

Come back, and I'll apologise, he thinks desperately. *I don't mind saying sorry if you're here*.

But Draco doesn't come back.

* * *

Come nightfall, Harry drives to Landewednack. It's a reluctant journey. He can't stop worrying.

He's worried over many things during his life. The knot of fear and anxiety in his stomach is certainly not unfamiliar. He knows the feeling well, whether from things like his first Quidditch match or the challenges of the Triwizard Tournament, whether from the safety of his friends or the future of Hogwarts students during the persecution of Muggleborns.

But it's certainly new to be worrying about Draco Malfoy.

Before he leaves, Harry carves the coordinates for Landewednack into a fence post, hoping that if Draco returns to the spot he will be able to locate Harry. Still, it's a long and lingering departure. Harry keeps thinking, *I'll wait just another minute*. And then, when the minute passes without sign of Draco, he thinks *just another minute*. At long last he leaves. But even as he starts the engine and turns the indicator on, he's vainly hoping for Draco to reappear.

But the nondescript and empty patch of road slowly disappears in the rear-vision mirror as Harry drives away.

* * *

In Landewednack, he finds a boutique guesthouse close to the coastal walking track. It appears to be of a markedly higher quality than the other places they've stayed. The receptionist chatters brightly to Harry about the weather and gives him the key for the room.

"You're on the second floor, on the eastern side," she says cheerfully. "Breakfast is served from seven to nine, and we have maps and brochures available for your perusal. Enjoy your stay."

"Thanks." Harry pauses. "I'm waiting for another guest to arrive, actually." *Just in case.*

"Tonight? We close in an hour."

"Tomorrow. Maybe the day after."

"Would you like to book a separate room? Your current suite is a twin share."

"No, that's fine." He gives her Draco's name and she assures him she'll 'send him through' if he arrives.

Harry finds his room with little difficulty. Draco would like it, he thinks. There's an expansive view over the emerald-green fields, leading to the dramatic drop of the cliffs. The ocean, bright in the setting sun of midsummer, looks tranquil and gentle, a far cry from the lashing waves of winter that last greeted Harry on this coast.

There are two double beds; he chooses the bed closest to the window, trailing a hand along the crisp linen. There's very little to unpack — a few sets of clothing he bought in Hopper's Crossing, his washbag with a toothbrush, razor and comb. Still, Harry spends a long time rearranging the items. When he's exhausted that activity, he roams the small room. There's a little balcony. An armchair in the corner of the room, a small writing desk in the other corner.

He's trying to distract himself, he knows. It's futile.

He goes to a nearby pub for dinner but he returns just an hour later, unable to enjoy himself despite the pleasant meal and scenic walk back to the guesthouse. The receptionist seems to guess at his question before he says a word.

"No guests," she says.

Harry nods and walks tiredly to his room.

* * *

He wakes early, before sunrise. He stands on the balcony and looks out across the dark line of the Cornish coast. The predawn air is crisp with a salted ocean breeze, but soon it will be tempered by a warm summer day. It's the seventeenth of June, Harry remembers.

The fifth of June...the day Draco arrived on his doorstep, tossed his cloak casually across the kitchen counter, and said *Come for a drive?*

It had been Draco's birthday. He would have turned twenty-five.

In the east, over the dark cliffs and the summer-soothed sea, the sky lightens.

Just a little.

* * *

Harry spends the morning walking along the coastal track. It's not the same, he thinks. He liked it better during his earlier visits. When the winter winds howled through the crumbling cliff edges, when the waves lashed across craggy rocks, when the sea sung a fierce song to a crescent moon.

Now, the land is bright and green, the sea sparkling beneath the light of summer. The abandoned holiday houses are filled once more with sunburned faces and laughing voices. As Harry follows the meandering track, he passes by at least three couples, a young family, and an elderly man with an equally elderly terrier.

Harry turns his face to the cloudless blue sky. He wishes it was winter again.

Or maybe he wishes it was night.

Or maybe he wishes it was three o'clock in the morning, and if he looks to his left he'll see Draco there. *I wanted to see where the land ended*, Draco will say.

Harry drops his gaze from the sky and looks west, to the Celtic Sea. Somewhere across the horizon, across the ceaseless tides and winding currents, it will meet the North Atlantic Ocean. And all the oceans meet each other, and all the land becomes a never-ending constellation circling the world.

Maybe he just wishes Draco was here.

* * *

Harry has responsibilities. Things he left behind. People waiting for him. He doesn't want Hermione or Ron to worry, of course, and he wants to send them another owl, let them know he's all right. But he finds himself caring very little about everything else.

That night, he stands on the little balcony and rests his hands on the wrought-iron railing, just to feel something solid. As if he's trying to ground himself, as if electricity is pouring through him.

He's not really sure he wants to be an Auror anymore. He always wanted to, back when he was sixteen and coded the world according to simple dualities. Good or bad, black or white, better or worse.

But of course, there's no dualities. Just degrees of difference.

It's a shame it took him so long to learn that.

* * *

Another early start the next day; he wakes up just after sunrise. It's still another hour before breakfast is served and he whiles away the time gazing out across the cliffs. It's all he ever seems to do: stand on a balcony and stare at the world. Trains and cliffs and lights and oceans.

He goes downstairs at seven and takes an hour to eat breakfast. His appetite seems to have vanished. He wonders if he should go back home, but there is no home. The apartment is nothing more than a box in the sky. Hogwarts — his first home, his real childhood home — is forever gone, accessible only by memory. It's home to a thousand other children now, and it's a bittersweet thought. And everywhere else in his life he's merely been a visitor, a stranger. He may have lived with the Dursleys for seventeen years, but it was never home; he may have considered The Burrow his home too, but the people have long gone — Ginny always travelling, the rest all moved out or married — and the rooms are empty.

He doesn't belong anywhere.

Except maybe in a Renault Mégane, burning down the M27 at midnight, tracing the lines of relationships across the land.

* * *

In the evening, Harry drives.

Or maybe he's not driving, maybe he's searching. For Draco, for a memory, for a state of mind, for home, for anywhere and everywhere.

He drives the long and winding country roads, past fields still tipped with sunlight in the late sunset of summer. The coast disappears behind him, the windblown cliffs giving way to open grassland. Harry can see the bright light of the sun in his rearview mirror, a brilliant and final spark of defiance streaming across the horizon. Soon, the bright sunset has faded to little

more than a fingerprint of pale purple, a soft bruise across the sky. In the south, the moon is a pale ghost in the faint light of dusk, and the first stars appear. That's what Harry always missed, when he lived in London. The smog-thick night never gave him a sky full of stars.

He returns to Landewednack, driving through the narrow streets. Past the church with the kissing gate, the small cottages, the bridge crossing a small inlet. The guesthouse — a restored country estate — sits at the end of a meandering lane, set against the backdrop of the Cornish coast. Although the night is still young, most of the windows are dark. The other guests will already be asleep, preparing for early beach walks and trips to the nearby coves.

Harry parks the Renault and makes his way past the reception, up the two flights of stairs, and to his empty room.

* * *

Later on that night, he leaves again to follow the winding thread of the south-west coastal track. The sun has long set; the smiling couples and elderly dog-walkers have long since retreated to their cosy beds and distant dreams.

There's a wide curve of a cliff nearby. It could be the same one he visited in Draco's memories, but Harry doesn't care to revisit it. Instead, he follows the slow descent of the path until he's standing in a sheltered cove. The shallow water washes gently over the silt and sand before retreating again, and Harry's reminded of how the ocean sometimes feels like an echo of his pulse.

He takes off his shoes and lets the waves wash over his feet. Further out, the waves curl until they crest and crash, rushing inland until nothing more than a rippled tide reaches Harry.

He should go home, he thinks. Buy a new apartment. Buy a hundred apartments, it doesn't matter. They all look the same. Go and return to his Auror job. Arrest Dark magic users. Greedy criminals, pureblood zealots, desperate teenagers, people needing quick money. It doesn't matter. They all look the same.

Before Draco, he knew exactly what he wanted. Maybe that's why he feels a little angry at Draco, Harry thinks. People can't just step into his life, change it, and step back out again. But past the anger, Harry thinks despairingly, is fear. It's terrifying to realise how much control Draco has over his life. With a handful of memories and a few conversations, he can change Harry's perspective; with a midnight road-trip, he can make Harry feel amazingly alive; with a brief argument and a quick Disapparation, he can make Harry worry for days.

The reception will be closed, Harry thinks. It doesn't matter. He'll Disapparate.

As the moon reaches its zenith and begins its almost-imperceptible descent, he vanishes with a faint pop.

* * *

And when he appears in the middle of the guesthouse room, Draco is there.

He's standing on the balcony, gazing out across the dark horizon of the Cornish coastline, but he turns to look at Harry after a moment.

"I'm sorry," Draco says.

It's odd to remember, Harry thinks, how he used to be infuriated by Draco's arrogance at Hogwarts. That sheer refusal to apologise, or admit wrong, or do anything vaguely resembling moral responsibility. *That little ferret wouldn't apologise if his life depended on it*, Ron had said once, and Harry had laughed. Seeing Draco Malfoy apologise, they had agreed, would be one of the most victorious moments in their lives.

There's nothing about this moment that feels victorious.

"You left," Harry says. "Four days." The words drop into the air like heavy stones.

"I know."

"You left. Do you have any idea — " Harry quickly cuts himself off, aware of the tremor beneath his voice. He's horrified at the idea of losing composure now and he strides to the bedside table, searching blindly for the keycard, something — anything — to focus on —

Draco steps away from the balcony, crosses the room in a few swift strides, and holds out the Renault keycard.

"Is that what you're looking for?"

Harry reaches out to take the keycard but before he realises what's happening, Draco's seized his hand and isn't letting go.

"I shouldn't have left," Draco says.

"Well...I shouldn't have insulted you," Harry mutters, distracted by the intensity of Draco's voice.

Draco pulls him closer, just a little, and Harry wonders — his pulse suddenly picking up and rushing along like a crashing wave — if Draco will kiss him.

But he doesn't. He just smiles faintly and says, "Is that an apology?"

"Yes," Harry says, but truth be told he's hardly paying attention to the conversation now. He doesn't think he's ever been this close to Draco and he wonders how he never noticed the faint flecks of slate-blue hiding in his grey irises.

"Then stay," Draco says, and Harry — gaze dropping to Draco's mouth — takes a moment to catch up to the words.

"What?" he asks at last.

"Stay," Draco repeats, letting go of Harry's hand and stepping away. He holds up the keycard. "You were going to leave, weren't you?"

"What?" Harry, suddenly aware that's he staring at Draco and apparently unable to construct coherent sentences, reddens slightly. "Oh. Right. No. I mean, yes."

Draco's faint smile is giving way to clear amusement. "Are you always this articulate when you're tired, Potter?"

Harry seizes upon the excuse with great relief. "Tired. Yes. Suppose I should get some rest."

Draco sets the keycard onto Harry's bedside table. "See you in the morning, then," he says.

"Where are you going?" Harry asks, feeling sudden trepidation.

"I'm going to have a shower," Draco says, picking a folded towel up from the end of the other bed and disappearing into the ensuite.

Harry thinks he'll stay awake for some time, but after he's climbed into bed he finds himself lulled by the sound of the waves, the sound of water humming, and soon he falls asleep.

* * *

He wakes up once, just before dawn. There's a faint grey light filtering through the windows, casting weak shadows through the room. The sun is only just beginning to rise, he thinks.

A few feet away from him, on the other bed, he can see the faint silhouette of Draco sleeping. He's facing away from Harry, curled in on himself as if trying to disappear, and Harry wonders if Draco ever has nightmares about the war.

Harry does, but so does everyone. Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Neville, all of them. All the people who saw friends and family die before them. All those who heard Voldemort's voice echoing throughout Hogwarts, the place they always considered an untouchable haven. All those who watched the castle crumble around them.

Some people like to talk about the war, some people don't. Harry doesn't. Ron doesn't either, but Hermione does. Ginny tried to speak about it with Harry, but gave up after her initial attempts were met with silence. It had been a point of contention between them for a while: *you'll feel better if you'd just talk about it*, Ginny had said, and Harry had pointed out, quite calmly, that he *did* feel better about it. It had happened, and that was that. Yes, of course there were nightmares, but everybody has nightmares. Falling from heights or being chased or dying in unpleasant ways, it's all the same. Everyone fears something.

You were always so terrified of failure.

Maybe Draco dreams of all the times he failed.

And maybe he views it as a failure — running away three years ago — but he came back, and then he ran away again after their argument — but he came back. Four days, but he came back and apologised.

He's *trying*, Harry thinks. And he's getting better.

And that's the opposite of failure.

* * *

Some time after sunrise, it begins to rain. Even the warmth of summer cannot deter the low clouds rolling in across the grey horizon. Harry goes for an early morning run, a habit leftover from his Auror training. He comes back, slicked with mud and sweat, and takes a hot shower. Draco is still asleep, he thinks, and he goes downstairs to breakfast. Typical that after Draco's returned, it rains. All this nice weather and all he did was walk moodily along cliffs and think of Draco, and now he's finally happy, it's pouring.

When he returns to the room, Draco is dressed and looking out the window, watching the raindrops race each other along the glass pane. Harry is strongly reminded of that day in the apartment, when Draco first spoke to him.

It's a nice view, but this isn't you, is it, Potter? This is nothing. A concrete box in the sky. You need something grounded. Something real.

Maybe the rain isn't so bad, Harry thinks. It reminds him of all those grey winter days and foggy mornings. All those nights driving, driving, with the ghost of Draco beside him.

We could go anywhere.

"You didn't bring me tea," Draco observes, snapping Harry from his reverie.

"Oh, was I supposed to?" Harry's amused.

Draco gives him a look. "No milk, one sugar."

Harry humours him. "All right. Anything else?"

Draco looks startled. "What?"

"Anything else?" Harry repeats, smiling. Draco gives him an annoyed look.

"I thought you'd say something about spoiled Malfoys giving orders," he says. "You're not supposed to agree and smile."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I'll try to be more predictable," Harry teases, refusing to be drawn into an argument. This is what happened last time, he reminds himself. Both of them taking everything far too seriously and getting defensive over nothing. "Let me guess, now's the part where I storm off and you sulk for hours?"

"I don't sulk. I reflect on my life," Draco says loftily.

"And I don't storm off, I make a strategic departure," Harry says.

Draco glances away, but Harry can see a smile hiding in the corner of his mouth.

It's odd, Harry thinks, how he and Ron always thought hearing Draco apologise would be their moment of victory.

But Harry feels most victorious here and now, watching Draco smile.

* * *

Draco's getting better.

It's a strange thing to think, because Draco wasn't ever sick, Harry thinks. There were never any symptoms, never any illness. But he's getting better somehow.

It's something about the way he watches the rain, and tells Harry that every raindrop has a different diameter. Or the way he decides he wants a nice bottle of wine and drives for half an hour to Helston because he says all the local pubs only have 'watered-down bleach'. And then he changes his mind anyway, and chooses a bottle of twenty-five-year Glenmorangie.

"How much did that cost?" Harry asks as they're driving back to Landewednack.

"The exact price," Draco says, "of your ex-fiancée's engagement ring."

Yes, Harry thinks. Draco is getting better.

* * *

Later in the evening Draco, lying across one of the beds, reads a well-thumbed book entitled *Flowers For Algernon*. Harry tilts his head and reads the blurb.

"That sounds depressing," he observes. "And boring."

"Thank you, Potter, for that literary criticism. Why don't you run along and finish reading the 'Top Ten Female Players' article in Quidditch Weekly?"

"I do read, you know."

"That's a lie. I'm not counting magazines."

"Well — "

"Or road atlases."

"Fine, but — "

"Or books that other people have left lying around and you've picked them up, skimmed a few paragraphs, and put them back down again."

Harry starts laughing. Draco drops the book and rolls over onto his back, looking up at Harry.

"What's so funny?" he demands.

Harry shakes his head, still laughing. "It's like you know me."

"I know lots of things about you." Draco grins and Harry's heart seems to stutter for a second. It's an...interesting angle, he thinks — him standing by the bed, Draco lying across it grinning up at him — and he's caught between disappointment and relief when Draco sits up and reaches for the book, setting it onto the bedside table.

"Do you?" Harry asks vaguely, still a little distracted.

"I know you're fond of standing on balconies, drinking neat whiskeys," Draco says, picking up the bottle of Glenmorangie next to the book. "Shall we?"

Harry stares at him, all amusement forgotten. "But — you could only see me when I was in your memories, or going through your possessions..."

"*Near* my possessions, I said. And if I recall correctly, you used to carry my driver's licence around sometimes. And my car keycard was frequently in your pocket."

All those times, standing on the balcony and gazing at the world, and Draco was there with him...

"What else did you see, then?" Harry demands.

"Nothing much, really. You're quite boring. Stand around staring into space a lot."

"Same as you," Harry retorts.

"I suppose we have something in common then." Draco lifts one shoulder in a careless shrug. "Fetch some glasses."

"What am I, the house-elf?"

"*I'm* not going. Yesterday, when I asked the receptionist if I could book in, she gave me a thirty-minute dissertation on the local walking trails."

"You know, normal people might find that welcoming. That's what locals do. Friendly chats."

"Then off you go, Potter, and have a friendly chat with the endearing locals."

Harry concedes defeat and leaves. He reappears forty minutes later. Draco's smiling.

"Shut up," Harry says.

"I didn't say anything."

"I thought I'd be trapped forever. She kept going on about the native plants along the coastal tracks."

"Did she? How fascinating." Draco takes the glass tumblers from Harry's hands, his fingers brushing fleetingly along Harry's.

"Yes, fascinating," Harry says dryly, watching as Draco sets the glasses down and opens the bottle of Glenmorangie.

"You have it neat, if I recall," Draco says. "I'll take mine on the rocks." He taps his wand against the glass of water on the bedside table, and the water instantly transforms into ice cubes.

"You do know that chilling the whiskey suppresses flavour and aroma?" Harry says conversationally.

Draco pauses halfway through pouring Harry's glass and stares at him.

"What?" Harry asks.

"Sometimes," Draco says, "you can be quite...surprising."

Harry hides a smile as Draco pours two neat whiskeys.

* * *

They stand on the balcony, despite the bruised clouds rolling in across the horizon. The sun has set early, sinking under the weight of rain and grey sky. Harry leans on the railing, glass in one hand, and looks at the churning waves of the ocean.

"Storm's coming," he observes, taking another sip of the Glenmorangie. He waits for an acerbic remark from Draco — *really, Potter? How observant of you* — but Draco is silent. Harry looks at him. He suits a storm. His pale complexion and white-blond hair seem almost luminescent against the charcoal-grey clouds.

"I like storms," Draco says at last. He looks down at his glass, then downs the rest of it.

"Draco," Harry says quietly, recognising the signs. The abstract way Draco speaks, the way he stares closely at objects.

"The summer storms always felt like coming home."

"Draco," Harry repeats. "This is real."

Draco looks at his empty glass. "I know."

"Do you?"

A pause, then Draco reaches out and takes Harry's hand. "Yes," he says.

Their rule. *When you were trapped in time, we couldn't make contact, could we? So this must be real.* A simple little strategy. Necessary contact, for the sake of reality. That's all.

Harry's walking a dangerous line and he knows it.

He tightens his grip around Draco's hand as they stand together to watch the storm roll in.

Chapter 15

The storm gives way to rain and when Harry wakens the next morning, the sky is a pale grey. It starts to rain lightly during his morning run, and when he trails back into the guesthouse — leaving sodden footprints behind him — the receptionist looks dismayed.

Nevertheless, it doesn't deter Draco, who — after a leisurely breakfast — insists on a coastal walk.

"You can go. I'm staying here," Harry says.

"Oh, I forget. You still have at least seven pages of *Quidditch Weekly* left to pore over," Draco retorts, but there's no malice to his words and Harry just laughs.

"Don't fall off a cliff," he says.

"Thanks for that advice, Potter, I'll write it down so I don't forget."

Draco leaves the room, taking his wand with him. He has a way of using his fingertips to catch the wand and flick it into his sleeve, where it stays as if adhering to the material. It's a very neat trick, Harry thinks, and seems even quicker than the method the Aurors were taught.

Once Draco's gone, Harry turns his attention to the copy of *Quidditch Weekly* he picked up from the stationery shop in Hopper's Crossing. He's read nearly every article twice. There's a page devoted to Ginny in the 'Top Ten Female Players' section. The page is peppered with photographs of her and references to 'Harry Potter's ex-fiancee'. That annoys Harry. Ginny's struggled for years to carve a name for herself, but at countless sports interviews and Quidditch articles, Harry's name has always been dragged in by enthusiastic interviewers. Now it seems even though they're no longer in a relationship, she's still having the same problems.

Harry wonders idly how the papers represented the story. Though they broke up at Christmas, the press didn't start speculating until February, and Hermione told him Rita Skeeter officially broke the news in late April. Harry wouldn't know. He doesn't read the paper, relying instead on Ron and Hermione to keep him updated on the happenings in the wizarding world. Otherwise, he knows, he'd be reading page after page about his apparent personal life. At least there wasn't anything malicious in the articles, Hermione assured him. Mostly daft and outrageous reports, like Harry claiming ownership over their apparent pet dragon or Ginny selling her engagement ring through the *Daily Prophet* classifieds.

Of course, there would no doubt be far more outrageous reports if anyone found out he'd gone missing suddenly.

He's always shied away from the media, and he's notoriously difficult to pin to paper. Hermione and Ron will cover for him, but his work colleagues will no doubt notice his

unexplained absence and whisper among themselves. And soon, the whispering will reach the ever-alert antennae of Rita Skeeter.

Harry doesn't even think about Draco going to the papers. Draco wouldn't do that. He doesn't know why, but he just knows Draco wouldn't do it. When they go back...

When they go back.

Harry sits on the edge of Draco's bed. It's a sentence he's trying to avoid thinking about. *When we go back*. It seems strange to imagine. Of course his friends will be desperately worried and he'll have to visit them at once — a pang of guilt echoes in Harry's heart — and he'll have to explain his absence to his annoyed supervisors, and deal with curious colleagues —

— but then he thinks of the apartment, the concrete box in the sky, with its dusty countertops and empty rooms, the silence that weighs heavy on his sleepless nights.

Harry stands up suddenly and reaches for the Renault keycard as if it's a liferaft.

* * *

By the time Draco returns in the afternoon, Harry's gone for a drive, returned, and settled down with *Flowers For Algernon*.

"Just remember, they're only words. They can't hurt you," Draco says conversationally, dropping his wet jacket onto Harry's bed.

"Mm," Harry says distractedly, turning the page.

Draco tries to engage Harry in conversation a few more times, then gives up and disappears again to find lunch. He returns three hours later with a new book.

"Went to a bookstore," Draco says, noticing Harry's inquisitive look. "Seeing as you stole my only book."

"I was right," Harry says mournfully, pouring himself a glass of the Glenmorangie. "It was depressing." He eyes Draco's new book. "Is that one depressing too?"

"I don't know. I haven't read it yet."

"What's it about?"

"An ivory merchant goes to Africa for a lovely little holiday," Draco says lightly. Harry gives him a look.

"And...?"

"...and becomes disillusioned with imperialism after witnessing the cruelty and corruption of the greedy European colonialists, eventually becoming terrified of the darkness and the challenge to his world order that it represents."

Harry groans. "I *knew* it was depressing. Do you read anything that doesn't cause an existential crisis?"

"I read a brochure yesterday."

"Was it about life not having any intrinsic value?"

"Very funny, Potter." Draco turns away, but the corner of his mouth is already curling upwards.

Harry laughs.

* * *

The next morning, they meander along the coastal trail for an hour or so. When the sun begins to rise, they stop to look over the water. Draco stands by the edge of the cliff, facing the sea. Harry — finally feeling the fatigue of the miles and the hours — is sitting with his back against a large rock.

The sunrise is little more than a finger-smudge of pale blue, glimmering in the dark sky, but then it slowly brightens into a wide beacon of gold, like a snitch hovering on the horizon. And at last, it casts the first rays of brilliant light over the waves, outlining Draco sharply against the sky.

Harry stares at Draco's silhouette for a long time, and it's only when Draco turns his head to gaze into the sun that Harry realises he's trying to pinpoint the exact moment he fell in love with Draco Malfoy.

It's a terrifying feeling. It's easy to lust after someone, to match their face to a missed heartbeat or a sharp intake of breath. It's easy to say, *I want them because of the colour of their eyes, the lines of their body.*

It's something else entirely to say, *I want them because of the way they rest their hands on a steering wheel, the way they gaze out a window, the way they say my name.*

Harry tries to remind himself of Ginny, of the soft and safely feminine curves of her body. Or even Cho, or...

...but there was never anyone else. Just a brief crush on Cho, and a relationship with Ginny that quickly flattened out into a uncertain connection that was lost over time and distance.

Harry places his hands flat against the earth, if only to feel something solid beneath him, if only to feel earthed somehow.

The sun kisses the air with the first real warmth of summer.

* * *

They leave Landwednack the next day. Draco drives. Harry listens to the sound of the ocean fade behind them, but he doesn't look back.

The road goes on and on. The sandy cliffs give way to flat woodland, the trees a lush green under the bright sunlight, and the small parishes flash past. They stop for lunch in Launceston and Harry traces the lines of the map as Draco finishes his coffee. Weston-super-Mare is a couple of hours away, he thinks. The same place his mother grew up, and he never went there. When he was little, he used to think England was enormous. Other children spoke of summer holidays spent in Brighton, or trips to the picturesque hills of the Cotswolds, or school excursions to see Wiltshire's premier attraction: the ancient monument Stonehenge. But to a young Harry, always confined to the neat rows of houses and orderly streets of Little Whinging, these places seemed like fantastical mysteries, strange and wondrous locations of which he could only dream. In his mind, the beaches of Brighton were a tropical paradise, and the Cotswolds a rugged wilderness with bottomless lakes and soaring mountains, and Stonehenge towered over the land like a ring of skyscrapers.

They drive on and on.

"Look," Harry says suddenly, an hour after they'd left Launceston. He straightens up in his seat and points.

"Look at what?"

"Those fields," Harry says, awestruck. Fields of bright yellow line the narrow road, stretching away until the brilliant yellow meets the azure sky.

Draco glances at him. "They're just canola fields."

"Look at those colours."

"Don't tell me you've never seen a canola field? They're everywhere."

"They look amazing." Harry's undeterred by Draco's dismissive tone, but Draco suddenly slows the car and pulls over to the side of the road. "What?" Harry asks, forgetting the fields for a moment and wondering if Draco's angry about something. But Draco just gestures to the fields.

"Don't you want to have a look?"

Harry opens the car door, walking around the bonnet to join Draco on the other side. For a moment they stand together, gazing out across the fields of sunshine-yellow. A starling settles atop a fence-post, its wings fluttering in the warm afternoon sun; nearby, a grasshopper leaps from stalk to stalk. Harry studies the canola flowers, watching the petals sway slightly in a faint breeze. Draco leans back against the warm car and Harry can hear the engine ticking as it cools.

"You've never seen a canola field?" Draco asks again. Harry shakes his head.

"No." He looks away, watching the starling. "I lived with Muggle relatives. They didn't like taking me places." He can feel Draco's gaze on him and waits in the long silence.

"This is an early yield," Draco says at last, nodding at the field. "We should come back in August, when most of the spring-sown crops will be harvested." He puts his hands in his pockets and leans back, looking overhead at the cloudless blue sky. "When I was a child, I knew summer was coming to an end when the canola fields turned from bright yellow to dull brown." He smiled faintly, still gazing up into the endless blue. "And the hay meadows would be cut, and overrun with wildflowers. That's when I knew summer was ending."

Harry looks at him, at the sun illuminating his outline, the angle of his jaw, the tilt of his chin, the way the sunlight casts ever-so-faint shadows of his eyelashes over his cheekbones.

"Did you like the summer? In Wiltshire?"

Draco glances at him, still smiling faintly. "Of course. It was my home, wasn't it? All those days I spent running through the wheat-fields and climbing trees...I used to catch frogs by the creek, and make little sailboats from old copies of the Daily Prophet...I always thought those little boats would eventually find their way to the ocean. They might leave England, but I never would."

"You couldn't leave England?" Harry frowns, but Draco shakes his head.

"Never wanted to. When you're a child...the world is as big as your bedroom, isn't it? The universe is a three-mile diameter around your childhood home. Knowing every river, every field, seems like an impossible task. Let alone conquering the counties beyond Wiltshire."

"Kind of makes me wish I'd grown up in Wiltshire," Harry comments. Draco looks at him, then glances back across the field, to that crisp horizon of gold meeting blue.

"I'll take you there," he says.

"I'd like that."

They both turn, as if reaching some unspoken agreement, and open the car doors again. Draco takes the driver's side again and Harry watches his eyes flick to the rear-vision mirror, watching the canola fields fade into the distance.

"Tell me more about Wiltshire," Harry says impulsively, and Draco speaks easily of the childhood summers spent exploring hay meadows, of skylarks flitting from field to field, of green woodlands. Harry listens to every word, mesmerised by the descriptions, the faint sketches of lost summers that, as a child, he could only ever dream about experiencing. In his mind's eye, he sees the scenes unravel: Draco, as a young child, carefully folding boats from newspaper and sending them downstream; playing in fields of wheat, swishing a stick as he orders imaginary soldiers about; watching the combine harvesters churn through the canola fields, lopping the bright yellow flowers and leaving rows of broken stalks. But, he realises, he always pictures Draco alone. Of course, he has no brothers or sisters, and Lucius seems a distant, largely absent father figure. No friends either, Harry realises. Certainly, Draco would not have made friends with the local Muggle children.

"It must have been lonely," Harry says suddenly. He hadn't meant to say that last thought aloud, but he had.

The old Draco would have darkened with anger, he thinks, or sputtered with indignation, immediately retorting that he had loads of friends, thank you very much, and a very expensive house and house-elves and was never left wanting for anything.

But Draco just exhales sharply, pushing the air between his teeth, and — without taking his gaze off the road ahead — says, "It was."

They're both silent for a long time after that. The highway is a long, straight line cutting across the land, never breaking, never winding nor looping, and Harry watches the shadows lengthen as the afternoon fades into dusk.

They never really saw each other alone, Harry realises. Most of the time they were surrounded by people when they encountered each other in the halls of Hogwarts. In classrooms where their friends stood behind them, stony-faced, like rows of soldiers. He can count on one hand the number of times they encountered each other completely alone.

He thinks of Draco facing Dumbledore, his wand shaking, an expression of desperation on his face. His face, gaunt and petrified, in the visions Harry saw through Voldemort. Staring at that same face, tracked with tears, reflected in the mirror of a Hogwarts bathroom. *No one can help me*, he had said.

Always alone.

"Do you think we could have ever been friends at Hogwarts?" Harry asks impulsively.

"No," Draco says at once, and hurt blossoms like a bruise in Harry's heart. Draco glances in the rear-vision mirror before he changes lanes, overtaking a slow car. When he speaks next, his voice is softer. "For that to happen, we'd have to reverse eight years of assumptions and change our beliefs, our values." Draco shakes his head. "Impossible."

"Not impossible," Harry argues.

"Ever the annoying optimist," Draco says wryly.

"You changed," Harry retorts. "Don't lie, I know you did. You started off openly bragging about being Voldemort's servant," — he notes Draco still winces at the name — "and being proud of following orders. Two years later, completely different story. You hated being a Death Eater, you were ashamed of the orders you followed."

"I didn't hate it," Draco snaps.

Harry falls silent at that. He doesn't know how to respond without an argument boiling to the surface.

Draco drives on. Evening has long since melted into night, and the headlights flash past on the opposite lane. Harry watches the monotonous patterns of light flick across the asphalt.

Draco inhales slowly, then exhales. "I hated it," he says. A pause, then he repeats himself. "I hated it. I *hated* it. I hated him, and I hated Aunt Bellatrix, and the Carrows, and Rowle, and all the rest of them. Every last one. I couldn't stand speaking to my own father, and I was

afraid of Greyback — and even more afraid of Nagini. Every moment, I hated it." Draco starts to laugh. "I hated it," he repeats one last time, still laughing, and Harry looks at him with concern.

"Are you okay?"

"Fine."

"You're laughing," Harry points out uncertainly. "Was there a joke?"

"No." Draco shakes his head, smiling. "Just...ever keep a secret so long? — those words you think in your head, over and over, but you'll never speak them aloud, and — " He breaks off, then shakes his head again, but Harry understands.

The highway unravels before them, mesmerising in its unbroken lines, the headlights cutting through the night like an unguarded truth.

* * *

Harry wakes up. He vaguely remembers falling asleep, forehead resting against the cool glass, watching the inky darkness on each side of the highway. Every now and again, a car would flash past.

The car is parked. He blinks and looks around. They're in the middle of nowhere, it seems. Darkness stretches away in every direction. Harry fumbles with seatbelt, unbuckling it before reaching for the handle of the car door.

Draco is standing a little distance away, staring out across the dark fields. He turns and looks at Harry, and for a moment Harry's transported across space and time. Back to the wild winter winds of the Cornish coast, standing on a cliff at midnight. For a long moment, Harry can't look away from Draco's clear grey eyes.

"Why'd we stop?" Harry asks at last, shaking away the memories.

Draco turns away again. "We're here."

"Where?"

"Wiltshire." He points. "This is where I used to play, as a child."

"Right here?"

Draco nods. "These exact fields."

Harry steps closer to the field, his shoes crunching over gravel before he steps onto soft grass.

"These fields," he repeats, slowly reaching out and brushing a hand over the tall canola flowers. Still green and young, they haven't yet reached the brightness of Cornwall's canola fields. Harry stares intensely across the field, his eyes narrowed with focus. As though, if he

looks hard enough, he might see the ghost of a young Draco racing between the canola plants.

Harry grins and takes a step forward.

"Where are you going?" Draco asks, sounding slightly startled.

"Away from you," Harry says, and takes off.

It's one thing he and Draco have in common: a lonely childhood. The only time Harry ever got close to playing games like tag was when he found himself running for his life as a jeering Dudley waddled after him, or Aunt Marge's bulldogs snapped at his heels. It's a very different experience to be racing through a field, the night sky clear and crisp above him, listening to the sound of light footsteps behind him. Draco's voice cuts across the field.

"You're *insane*, Potter! Are you seriously playing games — "

"*We're* playing games, you mean," he calls over his shoulder. "*You're* chasing *me*, after all."

"I am *not* chasing you! Get back here!"

"Make me!" Harry laughs and picks up speed; behind him, the footsteps quicken. Harry takes a sharp left, feeling the thin stalks of the canola plants feather through his fingers. He zig-zags his way across the field, running faster and faster until all he can hear is the blood thumping in his ears, the effort of breathing in his throat, and then he pauses. He can't hear footsteps behind him anymore.

Harry turns around. The field seems empty, the canola plants swaying gently in the night air. He frowns, his brow creasing, and drops his hands to his side, his fingers slowly uncurling. The silent night gives nothing away; not the slightest footstep nor the faintest draw of breath. Harry takes a step backwards.

Someone grabs him; he shouts out and nearly jumps out of his skin. Behind him, Draco starts laughing, his arms still around Harry.

"You *shrieked*," Draco manages between fits of laughter, his voice unnervingly close to Harry's ear. Harry reddens.

"I did not! I — I shouted, that's all. You startled me," he adds accusingly.

"You shrieked, admit it. For a moment, I thought I'd grabbed Astoria."

"Oh, very funny! Hey — where are you going?" Harry asks as Draco drops his arms and turns, poised to flee.

"Catch me." And Draco's bolting away, quick as a fox, racing through the field again.

Harry starts running.

* * *

Half an hour later, they're slowly walking back to the Renault together. Harry can feel his pulse slowing, like a car engine cooling, and his breathing becoming slow and even again.

"You're quicker than you look," he tells Draco.

"You're not."

Harry shoves at Draco, making him stumble slightly, but Draco just regains his balance and smiles at him. No, not smiles, Harry thinks, watching the faint curve of Draco's lips. Smirks. Harry hadn't realised how much he missed that smirk.

They reach the car and Harry takes the passenger side, Draco the driver's side. The engine thrums to life, the tyres crunch over the gravel.

Harry looks in the side-mirror, watching the fields fade into darkness.

* * *

He wonders where they're going. He was supposed to be navigating, but he fell asleep somewhere in Devon and Draco's clearly got a destination in mind. Harry glances at his watch: eight o'clock. Surely they'll stop for the night soon?

But on and on they go. Fields and trees flash past, stars reflected in rivers, and every now and again they pass through a small village, a little collection of lights. They're in the heart of nowhere, Harry thinks, leaning his forehead against the cool glass of the window. They pass through another village and Harry sees a playground for a fleeting moment. Swings swaying slightly in the warm summer night, the chains creaking, and he wonders if this is the same place he parked the Renault so many months ago when Draco gave him memories. Harry smiles, thinking that Draco gave him more memories tonight. There was no Legilimens spell, no pensieve, but Draco gave him memories regardless.

On and on they go.

* * *

Draco asks Harry to take over the driving.

"I'm going to have a nap," he announces as they switch seats.

"I don't even know where we're going," Harry argues, and Draco picks up the road atlas.

"You know how to get to Birmingham?"

"Not from here, no — what, Birmingham? We're going there?" Harry asks blankly. "That's ages away!"

"Oh, is this what happens when I try to do something nice for you?" Draco says. "Now, get onto the M40 and stay on it until you reach Hockley Heath. Then take the M6."

"Wait — why are we going to Birmingham?"

"Wake me up when we're there."

Harry pulls a face at Draco, but it's fruitless. Draco has already closed his eyes.

Harry sighs and lifts the handbrake.

There's something soothing about driving at night, he thinks. The road unwinds before him, the headlights fading away into the darkness ahead. Draco sleeps beside him, forehead resting against the window, his breathing deep and even. He sleeps better now, Harry thinks. The tension isn't lining his face now, like it did back at Landewednack.

A lone car appears in the distance. Harry watches the headlights rush past. His watch beeps — nine o'clock — and he notices the fuel gauge is nearing reserve. He pulls into the next petrol station and Draco wakes momentarily.

"There yet?" he murmurs, voice thick with sleep.

"No."

Draco goes back to sleep.

Harry drives on and on, until the dotted lights of the country towns and parishes have given way to the city lights of Birmingham. He pulls over on the outskirts of the city and hesitates to wake Draco. After a moment, he touches a hand to Draco's shoulder.

"Draco. We're here."

He stirs, opening his eyes slowly, his gaze immediately locking onto Harry. He smiles, then, and Harry would give anything to capture that unguarded smile forever. Then he seems to wake properly.

"I'll drive again."

"I thought this was our destination?"

"Birmingham? What sort of sadist do you think I am?"

Harry laughs and opens the car door, swapping seats once more with Draco.

"Want me to navigate?"

"No. You can just sleep."

"What if I'm not tired?" Harry asks.

"Then you can reflect on the poor decisions you've made throughout your life."

"Is that what you do?"

"Go to sleep," Draco repeats.

Harry thinks he won't, just to spite Draco, but despite his best efforts he falls asleep somewhere west of Shrewsbury.

* * *

When Harry wakes next, it's dark. Completely dark. Even when they were driving through the countryside of Wiltshire, it wasn't dark like this. Not a single light, not even the distant glow of a house.

The car door opens.

"Harry."

He looks up. Draco stands there, holding out a hand. Harry pauses a moment, then accepts it. He stands and steps away from the car, following Draco.

They're standing in the middle of the sky, he thinks for a moment, his heart missing a beat. For a moment, he feels dizzy. Stars below and above, and any moment Draco will step into the air, lead Harry to the constellations, to the fine dust and star-scattered clouds of the night. He reflexively grips Draco's hand tightly for a moment, as if afraid that he'll fall if he lets go.

Draco looks over his shoulder and smiles; Harry takes another tentative step forward, so they're standing beside each other, and in that moment he realises the stars above are merely mirrored in the still waters of a vast lake. Mountains rise each side of the lake, like cresting waves, and even now — in the height of summer — he can see the pale glow of snow on the uppermost peaks. For a moment, Harry thinks he's standing on the edge of the world. That crisp, clear darkness that rolls on forever until sky and land become one; the forests, the valleys, the thin crescent moon that seems to balance on his heart.

"Where are we?" Harry asks at last.

"Snowdonia."

It sounds like a name that belongs in a story, Harry thinks. Some fairytale realm, or a kingdom in a faraway world. Harry gazes into the lake, watching the stars glimmer across its surface. A shooting star briefly flashes across the sky, leaving a fading trail of light.

"I've been here before," Draco says suddenly. "When I was in the past."

Harry's heart misses another beat; he holds his breath for a long moment. Draco hasn't spoken of his time spent in the past, not once, and Harry never asked — much like his friends never asked about the war. Things like that — memories like that — should be given away like careful presents, and only to those who never demand them. Harry realises he's still holding Draco's hand, but he doesn't dare let go now, for fear it will somehow make Draco silent again.

"Hogwarts," Draco says after a long moment, his gaze still upon the vast and distant mountains, his eyes narrowed slightly in memory. "That's where I ended up. I don't know

where my father had intended to go, but that's where I went. Hogwarts." He pauses. "1965. The year my father started attending."

Three years, Harry thinks. Three long years.

"I didn't realise I'd been splinched. Not at first. I thought I was dead, a ghost, because nobody could see or hear me. I couldn't touch anything. But then I kept getting what I thought were visions — strange overlaps, where I'd see two scenes at once — and I realised I was seeing both past and present." Draco falls silent for a long time, staring out across the forests and valleys. "It started driving me insane. It was like two different people talking inside my head. So I left. I wanted to find a place where nothing changed." Draco gestures, his hand sweeping over the view. "This was the closest I got."

They stand in silence for a long time, standing together, stars reflected above and below, and Harry feels like he's running on air.

* * *

Later on, when they're leaving — Harry driving, Draco poring over the road atlas — Harry thanks him.

"For what?" Draco looks genuinely puzzled.

"For taking me to Snowdonia, of course."

"Oh." Draco turns a page. "Well, you said your Muggle relatives never took you places. Maybe we'll go back in the winter, when you can see proper snow."

Harry's breath catches for a second. He stares at Draco, then remembers he's still driving and looks quickly at the road again.

Maybe we'll go back.

The headlights cut through the dark night, the road lined with ancient Welsh oaks, their branches arching over the sky.

"I've never been to a national park before," Harry says, wondering how old the trees are. He heard once that oak trees could live for two thousand years. "I bet there aren't any as good as Snowdonia, though."

Draco straightens up, eyes suddenly bright with interest. "Brecon Beacons, you'd really like that. It's in South Wales. The stars are always perfectly clear — it's a designated International Dark Sky Reserve. Or if you prefer mountains, we'd go to Cairngorms, where the mountains have been sculpted by ice-age glaciers. Or if you prefer rivers and waterfalls, there's the Peak District. Of course, if you want rugged cliffs and sea arches, there's Pembrokeshire Coast." Draco pauses to give Harry a calculative look. "But I think you like the stars."

Harry wonders what Draco prefers. The sweeping night sky, or the roaring ocean, or the vast and ancient mountains, the beasts of stone that will stand there long after the last sign of humanity has faded from the earth?

I wanted to find a place where nothing changed.

Draco would like the mountains best, Harry thinks.

"Am I right?"

Harry glances at Draco. "What?"

"Am I right?" Draco repeats. "You prefer the stars?"

"I like the stars," Harry affirms.

Draco smiles, a small and satisfied smile at his correct guess.

Harry wonders if he might have seen Draco's constellation tonight, the polar stars shining bright over the mountains and valleys.

Chapter 16

Draco takes over the driving at Birmingham again. Harry isn't sure where they're going, but he doesn't mind.

"Get some sleep," Draco tells him and Harry nods. He faces Draco, his eyes barely open, just enough to observe Draco without him noticing. Every now and again, the orange glow of a streetlight fades over the car, or the passing headlights of another car, illuminating Draco for a second. Always looking ahead, he thinks, gazing at Draco's face. Never looking away.

He falls asleep with his gaze still lingering on Draco.

* * *

When he wakes next, it's a slow surface to reality, the blurred lights gradually coming into focus. Intersections dotted with traffic lights, bright streetlights, cars flashing past. The sound of trains rumbling nearby. Harry straightens up in his seat, blinking slowly. London, he realises. They're in London. His watch beeps: three in the morning. But this city never sleeps and the traffic is busy even now. Harry wonders how many people are on their way to Heathrow, on their way to a thousand destinations he can only dream about.

"Where are we going?" he murmurs, voice still raspy with sleep. Draco glances at him.

"You're going home."

The warm sleepiness falls away from Harry like a cloak. He looks at Draco, his heartbeat quickening.

"Home...?" he repeats.

"Your apartment," Draco says.

The concrete box in the sky. Is this where it all ends? The flat sandy beaches of Sutton-on-Sea, the bright bustle of Brighton, the soaring and windswept cliffs of the Cornish coastline, the canola meadows of Wiltshire, the star-filled sky of Snowdonia —

— and it all ends here, at an empty apartment with dusty furniture and blank walls?

In incepto finis est.

Well, of course this is how it will end. This was borrowed time, this trip. A journey stolen, moments that weren't supposed to happen, memories that were never supposed to be given. And now Draco will go back to the manor, to his fussing mother and doting house-elves, and Harry will go back to his blank white apartment and stand on the balcony and drink scotch, and maybe if he listens closely enough he might hear someone whistling blow the wind southerly, southerly, southerly...

In the deep and pristine wilderness of Snowdonia, it had felt like the moon had balanced on his heart, light and clear as the sky itself. Here, in London, it seems to weigh on him, heavy as lead, making it hard to breathe. The weight only grows heavier as they leave the highway and follow increasingly familiar roads. At last, they've reached the apartment block; Draco parks the Renault with the same easy grace he always has, whether he's standing on the edge of a cliff in Cornwall or taking Harry's hand to show him a lake full of stars. For a moment, Harry's heart lifts as Draco walks with him to the stairwell, but then he remembers he's been driving for hours. A cup of coffee before he leaves again would be a basic courtesy, at least.

It feels strange to be back in the apartment again. It takes him ages to find his keys, and longer yet to open the door. The air has a faintly dusty scent to it, Harry thinks as he flicks on the light switch, illuminating the white walls, the empty shelves, the kitchen counters without clutter. The curtains are all open and beyond the river, the city lights twinkle. Harry slowly sets his keys upon the empty counter.

"Coffee? Haven't got any milk," Harry adds, but Draco shakes his head.

"Tea's fine."

Harry wasn't away for long, but for some reason he has trouble remembering where everything is. Was the sugar kept on the second or third shelf? He opens a cupboard to fetch mugs, but it turns out to be full of glasses. He may as well be in the house of a stranger. While they're waiting for the kettle to boil, Draco takes a seat at the island counter and trails a hand along the edge of it.

"There was a Christmas tree here, once," he observes.

Harry glances up. "You remember...?"

"Not really. It's hard to remember. But there were little lights, weren't there?"

Yes. Harry remembers that quiet moment, buried in the depths of December. Draco, standing alone, illuminated by the faint glow of the Christmas lights. Harry had reached for him and he had faded like a ghost. Before their hands even had the chance to touch. Harry looks down at his own hand for a moment, at the way his wrist flexes as he picks up the kettle and pours the water. *This is real*, Harry thinks, but he must have spoken the words aloud; Draco looks at him for a long moment before glancing down at the counter, his fingers still tracing meaningless patterns upon its surface.

"I'm getting better at that," Draco says. "Telling them apart. Memories and dreams and reality."

So there's really no reason for human contact anymore, Harry thinks dully. He pushes Draco's cup of tea across the counter, resisting the urge to let their fingers brush. Seems to be a common theme to his thoughts tonight, he thinks. Hands, reaching for each other. Wouldn't that look strange, Draco's Dark Mark next to *I must not tell lies*?

"Maybe I was wrong," Draco says, and Harry looks up with surprise.

"What?"

"Maybe I was wrong," Draco repeats, his gaze intense and searching. "Maybe we could have been friends."

Dawn is arriving, Harry thinks, gazing past Draco to the glass sliding doors. It's little more than a pale blue smudge on the horizon, hesitantly touching the low stars. For a moment, he could dream of it all. Travelling on and on, driving forever with Draco. To the vast mountain ranges of Scotland, and the rivers and waterfalls of the Peak District, and they'll go stargazing in the Dark Sky Reserves, and see Wiltshire's wildflowers in bloom, and the canola harvests, and every year they'll return to Snowdonia to stand on the edge of the world, and Harry's favourite memories will be strung with tiny Christmas lights and the winter winds of the Cornish coastline.

And then he remembers that Draco has spent the past three years stuck in the past, where he thought he'd die, unable to touch anyone, his voice unheard, his presence unseen. For three long years. Of course it would all be surreal afterwards, and of course he'd smile at Harry and walk with him along the white cliffs of Dover and share childhood memories. It's only gratitude, nothing more. He only ever initiated contact to reassure himself it was real.

And now he knows it's real, and he'll come to his senses. He'll thank Harry for the cup of tea, stand up, and walk out that door like it's effortless. Like it all cost him nothing, and maybe it did.

Harry doesn't want to think about the price he'll have to pay. So it's self-preservation that makes him shake his head, refusing to look at Draco, keeping his eyes locked on the kitchen counter as he replies. "I think you were right, actually. We couldn't be friends." He doesn't dare look up, opting instead to carefully stir a teaspoon of sugar into his tea. He watches the tiny grains slowly dissolve. The silence stretches on for a long time before Draco speaks.

"You said I'd changed." There's something in his voice that Harry hasn't heard before, but he still doesn't look up.

"Yeah, well..." Harry tries to focus on the cup of tea before him, making sure every last grain of sugar melts away to nothing. "I just don't think we could've been friends."

Draco is silent for a long time again. Harry, at last, chances a glance at him. Draco's not looking at him, he thinks with relief. He's staring at the view from the balcony door, staring at the city lights, the trains slowly crawling along the tracks.

"And now?" he says, his gaze unexpectedly flicking to Harry. Harry gives him a quick, uncomfortable smile before looking away again.

"Well, I guess we might be friends. I suppose that wouldn't be unexpected, seeing as I'm the one who figured out the case and got you back out of the past." He tries to smile again.

After a long moment, Draco stands up. "So it's a matter of gratitude, then," he says slowly.

"Guess so."

"Well," Draco says, taking his Renault keycard from his pocket. "I'd better be going."

"What, now?" Harry asks with surprise, looking up. Draco meets his gaze, unblinking, his expression unwavering. Like it's carved from stone. Giving nothing away, Harry thinks suddenly, although that's stupid because they're saying goodbye, not sharing secrets. Draco crosses the room and opens the door, stopping for a moment to look at Harry.

"If it's a matter of gratitude, then thank you."

Then he leaves, closing the door behind him.

Harry crosses the room after a long moment, opening the sliding door to the balcony. The warm summer air caresses his face and he turns to face the faint breeze, feeling it whisper through his hair. He leans on the balcony railing, gazing at the street below, and after a few minutes he sees the Renault, headlights ghosting along the road as it goes past. He watches it until the red taillights have faded into darkness.

In the distance, the sky lightens just a little more.

* * *

"Do you have any idea," Hermione says, pacing in front of her fireplace, "how worried we were?"

"I'm really sorry."

"You said that already."

"Give the bloke a break," Ron cuts in, rubbing tiredly at the circles under his eyes. "Malfoy's been dragging him halfway across the country. You look awful," he adds, addressing Harry.

"Don't say that," Hermione says with alarm, still pacing around the living room and nearly tripping over a pile of her own books. "He's fine. You're perfectly fine, aren't you, Harry? I mean, you'd tell us if — if you weren't."

Harry's heart sinks with guilt at the anxious look on Hermione's face. "I'm...I'm all right."

Ron frowns. "Come on, mate. Something's going on, we're not stupid. Why'd you leave?"

"I don't know...just..."

"Was it stress?" Hermione asks. "I know they've offered you that promotion to Head Auror, and — oh, Harry," she adds with sudden misery. "Your supervisor has spent the last three weeks frantically trying to contact you. I...I don't think you'll get the Head Auror position now."

"Definitely not. The team needs someone reliable, I heard them saying." Ron catches Hermione's expression. "What? Just telling the truth."

"I didn't mean for this to happen," Harry protests.

Hermione bites her lip. "I'm glad you're all right, but — what were you *thinking*? Is everything all right?"

"I wasn't thinking at all, really," Harry admits. "I just...it wasn't because of work. I left because..."

They wait patiently, both looking at him with the same expression of expectation.

"You left because...?" Hermione prompts after a long minute.

"Because of Draco," Harry mutters at last. Ron frowns.

"Look, I know it can't have been fun for him — stuck in the past for three years — but you're not responsible for his recovery, Harry. You did your job, you located him, that's all you needed to do."

Harry groans and sets his cup of tea aside, burying his head in his hands. "It's not about that, either! It's not about obligation or a sense of duty."

"Then what?" Hermione presses.

Harry doesn't raise his head. They're trying very hard to understand, he thinks unhappily. After all, he's being the unreasonable one here — turning up at their home at six o'clock in the morning, disheveled and desperately in need of tea and conversation — and they both deserve an explanation. But Merlin help him, he hasn't got one.

"I don't know, I just wanted to leave," he mumbles at last, looking up.

Ron and Hermione exchange an expression and say nothing.

* * *

He was never particularly fond of the apartment before — it simply existed, like gravity, and he had to tolerate it. However, now he finds himself actively tormented by it every evening. The empty kitchen, the white walls that make him feel like he's in an office instead of a house. Normal people have photographs of their family and friends, he reminds himself, and he tries sticking a picture of him, Hermione, and Ron to the wall, but it looks strange. A small photograph in the centre of a vast expanse of white emptiness. It just makes him feel immeasurably sad.

Work is the same. He went missing for three weeks — three weeks — no notice given, no warning — and anyone else would be fired, dismissed, sent away without references. While his supervisors lecture him — *this is your final warning; if it wasn't for your exceptional skill and qualification; you're very lucky to have understanding colleagues* — it's nothing but empty threats. They even covered for him — Harry Potter going missing wasn't very desirable publicity, apparently, and they'd told the rest of the department he'd been sent away to help the Unspeakables with a top-secret mission. The first day Harry went back to work, his colleagues all congratulated him on his work and welcomed him back. Harry tried to return their smiles but somehow couldn't quite manage it.

All the usual projects await. Arresting a man trying to earn extra money through an illegal potions side-business. Planning their security strategies for a public appearance by the Minister. Harry stands in the rain, standing straight in his neatly-pressed robes, gazing ahead as the Minister drones on and on to the listening masses. He supervises an organised protest, silently standing guard at St Mungo's as the wizards and witches wave placards demanding the repeal of recent regulations regarding health potions. A witch tries to force her way through the doors, shouting angrily, and is subdued quickly by some of the Magical Law Enforcement officers. The rain is lukewarm on Harry's skin, offering no relief from the muggy July heat. Everyone seems so prickled by the humidity, their tempers shortened and their faces always damp.

When Harry goes home that night, he stands on the balcony and drinks his scotch and watches the trains arrive and leave.

He only loved them, he remembers thinking once, because they were going places.

* * *

He's not going to be Head Auror. They tell him they're considering another candidate and give him disapproving looks, parroting Ron's words: "We need someone more...reliable," they say. Williamson takes him aside and reassures him that, if the position is vacant in a few years and Harry has 'sorted himself out', he should still apply for it.

Two weeks after his return, he sits in his old Investigative Division office. Holdsworth, for all her sharp looks and thinly-pressed lips, has kept it for him.

"Missing the old place?" she asks, standing in the doorway. Harry sits in the chair behind the desk, regardless of the faint patina of dust over it.

"Yes," he says truthfully. Then he looks away. "I suppose there's not much chance of returning, not after I disappeared for three weeks."

Holdsworth looks at him, tilting her head as she does whenever she finds something particularly interesting. "Disappearing people are our specialty," she says, then turns and leaves.

Harry stares at the empty doorway for a long time, then slowly opens his desk drawer. All the old files are still here, including...

He picks up the pale blue folder and lets it fall open.

Case number: L10-332-5

Date filed: 10 September 2003

Case Classification: Closed; located alive

Name: MALFOY, Draco

Other names: None.

He turns the page. There is the photograph Narcissa gave him, and Harry's breath catches for a moment. Two long weeks since he last saw that face. Draco stares up at him, his eyes the colour of a sky just before a storm, his mouth small and serious. Harry reaches out and traces his fingertips across the photograph. A motion he'd never dare make to Draco in person. But the Draco in the picture just gazes at him, not moving as Harry's fingers trail across his cheekbones.

I miss you, Harry thinks, but he hasn't got the courage yet to say it aloud.

He closes the file slowly, Draco disappearing beneath the pages.

* * *

July melts into August. Harry stands at the steps of the Ministry building, chin tilted upwards, gaze forward as ever. His feet ache. The high noon sun beats down upon him, creating a bead of sweat upon his brow. To his left, Ron is equally silent and still. Some distance away, the protestors roil and rage. The economy isn't going so well, and within the Ministry there have been talks of raising the tax-free threshold. A wizard in front of Harry angrily waves a sign about.

"Sir, please move away from the Ministry entrance," Harry says. "Ministry employees have the right to access the building without harassment."

"Harassment? Oh, protesting is harassment, is it?" the man seethes. "Don't you bloody stand there and tell me that my suffering is an inconvenience! You've got a nice, cushy Ministry job — "

"Sir, please move away from the Ministry entrance," Harry repeats blandly.

" — unemployed for six months! But the Ministry doesn't care, does it? Just sends out brainless trolls like you to stand there and parrot from the rulebook — "

Harry lets the wizard hurtle on through his vitriol-fuelled speech. His polyjuice potion will be wearing off soon, he thinks. He hates having to take it, but what other choice does he have? As his supervisors rightfully point out, he'd become the security risk if he appeared as himself.

Harry turns his gaze briefly to the cloudless blue sky, and thinks the canola meadows will be harvested soon, the sunshine-yellow flowers lopped off, the plants left to wither in the last of the summer heat.

Light footsteps in a field. Arms wrapping briefly around him.

Catch me.

* * *

On the last day of summer, when the sapphire-coloured sky has given way to a pale blue and the blazing sunlight has gentled, Holdsworth tells Harry there's a vacancy in the Investigative Division.

"I haven't got any qualifications," he says uncertainly.

"Applications close on the eighteenth of September," Holdsworth says crisply.

"I'll think about it."

He does. Often. The next day — the first of September — he asks Ron if he likes working as an Auror. They're sitting at the bar at the Mad Alchemist, and Ron's nursing his fourth butterbeer and looking thoughtful as Harry asks the question. Harry, expecting an automatic and enthusiastic 'yes, I love my job' is surprised when Ron answers.

"I guess." Ron takes a long sip of his butterbeer. "Remember the early days? Merlin, that was crazy."

"Total madness," Harry agrees. "We used to hold competitions to see who ended up the most sleep deprived, remember? Atkinson still holds the record, I think — four days straight on the job."

"We used to sleep in our offices, and survive off sandwiches from the nearest café," Ron says, grinning. "It was great though, wasn't it?"

"Fantastic." Harry returns Ron's grin, but after a long moment his smile slowly fades. "We were going places back then. Turned the whole department on its head. Changed all the training policies, got rid of all the corruption, created specialty areas."

"Yeah, and when we weren't making radical changes, we were chasing the last of the Death Eaters." Ron shakes his head. "Those field assignments...you don't get 'em like that anymore. Days spent staking out places, tracking down Dark Arts masterminds...of course, it's great it's not like that anymore," Ron adds quickly, a half-hearted disclaimer.

"Is it?"

"Well...yeah. I mean, no Death Eaters, no rabid followers...work's dried up a lot since the war," Ron says, still smiling, but his voice is a little uncertain. "Mostly stupid prats trading on the black market, eh, and unlicensed potioners. All that sort of thing."

Harry looks down at his empty glass, then pushes it aside and catches the bartender's eye.

"Glenmorangie, please. Neat. Twenty-five-year, if you have it," Harry adds, and the bartender disappears for a moment, reappearing to shake his head.

"Ten-year all right?"

Harry nods and pays. Ron pulls a face.

"For that price, it better be laced with Felix Felicis."

Harry says nothing, taking a leisurely sip of his drink. Ron frowns.

"Do you?" he asks suddenly. Harry looks up.

"Do I what?"

"Do you enjoy being an Auror?"

Harry stares down at his drink, tipping the glass slowly and watching the whiskey eddy around. The words are wrenched reluctantly from his lips.

"Used to," he says.

When he dares to look up, Ron doesn't look shocked or even surprised. He just nods and takes another swig of his butterbeer.

"Yeah," he says, "it's a bit like that."

* * *

Merlin, he had such high hopes.

When he was seventeen and thought he'd feel that way forever. That he'd always want to be an Auror, because being an Auror was just like dodging spells and chasing people and spending cosy nights arguing over strategies with his two best friends. And he'd come home, exhausted but happy at the end of each day, stepping through the door of a little cottage somewhere in the countryside — something ramshackle, like the Burrow, or ancient like Hogwarts — and Ginny would be there, smiling, forever young. In his dreams, he was seventeen forever. Funny, that. He forgot to age himself, or Ginny. He forgot about Ginny's own ambitions and choices, and he forgot about the practicalities of a London apartment, and he'd forgotten how Aurors weren't needed much when there wasn't a war. He'd forgotten all the little details, the cold whispers of reality.

But if his future wasn't what he dreamed it to be, no doubt countless others felt the same. Seamus Finnigan had clearly imagined a future that, for example, did not include both parents dying during the war. Justin Finch-Fletchley too, spending his final year of education on the run, hiding from Snatchers, his mother tortured to reveal the location of the rest of the family. Or even Millicent Bulstrode, whom Harry heard suffered terrible injuries during the Battle of Hogwarts and ended up in a permanently catatonic state, her life reduced to palliative care. None of these students, when they were eleven years old and first stepped into the Great Hall, alive with nervous excitement and the sheer thrill of it all, would have imagined these futures for themselves.

Harry remembers that moment. Lining up outside the Great Hall, everyone looking at each other with a shared sense of awe. They could be Sorted into any house, achieve anything, grow up to be anyone. Their lives awaited them, an unwrapped present. Harry remembers how young Draco had looked then, his face still softened with childhood, robes still slightly too big for him, sleeves trailing. Regardless of how arrogant and pompous Harry considered him at the time, Draco still would have stood outside the doors of the Great Hall and dreamed of the future contained within. Maybe he dreamed of childish pranks, of popularity and admiring friends. Maybe he dreamed of becoming a Quidditch all-star, showing off carefully-practised moves on the latest broom model. Maybe he dreamed of academic achievement, impressing all his classmates and making his father proud.

It doesn't matter. All those dreams became little more than dust and debris, fragments crushed beneath the weight of a war. The weight of black ink on pale skin.

Sometimes it's impossible, Harry tells himself. Some dreams are just...unachievable.

Do you think we could have ever been friends at Hogwarts?

He unconsciously traces a fingertip along his bottom lip.

* * *

The ninth of September.

Four years to the day when Draco disappeared.

It's a Saturday. Summer is still hanging in the air like a familiar friend, reluctant to leave. Harry stands on the balcony and looks up at the azure sky.

Some dreams are impossible.

He could pretend. That if he turns around, it will be December. All dark inside the apartment, only the glow of tiny lights illuminating the room. Draco will be standing by the tree.

You're here, Harry will say, and Draco will give him one of those looks. The one where he tilts his head slightly, and his lips curl ever-so-faintly, a laugh hidden there. And Harry will step forward and kiss that hidden laugh, press his lips to the corner of Draco's mouth, right where that little smirk begins.

So don't look back.

Harry looks back.

Across the empty stretch of sunlit floorboards, the endless expanse of white wall seems to mock him. That sad little photograph, right in the centre. Hermione and Ron's faces are nothing but pale blurs.

Harry steps inside, giving the cloudless blue sky another look before snapping the sliding door shut. He trails one hand along the counter, feeling all the empty places where people should be. Silence where there should be a voice, sometimes soft and serious, sometimes light and teasing.

Catch me.

Harry reaches out, and for a moment he can almost feel the canola flowers feathering his fingers, the stars on his skin, a hand slipping through his.

He blinks, then slowly drops his hand.

Around him, dust motes dance in the sunlight.

* * *

They assign new fieldwork on Monday. The dark green folder drops onto Harry's desk with a thud. Ron's head pops over the cubicle divider.

"New assignment."

"I gathered as much." Harry picks up the folder and flips it open. A group of international scam artists are using love potions and romance charms to swindle elderly wizards and witches out of their savings. There are locations, dates, photographs of suspects, and pages of bank statements. Harry frowns and turns the pages, skimming over the rows of dates and locations.

"Not much here," Harry says.

"Yeah, well, that's why the Law Enforcement foot-soldiers gave it to us." Ron shrugs. "Pearson's working on a map at the moment, hopefully we'll see some patterns."

"Spoken to any of the victims?"

"They reckon we don't need to. Set up surveillance and some tracing charms, should be able to take the scammers down within a week."

Harry sighs loudly. He hadn't meant to, but Ron raises his eyebrows and gives Harry a shrewd look.

"Hermione wants to know if you're coming over for dinner tonight."

"All right."

Ron gives Harry one last look, then disappears from sight, sitting back down at his desk.

* * *

Harry visits his Investigative Division office before he leaves for the day. No, he thinks for a moment before wincing and shaking his head. No; not his office anymore.

He was supposed to clear it out, but he'd forgotten. Or maybe he'd just avoided thinking about it. The door unlocks at a tap of his wand, like it always does. Security flaw, he thinks automatically — they should have removed his wand signature from the office as soon as he left. But that's thinking like an Auror — constant vigilance. Harry has to smile wryly. Nobody wants to break into the Missing Persons offices. Nothing exciting there — no international crime organisations or terrorist information. Just family photographs of smiling faces, long-lost people. Ordinary people, missed and loved only by their friends and family. Considered unimportant by everyone else.

The bewitched windows offer a view of sunset over London, lighting the room in the last faint shadows of a cloudy dusk. Harry looks around the room, for a moment spotting the card sent in by Fenwick's son. *Thank you for finding my father*, the awkward teenaged handwriting

says. *It means a lot.* Of course, when Fenwick went missing, his son had only been nine or ten. Now he's seventeen.

It never ceases to amaze Harry that people thank him. He spends months interviewing them, asking them to relive painful or difficult memories, sitting and listening to them recall the little habits and hobbies of their loved one. And then he'll find a skeleton in a field, or a suicide note, and have to tell them. And, Merlin help them, they *thank* him. With tears in their eyes, they thank him as he tells them their loved one is dead.

Harry slowly runs a hand over his desk. He could be solving a case right now, working on something important...

His Auror work *is* important, he reminds himself irritably. Elderly people, losing their life savings to greedy criminals...of course it's important. Far more important than, for example, bringing someone home.

He leaves the office quickly, shutting the door a bit too loudly behind him.

* * *

The apartment is cold. Now that September is truly underway, the last of the summer warmth is quickly dissipating. Harry unlocks the door and pauses before he steps into the apartment. White walls, floorboards, empty counters. A room stripped bare. There's nothing here. With a pang of sadness, Harry remembers the trailing roses of Astoria's garden, the smell of sugary pastries baking in the oven, the crackling music of the Wizarding Wireless. It's been a while since he visited Astoria and Matthew.

Harry closes the curtains. White, he thinks, staring at the material as he slowly draws it across the window. Why is everything white in this place? He steps into his bedroom. The same bed he and Ginny slept in, neatly made with white sheets and cream-coloured covers. His bedside table, nothing on it except a glass of water and a book. *Flowers for Algernon*. The only personal thing in this damn place, the only interesting thing, and he stole it from Draco.

He really doesn't feel like company tonight, but he promised Ron and Hermione. Harry removes his work robes and hangs them up, then stares blankly at his wardrobe for a long time before closing the door. He's gotten used to not wearing robes, especially during the last three weeks. He'd bought jeans and t-shirts during the impromptu road trip; Draco had purchased far more formal clothes and kept them neatly pressed regardless of what godforsaken time of the night they were driving. The observation had made Harry smile at the time.

He doesn't particularly feel like smiling now.

He leaves the bedroom instead, walking to the front door, hearing every footstep echo around the empty room.

* * *

By the time he's arrived at Ron and Hermione's, it's a little later than he'd thought. The clock chimes eight o'clock just as Hermione ushers him through the door. Her eyes are bright and there's a faint flush in her cheeks.

"Into the wine already, Hermione? For shame," Harry says, smiling, and she smacks his arm.

"No! Well — just a couple of glasses. Would you like something to drink? Oh, don't worry, I know how you like your alcohol. There's a bottle of oak-aged whiskey in the cellar."

"Thanks." He steps into the kitchen; Ron's perched by the island counter, poring over a copy of *Quidditch Weekly*, a butterbeer next to his elbow. He spares a glance at Harry.

"Late as usual," he says, grinning.

They fall into conversation as easily as ever. Hermione leans across the opposite side of the counter, wineglass in hand, her eyes bright as she joins them as they reminisce about their Hogwarts days. The hours soon dwindle past; long after they've finished dinner, they remain seated around the dining table. Harry's nursing a butterbeer and gazing down at the table, absently tracing circular patterns into the grain of the wood, when Ron speaks.

"Going for that Investigative Division job, Harry?"

He glances up. Ron's grinning at him.

"How'd you find out about that?"

"Used my impressive Auror skills, of course." Ron leans back in his seat. "Better get your résumé organised, the applications close tomorrow."

"Yeah, well." Harry stops tracing patterns and takes a swig of his butterbeer. "I'm not applying."

Ron frowns and swaps a look with Hermione. "But...you said you didn't like your Auror work. I thought..."

"I've been an Auror for seven years," Harry says. "I'm good at it."

"You're good at investigating, too," Hermione retorts, frowning. "You've solved ten cases in eighteen months!"

"What, so I should just throw away seven years of training?"

"Nobody's saying that." Ron looks exasperated. "But give yourself some credit. You'd probably move through the ranks pretty quickly — it wouldn't take long to get a promotion. Holdsworth's pretty impressed with you, especially after you solved the Malfoy case. That was brilliant, Harry."

Harry doesn't want to talk about Draco Malfoy. He stares at the condensation on the butterbeer bottle and waits a long moment before speaking.

"I always wanted to be an Auror."

"Well, people change, Harry," Hermione says. "Just because you always wanted to be something, it doesn't mean you can't change. And yes, you've invested seven years in your career as an Auror. But there's no point staying in the department if you're not happy..."

"I'm happy where I am."

"You're not," Ron says, picking up a new bottle of butterbeer. "You said as much to me, when — "

"Look, just leave it, all right?" Harry snaps. "I just said — "

"You're afraid." Ron points his butterbeer at Harry, then sets it upright again and untwists the cap. "Pathetic, really."

Harry's mouth falls open. "Afraid? Are you serious?"

"You are." Ron takes a leisurely swig of the butterbeer. "You're afraid that if you take this Investigative job, it'll mean you were wrong about always being an Auror. And you wasted seven years doing it. But that's a bloody stupid way to look at it. We had some great times during those seven years, didn't we? You were happy during those seven years, weren't you? Not a waste of time, then." Ron shakes his head. "It's like losing a game of Quidditch, then saying you wish you hadn't played at all."

Harry is silent.

What's the point in that? Sitting in a box, only going where someone else takes you...

"You all right, mate?" Ron frowns.

Harry looks up, barely paying attention. He nods, tries to smile, says something.

But all he can think about how close he came to never looking back. To never flicking his eyes up to the rear-vision mirror.

But this isn't you, is it, Potter?

No. It's not.

* * *

The eighteenth of September.

Harry stands outside the office door. He's been pacing the hallway for a good twenty minutes, a stack of papers in one hand. Thrice, in his restless pacing, he's nearly run into ruffled-looking secretaries.

"Can I help you?" they asked him, and he shook his head each time.

Somewhere, a clock chimes noon. Harry takes a breath, straightens up, and looks ahead. He pauses a moment, then knocks sharply three times on the door. There's a long pause, and then —

"Come in."

Harry opens the door and steps inside the office. Holdsworth, rifling through papers on her desk, is looking at him with an expectant expression.

"Hi," Harry says weakly. "Er...I just thought...I might..." He holds out the papers. "My application."

"Thank you, Potter," Holdsworth says briskly, reaching out and taking it. She puts it neatly to one side of her desk without looking at it. "Is that all?"

He pauses. "I...I just want to say I understand now. What you meant when you said that solving cases isn't a game of Quidditch, and people aren't snitches."

She looks at him, then nods once.

"Very good, Potter." She returns to her paperwork.

Harry takes the cue and leaves.

* * *

A storm gathers the next day, and it reminds Harry of that night watching the storms roll in over the Celtic Sea, Draco's pale skin and blond hair in beautiful contrast with the dark bruised skies.

Then again, it seems everything reminds him of Draco these days. The nights remind him of the sea of stars in Snowdonia, and the lonely autumn winds remind him of the wave-lashed Cornish coast. The fair weather conjures the feel of butter-yellow canola flowers and pale blue skies, and the rain makes him think of falling asleep in the Renault, listening to the faint swish of the window wipers, seeing the water droplets stream across the windscreen. Watching Draco's wrists flex as he steered around the corners.

A 2002 Renault Mégane coupé. Harry remembers the first time he saw it, the canvas falling away in swathes, the dust dancing through the air. It isn't a luxury car; it isn't anything spectacular. But it's Draco's car, and Harry misses it as much as he misses Draco. As much as he misses a clear night sky, and highways and Christmas tree lights and windswept cliffs and canola fields and the way Draco's eyes would flick to the rear-vision mirror.

Harry just wants to go home.

* * *

So he does. Deep in the golden light of autumn, he goes to the manor. A house-elf answers his hesitant knock, peering at Harry with its large eyes before bowing and ushering him into the reception hall.

"Please be waiting here. I will fetch Mistress — "

"No, I'm — I'm here for Draco, actually."

The house-elf frowns, then nods and disappears. It's gone for so long that Harry begins to wonder if it died on the way. He turns and surveys the hallway, with the uncomfortable chaise and spindly hall-tables lined with photographs, and picks up one of the framed pictures. Draco smiles up at him and Harry returns the smile.

Footsteps. Harry glances up.

Draco is very good at schooling his face into a blank expression, Harry thinks. When he wants to, he hides his emotions so easily. Still, Harry gathers his courage, refusing to back down now.

"Come for a drive?" he asks casually.

Draco looks at him.

* * *

Autumn has well and truly arrived in Wiltshire. The fields are a pale gold; the trees seem ablaze in the afternoon sunlight, their scarlet leaves lit richly. Draco drives along a narrow country road, the same sort of road on which Harry spent hours learning to drive. An oak tree curves overhead, sending dappled shade dancing over the car for a fleeting moment, and Harry's reminded of the ancient Welsh oaks of Snowdonia. The narrow lane soon joins a wider road. A map of arteries, leading to the heart of nowhere.

All rivers lead to the sea.

The far-off ring of a warning bell; Draco slows down at the level crossing and waits.

Harry looks at him.

"I was wrong, you know."

"Wrong about what?" Draco rests both hands on the steering wheel, gazing at the road on the other side of the crossing.

"I think we could have been friends," Harry says quietly.

Draco doesn't move his gaze. "Really?" he asks, sounding disbelieving. "You seemed to think otherwise earlier."

The train is nearly at the crossing now.

Now or never.

He reaches across and takes Draco's hand. Draco looks startled, but he doesn't resist.

"Yes, well," Harry says, "going away is easy. Coming home is hard."

He lifts Draco's hand, bringing his wrist higher, and kisses the soft skin just beneath the inky tail of the Dark Mark.

The train rushes through.

Epilogue

Harry knows the journey by heart. It's like drawing breath, it's like speaking his own name, it's like stepping into the night and tilting his head back to stare at the stars.

It's like the first journey, or the last one, or every one. All the little familiarities, stepping into his heart like old friends. City lights, going past each side of him, a blur, a long stream of everlasting brightness. But he doesn't need the lights. He doesn't need to see. He knows the way, he'll always know the way home.

The lights dwindle away into suburbs, the night-dew collecting on the park benches and playground swings. If he looks up, it looks like the sky is exploding. All those stars, bursting across that inky sky. The moon is hanging low, silver and round as a coin. He can think about the stars, or the moon, or anything and everything he'd ever like to dream about. He doesn't have to focus. He doesn't even have to remember which corner is next, which road. This map is scrawled across his skin, in a thousand different little freckles and scars and constellations. He doesn't have to remember a single thing.

He turns a corner. The lights are petering out now. Turns another corner. Now there is nothing but darkness and the stars. The fields, right there, and it brings back all those summer memories, all those times spent driving, driving, and the canola flowers set heart-stoppingly bright against a sky the colour of a propane flame.

He turns another corner. The bright summer memories fade, but it's all right. He's going home now. Straight ahead. No more corners, just a long stretch of road that rolls on and on.

The driveway gravel crunches beneath the tyres of the car. It reminds Harry of snow, white and crisp and crackling underfoot. He always loved winters. And summers. One or the other, his friends would say, but Harry thinks it's perfectly fine to love two things at once.

The slam of the car door echoes once. He steps forward, making his way along the little meandering path. Past the wildflowers, escaping their beds; past the jasmine plants, glowing white beneath the moon. To the front door, painted dark green, the same colour as the ivy creeping around the sandstone walls.

He opens the door. Light spills out, a soft glow. Harry steps inside, closing the door behind him. Across the room, flames flicker in the fireplace. Draco, curled up in an armchair with a book, looks up.

"You're home," he says.

Harry crosses the room, leans down and kisses him.

"Yes," he says. "I'm home."

* * *

Later on, in the deep darkness of the night, Harry dreams of the long highways and dark fields, the endless roads all leading into a dawn the colour of canola fields, the colour of autumn leaves, the colour of a lazy summer afternoon. He gazes into the bright blaze of the cloudless sky, then steps forward.

As he stirs in his sleep, Draco pulls him close.

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