HAPPY H/D HOLIDAYS, SUGAREEY!

Author: Anonymous

Recipient: sugareey

Title: Falling Slowly

Pairing(s): Harry/Draco, Ron/Hermione, others

Summary: When Harry learns Draco Malfoy is to become the new Hogwarts headmaster, he's certain his old rival has to be up to something. Taking a teaching job at the school and moving himself in with Malfoy seems to be the best way to uncover his secrets.

Rating: NC-17

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Warning(s): A wee bit of angst.

Epilogue compliant? The epilogue does not exist. Not here, not anywhere. *hides eyes*

Word Count: 20,000

Author's Notes: HUGE thanks to the mods for allowing me the extra time needed to finish this. Dear sugareey, I tried to fit in several of your requests and I hope you enjoy this! Merry Christmas!

(Falling Slowly)

Tags: [fic], [long/chapt

"Mr. Potter, how does it feel to be back after a decade?" Professor McGonagall patted Harry's arm and smiled fondly, her lined face softening.

"It's wonderful," Harry confessed. He took a sip from his champagne flute. "I'm glad I decided to come. I nearly didn't."

"I'm glad you did as well. I've just announced my retirement, and I am hoping to name my successor this evening, but I need to speak with you first."

Harry sighed. "Headmistress…"

"Just hear me out, Harry. Please. Can you come to my office in half an hour or so?"

Harry looked at the elderly headmistress and shook his head. "I can't say no to you."

"Let's hope so." McGonagall winked and walked away.

"Harry," Hermione hissed, appearing out of nowhere. "What did she say?"

"Merlin, Hermione, did you Apparate in just to give me a heart attack? Don't creep up on a bloke like that!"

"You can't Apparate within Hogwarts, Harry. In 'Hogwarts: A Hist --'"

"Yes, yes, I know the book. I just meant that you startled me. Were you listening in?"

Hermione flushed. "Sorry… I didn't even catch it all. It's just -- well, you know I'm on the Hogwarts board of directors, and we've been wondering who Professor McGonagall is going to choose as her successor. Only the board's elders get vote on her nomination, which is unfair, but they seem very happy with their choice. She's been keeping it a secret, though, and your name has been passed around more than once. Did she offer you the position?"

"No, and it's silly to think she would. Though she did say she wanted to talk to me…" Harry

furrowed his brow. "You don't think she'd really offer the position to me, do you? I've never accepted her offers to teach and she stopped asking several years ago. Why would she want me to be headmaster?"

"Because you'd be brilliant at it!" Hermione exclaimed.

"More than someone who's actually put in teaching time here?" Harry said doubtfully. "I don't think so."

"You love this school, Harry. She knows that and she knows you'd do well. Think about it when she asks, won't you? Don't turn it down out of hand."

"I'll think about it, but…" Harry bit his lip. "It would be nice to live here again. I wasn't ready right after, but now… I don't know."

"You look too serious." Ron appeared between them and slung an arm around each of their necks. "It's a party!"

"Smells like you've been enjoying the party a bit too much," Hermione informed him.

"Oh, come on, we never get to see everyone like this!"

"And yet it's the three of us watching from the outside," Harry mused. "I suppose some things never change."

"Would you rather go spend your evening with Malfoy?" Ron nodded toward Draco, who was laughing with a few ex-Slytherins.

"No," Harry murmured, studying his old rival. Draco had grown into a rather attractive man,

with fine features and chin-length blond hair. "What's he doing these days anyway?"

Hermione looked surprised. "He's teaching here, Harry. I thought I told you that."

"I don't remember, sorry." Harry blinked and looked away when Draco met his gaze and nodded in greeting. "It'd be interesting, wouldn't it? If I came in and took over?"

"He's doing very well here, Harry."

"Hmm." Harry chanced another look at Draco and found the man watching him openly.

"There's Susan Bones, I think I'll say hello!" Ron stumbled away and Hermione sighed.

"He's probably going to sleep with her." She frowned. "He's so different."

"Yes, well, he took it hard when… you know."

"I know, and I won't take the blame, Harry." Hermione crossed her arms. "Things changed after the war. People stopped living as though they were about to die, we got the chance to find out who we really were… you should know that better than anyone."

"And did I say you were at fault?" Harry fired back. "As I recall, I was in a rather uncomfortable position when the pair of you decided to put me in the middle. You wanted to be on your own, so it was right of you to let Ron go, but I'm not sure you ever understood just how deeply he loved you. He wanted nothing more than a future with you."

Hermione looked down. "I thought it was a passing fancy for him. I thought he'd get over it."

"Oh, he has. That's why he's still single ten years later. That's why he's always trying to 'round up the blokes,' as he calls it, even though most of the blokes he wants to round up have families of their own and no time to waste in a pub. That's why he sleeps around and never makes anything of it. Because he's clearly gotten over you."

"Well, it's obvious whose side you're on!" Hermione glared at him.

"Maybe I wouldn't be if you'd actually done something with your time apart. You dated around, you went to university and focused on your career, and now, after a decade, you're single too and you watch him as though you think I don't notice. I think you still love him, and I think you're wasting valuable time in not telling him so."

"I don't believe I requested romantic advice. Especially when you're hardly attached yourself."

"Nice shot, that one, thanks. I don't believe I request your advice on anything ninety percent of the time it's given to me," Harry fired back. "And I don't exactly have my childhood love pining away for me, do I?"

Hermione looked stung. "I'm going to walk away before either of us says anything too hurtful to recover from," she said quietly.

Harry sighed and snagged her wrist. "I'm sorry, but I hate seeing the pair of you so miserable when it's clear you could be happy together. I love you both."

"I know, but… it's not that easy."

"To be happy? Say the word, Hermione, and he'd be down on one knee for you. Think about it. I've got to go see McGonagall."

"Good luck."

Harry squeezed her arm briefly and left the Great Hall, his footsteps echoing in the silent corridors as he headed toward his destination. Entering the familiar office made him more than a little nostalgic for his many visits to Dumbledore in years past.

"I'm glad you could join me, Mr. Potter." McGonagall motioned for Harry to take a seat.

"Thank you." Harry settled in and smiled. "I still have a craving for lemon drops, being in here."

"I still keep a dish." McGonagall pushed it toward him and waited for him to take one. "Now, then, the reason I asked you to come and talk with me… I need your help. And I know you've turned me down before, but I'm hoping you'll consider my offer."

"I already know what you're going to say. I think --" Harry paused when a knock sounded at the door.

"Ah, there he is. My apologies, Harry, please hold your thoughts for a moment. Come in, Mr. Malfoy."

Harry turned in surprise to see Draco enter the room. "Malfoy?"

"Hello, Potter. Headmistress." He nodded to McGonagall. "Have we come to an agreement yet?"

"Not yet, but we've just started our conversation. Harry, please continue with what you were about to say." McGonagall smiled in encouragement.

Harry glanced between them briefly and frowned. "I… well, I was just saying that I know what you're going to ask me, and I accept. I know I've turned down teaching positions in the past but it wasn't the right time for me then, and now…I think I'd welcome a return to Hogwarts."

"Wonderful!" McGonagall beamed. "We're thrilled to have you, aren't we, Draco?"

"You're definitely a natural for the position, Potter," Draco agreed. "And it will be interesting to work together."

"I must admit that I'm surprised you're on board with this, Malfoy," Harry told him. "But then I'm surprised by all of this. Pleasantly, of course," he assured McGonagall. "Still, who'd have ever imagined I'd be your boss, Malfoy?"

Draco frowned. "Excuse me?"

"Harry --" McGonagall began.

"No, no." Harry put up his hands. "I won't be unfair or anything, I assure you -- it's been ten years, after all, and I don't think our rivalry needs to continue. It wouldn't do for me to behave unprofessionally as headmaster."

Draco and McGonagall looked at each other in silence, and Harry frowned. "What is it? I mean it, truly. I'll take this position very seriously. Perhaps you can even come and take tea with me in my office here and we can try and become friends."

"Harry…" McGonagall shifted uncomfortably. "I'm afraid there's been some sort of misunderstanding here."

"What do you mean?"

"I wasn't offering you the position of Headmaster, Harry. I want you to come and teach Defense Against the Dark Arts. Draco's class."

"But…" Harry looked at Draco, who was watching him with amusement. "I don't understand."

"Mr. Malfoy is going to take my place, Harry. I want you to take his."

"You?" Harry exclaimed.

Draco grinned. "I won't be unfair or anything, Potter. It's been ten years, after all. Perhaps you can come here -- to my office -- and take tea with me."

"I thought…" Harry spluttered. "I don't understand!"

"Harry, I'm sure you'd be wonderful in the position," McGonagall said soothingly. "But you've never taught here. If you'd come in years ago my decision would be more difficult, but as it is… several of the professors are retiring in the next few years and the newer ones haven't been here as long as Mr. Malfoy. Though he's young yet, he's done remarkable things for the school in the past seven years and I fully believe he will excel as Headmaster."

"Who'd have ever imagined I'd be your boss, Potter?" Draco added.

"Stop mocking me! I don't -- I can't do this. I'm sorry." Harry stood. "I'm sure you'll find someone else."

"Harry, wait!" McGonagall stood.

"I'm sorry." Harry exited the office and rushed down the staircase. He wandered aimlessly down toward the dungeons, having no desire to rejoin the reunion in the Great Hall in his current mood.

"Potter, hold up."

Harry groaned. "Go away, Malfoy."

Draco caught up with him. "No. Look, I'm sorry I gave you a hard time -- I couldn't resist, but I shouldn't have."

"You're apologizing to me?" Harry said incredulously.

"I'm not the same person you knew in school, Potter," Draco said evenly.

"None of us are. That doesn't mean I want to work for you."

"Your ego's so inflated that you can't be a lowly professor, is it? You turned that job down often enough, but you're all for being the Headmaster."

"You don't even know me," Harry hissed. "Don't presume you do."

"I'd say I know you well enough, if this is how you're going to behave. To think I actually -- you know what? Never mind." Draco shook his head in disgust and turned to leave.

Harry grabbed his arm. "You actually what, you prat? Don't walk away now."

"Let go of me, Potter," Draco said quietly.

"No! Not until we finish this."

"There's nothing to finish."

"There certainly is, you bastard!" Harry's voice rose and he yanked on Draco's arm hard enough to make him stumble.

"That's it," Draco hissed. He pulled free of Harry and hauled him down the corridor by the sleeve.

"Get off me!" Harry cried, trying unsuccessfully to remove himself from Draco's strong grasp. He fumbled for his wand and yelped when Draco pushed him through a doorway. "What the -- oof!" His back connected with a solid surface when Draco slammed the door and shoved him against it.

"Listen to me," Draco hissed. "Take the job or don't, but do not cause a scene in my school, you immature baby."

"Your school, is it?"

"Yes, it is, and I won't have you behaving like a child. School's out for the summer so if you want to act like a firstie you'll have to be sorted with the rest of them in September. Now, you can choose to go back to the reunion and enjoy your evening or you can leave."

Harry looked away. "Sorry," he mumbled.

Draco released his hold and stepped back. "That's better."

Harry scratched his head. "These your quarters?"

"For now, yes."

"Right." He narrowed his eyes. "You're really all right with the idea of me teaching here? Or did you only go along with it because you're so anxious to finally best me?"

Draco suddenly looked very tired. "Get out, Potter."

"It's a valid question."

"It shouldn't surprise me that you still think so little of me after all these years, and yet I suppose I'd hoped you'd have grown up along with the rest of us." Draco motioned to the door. "Go."

Harry opened his mouth to retort, but the look on Draco's face stopped him and he left the room quietly instead. Something uncomfortable settled in the pit of his stomach as he made his way back to the Great Hall.

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"Mr. Potter, wait."

Harry closed his eyes momentarily and turned. "Headmistress…"

McGonagall's mouth was set in a thin line. "I truly hope that misplaced animosity toward Mr. Malfoy had nothing to do with your decision to decline our offer."

"To be honest, Headmistress, I don't think I could work for someone like Malfoy."

"You were perfectly willing to accept the position of Headmaster, though, and work over him."

Harry flushed. "Well…"

"I think it's a shame that someone who fought so hard for change is unwilling to believe it worked. Let me tell you something, Harry. I asked you multiple times to teach Defense here and you indicated you had no interest."

"It wasn't that, it's just that I wasn't ready for a step like that. Yet."

"Be that as it may, I had a couple of different instructors those years, but no one who worked out long term. Then Mr. Malfoy came to me seeking employment. I was desperate so I allowed him to trial that position, and he excelled like no other I've seen. The students look up to him and respect him, and as head of Slytherin House he's made an incredible difference. Slytherin is not nearly the feared House it once was, and Mr. Malfoy promotes inter-House unity above all." Professor McGonagall tilted her head. "He's done so much for Hogwarts and I trust him completely with the future of this school."

"But… he…" Harry fumbled for an argument and found he had none.

"I'm sorry you were under the impression I was going to ask you to take my place. You and Mr. Malfoy are both very young, far younger than most of the previous Headmasters and mistresses have been, but as I mentioned earlier my prospects were not numerous. I don't doubt you'd be dedicated to the position, but we generally prefer to choose someone familiar

with teaching here and Mr. Malfoy has truly proven himself here time after time."

"Oh. Well, I… he probably would still prefer someone else for the Defense position."

McGonagall chuckled. "You really have no idea how much he's changed, do you? He's been in that position a mere seven years and has turned out a consistently better-prepared group of students every year. His students always score incredibly high on their NEWTs. He wants someone who will continue what he's begun, someone he believes will be an asset to Hogwarts. I'd given up on you, Harry -- it was his idea to discuss this with you."

Harry's mouth dropped open. "What?"

"I had prepared a list of candidates and he declined them all. He asked if we could speak to you, perhaps together, to see if we could interest you in the position. He believes you would be a credit to the school and to the high standards he upholds for his students."

"I…" Harry shook his head. "He wants me to teach?"

"I believe we've established that. If you decide you'd like to reconsider, please contact me. I will move on with interviewing others in the interim, because we want to get someone in as soon as possible. He will need to work with the new instructor on his established curriculum, but he's also got his own training to do." McGonagall patted his shoulder briskly. "Consider allowing the past to be the past, Harry. He is."

Harry watched her go, mind racing. It seemed a little too tidy and more than a little too suspicious, Malfoy taking over Hogwarts and claiming to want Harry there as an employee. There was no way the man wasn't up to something, whatever that something may be. Plans to corrupt the school? Simply a plot to humiliate Harry?

He glanced toward the Great Hall. Laughter and music spilled from the doors and though it seemed a far more appealing place to be, he knew he needed to be elsewhere.

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At first he thought Draco wouldn't answer, but the door finally swung open. "What do you want, Potter?"

Harry shuffled his feet nervously. "Can I come in?"

"No."

"Please? Look, I want to apologize, and… it'll just be a minute." He tried not to stare at Draco's wet hair and dressing gown.

"Fine." Draco stepped aside and allowed Harry to enter.

"I, um, didn't mean to interrupt your… bath. Or whatever."

"I just had a quick shower, Potter. Surely you've enjoyed one or two in your lifetime as well."

"Right. So, I wanted to apologize. I overreacted before, and I was embarrassed… I don't know why I thought she'd want me to be the headmaster, only she mentioned her retirement and that she wanted to name her replacement, then asked me to come and talk with her, so… it was stupid, regardless. And I'm sure you'll be great. She's told me about how well your students are doing." Harry gnawed on his lip, hoping he looked sincere.

"Apology accepted," Draco said stiffly.

"And… she told me it was your idea to approach me about taking over your classes."

"Did she?" Draco sighed and motioned to the small sofa in front of the fire. "Have a seat. Sorry if the fire is too warm for you but I chill easily."

"It's fine." Harry sat down. "So… you really want me to teach here?"

"I need someone who won't bollix up everything I've started here. I've always thought you were probably tailor-made to teach that class. Lucky for me you didn't want to before."

"It was tempting," Harry admitted. "I've always loved it here, and I like teaching that material. I just wanted to take some time away from here, I guess. But now, it seems right to return."

"The job is yours if you want it, Potter, but we have to be clear on a few things. It is my school now. I'm going to be the headmaster here for a long time, I hope, and I intend to run the place well. I don't want my curriculum to completely fall by the wayside when a new teacher takes over. It works and my former students are the proof. I want my successor to make the class his own, but to respect what I've built." Draco studied him. "Can you do that?"

"I would like to see your curriculum and discuss it with you, but if you've made such improvements to the course I don't imagine many changes will need to be made. Do you intend to watch me all the time, to interfere?"

"If necessary. It is my right, and my duty, to make sure everything is running as it should be," Draco warned. "I'll try and stay out of your way once I see that you've got a handle on everything."

Harry scowled, but nodded. "All right. And you really think we could get along?"

"We are right now, aren't we?"

"I suppose."

"I have no time for childhood rivalries, Potter. I'm a single man with no responsibilities to anything but this school, and I take that seriously. I want the best for my students, and in Defense, you are the best." Draco combed his fingers through damp, blond hair. "It's up to you to decide if you want the position."

"I do." Harry stood and held out a hand to Draco, who clasped it in his own. "And I do apologize for my earlier behavior."

"Already accepted, but thanks. One more thing -- how do you feel about being head of Slytherin House? Frankly, I think there's some justice in having a former Gryffindor in that role, and I know you'd treat them fairly. I've been trying to promote --"

"Inter-House unity," Harry finished. "McGonagall told me, and I think it's admirable. I will certainly give it a shot."

"Wonderful." He cleared his throat. "I don't mean to be rude, but I have a lot of work ahead of me before school begins again and I rise quite early, so…"

"Oh, right." Harry moved toward the door. "When shall I start?"

"Any time you like, but preferably early August since it will be your first term. After that you won't have to return too long before the students unless you choose to stay for summers."

Harry thought quickly. If he was to find out what Draco was up to, he should surely begin investigating things sooner rather than later. "Perhaps I could come next week, then, bring

some of my things."

Draco gave him a small smile. "You're welcome to, but as you'll be taking my quarters and I won't be moving into the headmaster's quarters immediately, you'd have to bunk with me. Minerva isn't leaving until August."

"Oh." Harry glanced at the shoulder that had been revealed when Draco's dressing gown slipped down a bit and found it difficult to tear his eyes away from the pale flesh. "I've been looking for a new flat and staying with Hermione."

Draco raised an eyebrow. "My condolences. Well, there's always the sofa there if you become desperate to escape."

"I'll remember that. Good night."

"Potter." Draco placed a hand on his arm and stepped closer. "Thank you. I'm glad you've decided to do this."

"Er, me too." Harry swallowed and stepped back. "I'll see you later."

"See you."

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"Harry!" Hermione jumped up when Harry stumbled out of the Floo. "There you are. McGonagall made her announcement and you weren't there… I'm so sorry, I didn't know she was going to choose Malfoy!"

"It's all right. It was foolish to think she'd want me to do it when I've never taught there."

"So what did she want?"

"She wants me to take Malfoy's job." Harry flopped into a chair. "I behaved like a complete berk, of course, but it's all sorted out now."

"Are you going to do it, then?"

"Yes. I think it's the right direction for me. I haven't felt like I belonged anywhere since I ended things with Oliver, you know? And now I'll be able to get off of your sofa." He grinned.

"Don't worry about that. Although…" Hermione looked uncomfortable. "I sort of have someone coming over."

"Tonight?"

"Well, yes. You were right, everything you said to me, and I'm sorry I said what I did about you not being in a relationship. I know you regret that things didn't work out with Oliver."

"I do, yeah. I regret even more that he decided to fuck me over in such a spectacular manner."

Hermione sighed. "I know. I'm sorry."

"Enough about that. Who's your date tonight? And more importantly, Silencing Charms, please?"

"Hush, of course I'll use a charm. And you'll be --"

"Oof -- hey, Harry." Ron stepped out of the Floo. "Hey, Hermione."

"Hi, Ron." Hermione gave him a shy smile.

"Really?" Harry exclaimed. "Oh, thank Merlin."

"Do you want some tea?" Hermione asked.

Harry shrugged. "I could use a cup, if you --"

"Not you. Ron?"

"That would be lovely, thanks. Hey, mate, you missed it -- McGonagall named Malfoy as her replacement! Can you believe that codswallop?" Ron dropped onto the sofa.

"Yeah, I heard. And I'll be teaching Defense."

Ron snorted. "Good one. Can you imagine having Malfoy for a boss?'

"I'll find out soon, since I'm serious."

"You -- but --" Ron gaped at him. "Really? You're really going to work for that smarmy bastard?"

"Yes, but I'm doing it partially so I can get inside and prove he's unfit to be headmaster. It's going to --"

"Harry Potter, you just put that nonsense aside!" Hermione returned with a tea tray. "Malfoy is doing wonderful things for Hogwarts, and you will not go mucking that up just because you can't get over a silly childhood grudge."

"But, 'Mione, he called you a Mud --"

"I'm aware, Ron, thank you," Hermione bit out through clenched teeth. "But it's been ten years, and he's spent most of it at the school. Don't you think his test scores speak for themselves?"

Harry pondered. "No. Surely having the same teacher for several years would help students on their exams, right?"

"Not like we had any continuity there," Ron agreed.

"Besides," Harry pointed out, "if he wanted to become headmaster he had to do something right. Now that he has the position, he's surely going to use it for his own gain. And why would he want me to teach there when he hates me?"

"Because he doesn't really hate you?" Hermione suggested. "Because he, unlike you, has matured and just wants a competent instructor to take over his classes?"

"Are you in on this too?" Harry's tone was indignant. "Because I'm fairly sure you, Malfoy, and McGonagall are all reading off the same script."

"At least our copy has been updated since 6th year, you dolt," Hermione retorted.

"Look, maybe he's up to something, maybe he's not. At least this way we'll know for sure."

"You're an idiot."

"You'll change your tune when I prove you wrong."

"If you ever prove me wrong about anything, I'll compose you an entire symphony. Come on, Ron, let's go to bed." Hermione grabbed Ron's arm and hauled him toward the bedroom.

Harry glared at the forgotten teacups and crossed his arms. "It'll serve her right when I show her that Malfoy still can't be trusted," he mumbled.

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"Morning," Hermione sang as she sailed into the kitchen the next morning. "Something wrong?" she asked when Harry merely grunted into his cereal.

"No, nothing at all -- it's not as though I just had to listen to my best friends going at each other like crazed monkeys for hours on end." Harry stabbed a corn flake with his spoon, splashing milk onto the table.

"Oh, did I forget to cast the Silencing Charm?" Hermione asked, mock regret dripping from her voice. "So sorry."

"I get it, you're punishing me for what I said last night. Well, I don't care. I'm still going to find out what's on Malfoy's agenda."

"Besides running a successful school? You're right, he surely has time to plot world domination on top of all that."

"I wasn't aware Malfoy had a fan club, or that you were the leader. Perhaps you should have badges made so that all the members can identify each other easily. You know, all two of you." Harry stood and dropped his bowl into the sink.

"Harry, really, you're such a bloody child. Let the man do his job. Do yours. It's not that difficult."

"What's difficult is that you won't trust my instincts!" Harry spun around to face Hermione. "I just want to protect the best part of my childhood -- is that so bad?"

"You just want to persecute an innocent man," Hermione corrected. "I'm on the board of directors, and --"

"And he's a changed man, and so good for Hogwarts, and blah, blah, blah. I get it; you're on his side here. I simply disagree, and I'm going to find out what he's hiding. And when I do, you'll see that I was right to be cautious of him."

"Fine. Do what you want. Just don't expect my support when you find out what a fool you are." Hermione glared at him. "And don't expect any Silencing Charms in the future, either. Especially since Ron's moving in."

"He is? That's great!" Harry exclaimed, throwing his arms around Hermione. "I'm so glad you two worked it all out, finally."

"You -- damn you, Harry!" Hermione released an exasperated sigh and returned the embrace. "Thank you. I still don't agree with what you're doing."

"And I'm still doing it, but I'm happy for you."

"I'm going back to bed. Hopefully Ron's awake now. We talked a lot last night, but we still have things to discuss."

"Oh, right, yeah. I heard parts of your conversation last night -- mainly the parts where you were encouraging Ron to go faster and harder."

"Shut it."

"And while I enjoy the closeness we share, I'd prefer not knowing exactly how hard you like Ron to pinch your nipples." Harry shuddered.

Hermione flushed. "Well, serves you right for being a prat."

"Go on back, then. And tell Ron that I, like you, like having my arse slapped when I'm naughty."

"Are you going to find your own flat soon?"

Harry grinned. "As a matter of fact, yes -- I do believe I'll be moving out today. I've got just the place in mind."

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Harry's stomach churned unpleasantly as he waited. When the door finally swung open, he took a deep breath. "Hello, Malfoy."

A single blond brow arched. "Back so soon, Potter?"

"You did tell me I could move in whenever I liked, right? And stay with you?"

"Yes, but I didn't expect you to take me up in it. Are you really…" Draco looked around him at the pile of shrunken trunks. "You really are. You want to move in with me?"

"You did say if I was desperate…"

"And you've suddenly reached the level of desperation that would prompt you to move in with the man you verbally assaulted not more than eighteen hours ago?"

"Hermione and Ron got back together last night. No Silencing Charms."

Malfoy's lip curled. "Right. Well, come on in then, I suppose."

Harry cheered mentally and took his things inside. "I appreciate it."

"It's fine." He frowned at Harry's trunks. "I'm not sure where you'll put everything, but you can have the sitting room for now. The sofa in there is reasonably comfortable and there's enough room to enlarge it a bit. We've got no extra faculty quarters right now, and I don't feel comfortable giving you access to someone else's private rooms when they're not here. The elves are working in the dorms, cleaning and redecorating for next term, so… that's all I've got to offer you."

"Sounds fine. Hermione's is lumpy."

"She's what?"

"Her sofa," Harry clarified. "It's lumpy."

"Oh. Right."

"I'm sure yours is fine."

"Of course it is." Draco drummed his fingers on a table. "I'll get you my curriculum today, since you're here, and you can begin reading it over."

"Sure, I can't wait. What will you be doing?"

"I'll be spending most days with Minerva until she takes her leave. If you need anything, we'll likely be sequestered in her office."

Oh, gross, maybe he's having an affair with McGonagall. I didn't think of that. "Really?"

"Yes, really. There's a lot of work involved in administration. I've been assisting with the budgets and hiring for the past couple of years, but there's a lot left to learn. I've got most of this month and all of July left before I'm on my own, so I need to get to work. You caught me just as I was preparing to leave."

"Ah." Harry scratched his cheek. "All right, then."

"Take a look at these." Draco sorted through a few files on his desk and handed Harry several. "We can discuss your thoughts later. Feel free to take notes -- ink and parchment are right here -- but please don't mark on my originals. Meals are served in the Great Hall at the usual times, and the password to my quarters is veneratio quod maiestas. Questions?"

"Er --"

"Wonderful. I'll see you later on."

Harry watched Draco leave, mouth ajar. "Where are you really going in such a hurry, Malfoy?" he muttered. Dropping the files on the desk, he pulled his Invisibility Cloak out of one of his trunks and hurried into the corridor, where Malfoy was just rounding a corner.

Several minutes later Harry stood outside McGonagall's office with a frown. It appeared Malfoy was telling the truth, at least about his destination. He decided to check Malfoy's story with McGonagall at lunch -- surely something was off there.

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Lunch was a long time away, seeing as how Harry wasn't able to get back into Draco's quarters since he hadn't really been listening when the password was given. Instead, he wandered the corridors and noted all the changes he hadn't seen since the post-war rebuild was completed.

When it was finally lunchtime Harry headed to the Great Hall. He met Professor Flitwick on the way in and smiled at the wizened little man. "Hello, Professor."

Flitwick smiled. "Hello, yourself, Professor. Congratulations on the new job -- and it's about time!"

"Yes, well, I'm happy to be here, even if it took me awhile. And Professor McGonagall retiring is quite the change, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is." Flitwick shrugged. "But then we knew it was coming, and my own retirement is just around the corner. Between you and I, next year will be my last."

"Oh, that's too bad."

"It's time, my boy."

"At least you'll only have one year here with Malfoy at the helm."

Flitwick looked up sharply. "You boys aren't still at each other, are you? Young Mr. Malfoy has truly been an asset to the school. I imagine he'll have a successful tenure as headmaster."

Is everyone here completely brainwashed by Malfoy? "I…"

"Mr. Potter, welcome!" McGonagall approached them with a smile, and Harry returned it with relief.

"Headmistress. It's good to see you again."

"I was so happy when Professor Malfoy told me you'd decided to join us, and then he told me this morning that you were already here!"

"I needed a place to stay, and I'm looking forward to getting started. Malfoy told me you were training him today."

"Every day. He's a fast learner, and he's been assisting me with things for awhile now, but there's still a lot to go over. He'll do well, though. I'm very pleased you two worked out your differences -- and now you're staying with him, of all things! Well done, Mr. Potter."

"Yes, well." Harry wanted to scowl at the fact that Malfoy was telling the truth. Well, no

matter -- that simply meant that he was planning to take over completely before unleashing whatever nefarious plans he had in mind.

"I apologize that there are no extra staff quarters. I could try and contact one of the professors who aren't residing here this summer, I suppose…"

"No, no," Harry interjected. "Malfoy was right about that; I wouldn't feel comfortable taking over someone else's space without them present. I'm fine on his sofa." And I'll be able to keep a closer eye on him this way, he added silently.

"Come and join us, won't you?" McGonagall motioned to the table, where Flitwick had settled next to Malfoy.

"Sure." He followed McGonagall to the table and returned Malfoy's nod as he took his seat. "Hello, Malfoy."

"Potter. How was your morning? Get much work done?"

"I actually took a walk."

"All morning?"

"I… forgot the password."

Draco snorted. "Already? Well done, Potter. Should I change it to something you can handle more easily? Perhaps just your name, if you can remember that?"

"Mr. Malfoy." McGonagall's tone was warning, and Harry smirked at him.

"Just tell me what it is again and I'll be fine."

"Here." Draco took up a quill and scribbled on a scrap of parchment from the stack of files he had beside him. "Written down for you. Shall I pin it to your robes?"

"No, thanks, I'll manage." Harry took the paper and jolted a bit when his fingers brushed Malfoy's.

"Wonderful. Minerva, I'm going back up. I'll see you shortly."

Harry frowned, watching Draco leave, and dug into his meal. "That was fast."

"We arrived a bit before you, and Mr. Malfoy is very task-oriented. He's eager to learn the ropes well before the term begins."

"Right."

"He tells me you're going to be the head of Slytherin House. There won't be any prejudices, will there?"

Harry shook his head. "I don't have it in me to judge people I don't even know based on that hat's decisions. Not anymore."

"Good. We've made such headway, and I'd like to know it's not all to be lost in my absence."

"Headmistress, I wondered -- I was passing by the corridor where the Room of Requirement

should be and there's nothing there. I wasn't able to create a door."

Her expression darkened. "It's no longer available. The fire destroyed the magic too badly to be repaired, so we've closed it permanently."

"Oh." Harry frowned. "That's awful."

"Indeed it is. But it's a small price to pay since we were able to restore most of the rest of the school. I…" She closed her eyes momentarily, and Harry laid a hand over hers.

"I still see it, too," he said quietly. It was true; he could still easily picture the school on fire, even a decade later. He could see the piles of stone, the crumbled walls, the bodies… and he could still feel the flames licking at his feet as he flew for his life, Malfoy clutching him and panting in his ear.

"We're all in a better place now, Harry," McGonagall said gently. "That's why I'm so happy to see you back here. Getting along with Mr. Malfoy to boot. You make me proud."

Guilt flooded Harry's body at her words. "Yes, well, I'm glad to be here."

"I've got to get back. I'll see you 'round dinner time, all right? Settle in."

"I will."

~*~*~*~*~

Dear Hermione,

So far, so good. I've moved in to my new quarters -- sort of -- and you and Ron can be as loud

and disgusting as you want to be.

I didn't tell you before I left, but my new quarters are still Malfoy's quarters. He isn't moving until McGonagall leaves in August. That means two whole months to get close to my new roommate and see what exactly he's hiding. And he is hiding something, even if you disagree.

He's not too bad so far. Snarky, still, but all right. At least it'll be tolerable for the time being. And everything with him aside, I'm really glad to be home. That's what it feels like -- home. I'm excited to start my class, and I hate to admit it, but Malfoy's curriculum is seamless. If we'd been educated this way, even Neville would have received an O on his NEWTs. I can't see much of anything I'd care to change, though I might alter the order of topics just a bit. He does seem to be a competent teacher, if nothing else.

That doesn't change the fact that he always has an agenda, and I'll find out what it is. Say hello to Ron for me, and I'll talk to you soon.

Love,

Harry

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Harry stretched out on the sofa. He'd been living with Malfoy for a week and he barely saw the man. It was nearly bedtime and he was still in his office, the scratch of quill on parchment audible through his partially closed door.

With a sigh Harry stood. "Malfoy?" he called. He padded to the office and pushed the door all the way open. "Malfoy, do you have a minute?"

"One moment." Malfoy scratched at the parchment a bit more and turned. "Yes?"

"I just wanted to tell you that I found your curriculum to be quite adequate."

Draco snorted. "Thank you for the glowing endorsement of several years' worth of my work."

"No, no, I mean… it's really good. I think it's a lot better than anything we had as students."

"I do, too. But then we didn't have a lot of stability during our years here, either. I tried to model my original curriculum on many of the things Severus taught me, as well as our year with Lupin."

Harry's eyebrows shot up. "Lupin? Remus Lupin?"

"Did you know another?" Draco asked dryly.

"I just… you hated him."

"I was considerably less mature then. I recognize now that he was the best Professor we had for that subject, other than Severus. I know you didn't think much of him but he was good at what he did, whether it was Potions or Defense."

"I agree."

"Really?"

"Sounds like we're having the same conversation in reverse. Yes, really -- I learned a lot more about him later, and even though I wish he'd been a little easier on me I recognize that he was

a very intelligent man. I see him sort of differently now."

"Yes, well." Draco looked at his hands. "I do miss him."

"I wish he hadn't --"

"If that will be all, Potter, I think I'll skip the rest of this little trip down memory lane. I have work to finish before I go to bed."

"Fine, sorry," Harry mumbled. He was cursing at Draco in his head as he turned away -- it was just like the prat to ruin a perfectly reasonable conversation -- but then he saw the sheen of tears in Draco's eyes and didn't know what to think at all.

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Despite his best efforts, Harry couldn't find anything amiss in Draco's behavior over the next weeks. The man worked harder than Harry could ever have imagined.

As June turned into July, Harry was beginning to have doubts that Draco was plotting anything at all. The faculty liked him, McGonagall adored him, and even Hagrid had nothing but positive things to say about the boy that had once made his life difficult.

The problem, he decided, was that he wasn't spending enough time with his old enemy. Was it intentional? Was Malfoy avoiding him because he didn't want Harry to find out what he was up to? Harry decided that was probably the answer, and marched directly into Draco's bedroom without thinking to remedy that situation.

And quickly stumbled back out again.

"Potter!" Draco followed him, closing his dressing gown along the way. "What are you about? I

told you I was going to take a bath."

"I forgot! I'm sorry." Harry looked away, but it didn't take the picture of a very naked Malfoy out of his head. "I just wanted to ask you…"

"Yes?"

"If you'd go to Hogsmeade with me!" Harry blurted. "You know, for dinner."

"Are you asking me on a date, Potter?"

"No!"

"Good, because it's not proper for the headmaster to date one of his Professors."

"Is that the only reason?" Harry asked without thinking.

Draco rolled his eyes. "No, but I thought I'd spare you from hearing that you're a speccy git with abysmal taste in fashion."

"Thanks a lot."

"It doesn't matter, Potter. I don't date. Period."

"It's not a date, though. I just wanted to get out for the evening, and I thought you might like to join me. You're always very busy."

"I take my job very --"

"Seriously, yes, got it. But even the headmaster needs a break, right? Don't burn yourself out before term begins."

Draco arched an eyebrow. "Well, be that as it may… I suppose it would be nice to get some fresh air."

"Great! Then you just… you know…" Harry allowed his eyes to travel back down Draco's body and swallowed hard. "Get dressed. And when you're ready we'll go."

"Fine." Draco turned, revealing a gorgeous silk-encased arse for Harry's viewing pleasure, and closed himself in his bedroom again.

An hour later, once Draco was dressed and Harry's erection had subsided, they wandered the road together, peering in shop windows and exchanging small talk. It was so normal that Harry nearly forgot he was meant to be probing for information.

"So, er…" he began when they'd finished their meals at the Three Broomsticks. "I guess we should get to know each other better. You know, since we'll be working together."

Draco rolled his eyes. "We know each other well enough. I'm your headmaster, you're one of my professors. End of discussion."

"Hey," Harry protested. "Come on. You let me stay with you, but you barely speak to me. You're gone all day and when you're there you're locked in your office. You don't talk to me at meals, you don't discuss anything with me unless it's about your precious lesson plans, and even though it was supposedly your idea to ask me to teach you don't seem remotely interested in my presence at the school."

"Feel better?" Draco asked dryly.

"No."

"Sorry to tell you, Potter, but you aren't my top priority. I have an entire school to run and it is a bit intimidating, you know. I have a lot to learn and a short time in which to do it."

"McGonagall has implied more than once that she's been grooming you for this for years."

"I suppose, but I never allowed myself to believe I had a chance at the position. It's still very new and frightening, knowing I have as much responsibility as I do."

Harry frowned at the sincerity in Draco's voice. "But… why did you accept the position if you're afraid of it?"

"That's a laugh, coming from you. I'm sure you know what it is to take on a task that seems terrifying."

"I had no choice. And opposing Voldemort isn't really in the same league as getting a promotion at work."

"Glad you noticed," Draco drawled. "My point is, sometimes you have to make the leap if you're hoping to land in a better place."

"Oh." Harry worried his lip with his teeth. "McGonagall seems to have loads of confidence in you."

"Someone has to." Draco looked out the window. "She gave me a chance when people still saw me as the son of a Death Eater. The boy that let Death Eaters into this very school. Some of the parents were angry that I was allowed to teach, and she defended me again and again when she could have turned me away."

Harry swallowed. "She's very loyal."

"Yes. And who am I to inspire loyalty in the likes of her?"

"You respect her," Harry realized aloud. "You really, truly respect her."

"Of course I do. She's given me my life back, Potter. I can't fuck this up. If I do I'll let her down. And the parents may have conveniently forgotten who I am since their children excel on their leaving exams because of my classes, but one mistake as headmaster will have them rallying for my dismissal. I know that." Draco ran a restless hand through his hair. "So you'll have to excuse me if I'm not playing the part of a proper host in favor of trying to do my job."

"I… see." Harry stared openly at his companion. The man was either a damn good liar, Harry thought, or…

"I'm going to go back. This was stupid." Draco stood. "Stay if you want, and I'll settle the bill on the way out."

"Draco, wait." Harry grabbed his arm and tugged, causing Draco to nearly topple into his lap. His breath caught as Draco righted himself.

"Potter," Draco said stiffly. "Kindly release me."

"I'll pay for dinner. I invited you, after all."

"Fine. Let go."

"At least let me walk back with you."

"Potter --"

"Please."

Draco sighed. "Fine."

Harry left a few coins on the table and followed Draco out. "I understand."

"What?"

"What you're feeling. I get it. People only see my scar and all, you know? Doesn't matter what I do, it's always about the fame. I can't so much as fart without it making the Prophet."

"Charming," Draco replied. "I don't think it's the same thing."

"It is! People don't see us for who we are. It's all about things we couldn't control, and --"

"I could certainly have controlled what I did. I chose not to."

"You were threatened!" Harry protested.

"You made the right choices. I could have, too, if I wasn't so weak. Yes, Potter, I'll admit it -- I was fucking weak. Happy?"

Stung, Harry hurried to catch up when Draco quickened his pace. "No! I -- all right, maybe as a teenager I'd have enjoyed it, but not anymore. Didn't you tell me you'd grown up?"

"Yes, and you proved you haven't."

"It was a gut reaction, all right? And I was embarrassed… dammit, Draco, I already apologized for that."

"You did, yes. Sorry."

"So… stop walking so bloody fast, your legs are longer than mine!" Harry caught the back of Draco's shirt.

Draco whirled around and took hold of Harry's biceps. "Potter," he said in a low voice. "Everything is at stake here for me. Everything. I appreciate you trying to understand it, but I don't have time to discuss the past, or how much you think we have in common, or anything like that. I need to focus on the school right now. This is my chance to make things right, to make up for everything I fucked up before. Don't you understand?"

Harry blinked. Draco's face was so close to his it was blurry and his mouth was slightly open, allowing little puffs of air to graze Harry's lips… "B-but you'll have help, Draco. The other professors support you. McGonagall will help, even if by owl. Dumbledore's portrait is there, with the other headmasters, and he'll help you. Snape, as well, for that matter. And… I may not know much, but I'll… I'll support you, too."

It was a shock to realize he actually meant it.

"Thank you, Potter," Draco said quietly. "That means a lot to me, especially in light of how we started all of this."

"I was stupid to think she'd want me as headmaster. I don't know a thing about it. See, every time you start to worry about mistakes, think of how badly I'd bollix it all up in comparison."

Draco chuckled and stepped back, releasing his hold on Harry. "That's very true. Except that you're the Chosen One, so even if you burned the castle to the ground you'd be forgiven."

"I don't know about that."

"I do." Draco shook his head. "There have been letters, you know. A whole host of them, and Howlers too."

"What sort of letters?"

"The sort that are filled with ranting about someone like me taking over the school. Even a few of the people who got over me teaching here are outraged all over again. Minerva chose me herself and the board's elders agreed, but that doesn't matter to anyone who just wants to see me as a Death Eater."

"Well, fuck them. They don't matter, they don't know what you're capable of."

Draco chuckled. "That's the problem -- they think they know exactly what I'm capable of."

"The sort of people who want to judge someone on their past actions…" Harry swallowed and looked away, shame slipping over him like a heavy cloak. "They just aren't worth your time. Just remember how many people think you can do this."

"I try, but it's a challenge every time another Howler arrives."

"You have a whole lot more of us for you, though, than against you." Harry raised an impulsive hand to brush a strand of blond hair away from Draco's face. Draco's eyes widened and his lips parted slightly in surprise, and Harry found himself wanting to kiss the expression away with a frightening intensity.

Draco backed away and stared at him for a moment before responding. "I… come on, then, I've a lot of work to do."

"Can I help you with anything?"

"Potter…"

"What? If you thought I was an utter buffoon you wouldn't have me teaching, would you?"

"Point. Still, no, there's not much for you to do. I'm reading through the bylaws currently, and it's simply tedious work."

"Ugh." Harry's lip curled. "You have to memorize them?"

"It's expected for the headmaster to be very familiar with them, yes."

"Perhaps I can bring you tea."

"Going to become a house elf, are you?" Draco pushed the gate open and gestured for Harry to

enter school grounds. "Really, I don't require assistance."

"All right, if you're sure." Harry took a deep breath. "Is that why you don't date? To focus on work?"

"Yes. Primarily."

"There are other reasons?"

"A little personal, aren't we?"

"Come on, we're friends."

Draco chuckled. "When did that happen?"

"Tonight, I'd say."

They entered Draco's quarters. "All right, friend -- I don't date because I'm far too busy to devote time to a relationship. The last time I attempted it was when I first became a professor here, and I wound up miserable when I was cheated on for 'not being available.'" Draco used air quotes to punctuate his statement. "And I decided then that it's not worth being hurt. I'm busy, and I'm married to this school."

"It's been years then!" Harry said, horrified. "Surely you could find a woman who understands your duties here."

Draco made a face. "A man, if you please, and no. Needs are easy enough to meet, and I can go without the rest."

"But --"

"I'm going to read in bed until I go to sleep. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Hey!" Harry watched Draco's abrupt departure and shook his head.

He sat up for quite a while, turning the evening's conversation over in his head again and again. He felt like an utter berk for having been so immature and unwilling to believe Malfoy was sincere. On top of it all, he had to admit that his feelings for Malfoy were rapidly moving past platonic and heading straight toward something dangerous.

Turning to the table he'd been using as a desk at last, he spotted a sealed letter and sat down to read.

Dear Harry,

Well, Sherlock, have you discovered all of Malfoy's secrets yet? It's a bit cold, even for you, to be living with the man merely to poke into his private life so that you can expose him. Not that I think you'll find anything, mind you, but since you're set on believing he's still an evil git who's up to something, what can I say? I hope you aren't really pretending to be his friend as well. That's just cruel.

Ron is well, and things between us are too. I do have to thank you for shaking some sense into me about him, because I haven't been so happy in years. I wish you'd let me shake some into you about this whole Malfoy thing but I suspect you won't. So just be careful, all right?

Come and see us soon.

Love,

Hermione

Harry folded the letter and sighed. "No, I think I've come to my senses all on my own," he murmured. "Time to let the past stay in the past, where it belongs -- especially since I think I may want Draco in my future."

~*~*~*~*~

Harry woke early the next morning, prepared to catch Draco on his way out. He waited until the bedroom door opened and smiled when he saw Draco moving quietly across the room, clearly trying not to wake Harry.

"Good morning."

Draco jumped. "Damn you, Potter, you scared the piss out of me. What are you doing awake?"

"Just wanted to say hello to you before you left. You look very nice today."

"Oh." Draco's brow furrowed. "Thank you. Did you need anything?"

"No, not at all. Wait." Harry leaped up and stepped into his slippers. "I'll walk you to McGonagall's office. Or your office, I suppose, right?"

"Er…" Draco folded his arms. "You're still in your pajamas, Potter. And your hair's a fright."

"So? No one is here. Hardly, anyway, and they're likely still asleep."

"But if they aren't, and they see us, they'll think --"

"That I'm going to breakfast, which I will when we part ways. What about you? When will you have breakfast?"

"I'll have a roll or something when I get there. Minerva usually has something light sent up since she eats before I arrive."

"That's not enough. If you're to spend your whole day working you need to start it off with a good meal."

"Listen, although I'm truly terrified by your concern, what the hell have you done with the real Potter? The one who doesn't speak in complete sentences before noon and would be all right with the idea of me starving to death?"

"I just thought we made some real progress last night, you and I. And as your friend I just want to make sure you're taken care of."

Draco smiled slightly. "There you go with that 'friends' thing again. You're a tough one to figure out. Fine, if you insist on accompanying me, let's go."

"And you'll come for breakfast?"

"No."

"Please?"

"No, Potter."

"Come on. Or shall I make you a plate and bring it up?"

"Again you want to be a house elf. There aren't any vacancies in that department, so you'll have to stick to teaching."

"Don't change the subject." Harry touched Draco's arm.

Draco swatted his hand away. "I have a mother, thank you, and I relish the fact that she's not here to micromanage my every move. I'm not looking for a substitute in her absence."

"Have breakfast with me. I know, I'll have the elves serve you breakfast in bed tomorrow. That way you'll eat."

"Only barbarians eat in bed."

"I happen to love breakfast in bed."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Of course you do. If I eat with you, will you shut up?"

"For now, yes."

"Fine. Prat."

"Thanks, git."

Harry chattered to Draco over breakfast, hurrying to follow when Draco got up to leave. They parted at the staircase leading to McGonagall's office and Harry returned to Draco's quarters to dress properly and work through Draco's notes on advanced protection spells.

Their meals for the next several days went much the same way. Harry met Draco in the Great Hall and sat beside him, carrying on mainly one-sided conversations as Draco heaved sigh after long-suffering sigh.

"Mr. Potter." McGonagall hurried after him as he left the room one evening the following week. "May I speak with you?"

"Sure." Harry smiled at her. "What's going on?"

"I was hoping to ask you that very question. You're acting differently."

"How so?"

"Oh, I don't know -- forcing Mr. Malfoy to take breakfast with you, talking with him at every meal, tucking him into bed at night…"

"He told you that?" Harry exclaimed, flushing. "I don't tuck him in, exactly. I just make sure he stops working at a reasonable hour, considering how early he gets up."

"And then you tuck him in."

"Once I gave him an extra blanket. He gets cold, and it was an unseasonably chilly night. Why are you asking me this? Why is he telling you this?"

"Calm down. He's long been able to confide in me but he doesn't often get too personal, so imagine my surprise when he began telling me stories of how your attitude has changed. He mentioned that you two shared a meal in Hogsmeade and had a conversation that resulted in… this." She arched one gray eyebrow. "What's changed for you, Harry? I do hope you aren't toying with him. He needs friends. You were able to get along with him at first but now it appears that you're taking things much more seriously."

"Look, I…" Harry released a breath. "I'll admit I wasn't completely sold on the idea of Draco as Headmaster. Not even after I arrived, not completely. But then we talked, and he opened up to me, and..."

"Now you're trying to show him you're behind him, because you feel guilty about doubting him initially."

The woman was still as sharp as she'd always been. "Yeah. Pretty much." And I can't get him out of my head, but we won't discuss that.

"Hmm. Is that all there is to it?"

Damn you, woman. "Well, yeah…"

"Because I'm not blind, despite what you may believe. I may be an old woman, but I still have eyes, and I see how the pair of you are. How Draco complains about your sudden change of heart to me, but how he can't stop himself from smiling -- something I rarely see. The man is too serious and he needs someone to lighten his burden. But I beg you, Harry… don't hurt him."

Harry frowned. "Headmistress, we're not… together."

"I'm aware. But you'd prefer things that way, wouldn't you?"

"I…" Harry's face burned. "I don't know."

"I do. And I also know that he's suffered enough. Tread carefully with him."

"How do you know he won't hurt me?" Harry protested.

"Oh, I'm certain he will. And I think you know it too, so I feel the warning isn't necessary. For my part, I've been telling Draco to let you take care of him if that's what you want to do. Merlin knows he could use it, and that you're happiest when you're worrying about someone else." McGonagall patted his arm. "There are no laws against the headmaster having a relationship with a professor, even if he'd like you to believe so. I should know."

"What?" Harry exclaimed. "You and -- and -- Dumbledore?"

"Albus?" McGonagall laughed heartily. "Oh, dear boy, no. The man was as gay as the day is long. No, no… I've had a bit of something the past few years with Horace. He's changed for the better since the war, and he's good company for a lonely old woman."

"Slughorn?" Harry exclaimed. "I -- wow, all right. That's, er, great."

"It's what it is. Now, run along and see if you can't get your own young man to give up working for the weekend. There are still a few weeks before term begins and he's ready for it, but he won't believe me when I tell him that."

"Thanks, Headmistress. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Indeed you will." She waved him away.

Harry headed back to Draco's quarters and straight for the office. "Hello."

"What can I do for you, Potter?" Draco asked without looking up from the papers spread across his desk.

"Er… did you know McGonagall and Slughorn are shagging?"

Draco sighed. "I did, yes, and thanks ever so for bringing it to my attention when I'd tried so hard to forget."

"Sorry. I just found out."

Draco turned then, his face drawn in horror. "You didn't -- you didn't see them at it, did you? Do you need to sit down? I'll pour you a drink."

"You're very accommodating, but no, I'm fine. She told me."

"Did she." Draco's face returned to its usual blank state. "I see."

"In passing. She said I should come and distract you so that you'll quit working for the weekend."

"I have too much --"

"You're ready, Draco. She told me that, too. Don't you think it would be best for you to take it

easy for once? Don't burn yourself out before the term even begins."

"Potter…"

"Let's have a drink, both of us. What have you got? Firewhiskey?"

"Yes, but --"

"Bring it out. We'll drink to -- to something. I don't know."

"That sounds worthwhile," Draco drawled. "I really shouldn't."

"You really should," Harry corrected. "Take a night off and let yourself unwind so that you'll be fresh when you get back to it on Monday."

"Tomorrow."

"Monday," Harry said, tone firm. "Now, let's begin, shall we?"

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"And then… and then she tried to kiss me, and I just about threw up my lunch!" Draco gestured madly and downed another gulp from his glass.

"I don't blame you," Harry said, voice solemn. "She's a bit… puggish."

"She is, Harry, but you're forgetting I told you she was naked. Naked! And her… her…" He used

his hands to mimic breasts. "I knew I was gay, but that settled it."

"I've been with a girl. Wasn't… wasn't awful." The room began to spin so Harry stretched out on his back. "But then I was with a bloke… 's better. 'S a lot better."

"Better when they don't cheat you," Draco muttered. "Cheat you, cheat on you, just bloody cheat. Fucker."

Harry struggled to prop himself up on an elbow and looked up at Draco, who was sprawled across the sofa. "Who was he?"

"Who?"

"The bloke who broke your heart."

"Didn't break my heart," Draco snapped. "Just… bruised it some. Name was Liam. Smarmy bastard."

"Liam's a fool."

"Doesn't matter. I'm not the sort of man someone decides to love, am I? Not being who I am and all."

"You're brilliant!" Harry said earnestly. "Didn't think so before, but that's just 'cause I didn't see. I wasn't looking. Now I do, and I think you're wonderful."

"You're pissed."

"Maybe, but I still like you."

Draco looked down at him, the corners of his mouth curved slightly. "You're not so bad yourself, I suppose."

"Draco…" Harry got to his knees and crawled to the edge of the sofa. "Why won't you date now?"

"I told you."

"But…" Harry wobbled and Draco caught his arms. They stared at each other, faces nearly touching, and Harry felt breathless. "Draco."

"It's not a good idea," Draco murmured after several lengthy moments. "Dating. I'm too busy, and I don't enjoy casual affairs."

"But…" Harry swallowed. "Aren't you lonely?"

"I have my books, my castle. And an annoying roommate," he teased.

Harry shivered when Draco's breath ghosted over his face. "You need a lover."

"I don't." Draco released Harry and pulled away. "Tell me what happened with Wood."

Harry blinked. "Oh… well, I guess we just, you know, grew apart."

"Bollocks."

"Fine." Harry sighed. "He cheated on me. And now they're married. It all happened in a matter of months."

"Oh." Draco frowned. "I'm sorry. I didn't see anything in the papers about it."

"Because his spouse decided to make it a quiet affair, in an attempt to make up for stealing my boyfriend."

"Do you know him, then?"

"Oh, I do." Harry laughed without humor. "I do indeed. And it's not a 'him.' Oliver was always quite comfortable playing on both fields, you know. He went off for a series of away games and met up with a chaser for the Harpies, and the rest is history. I don't know whether his betrayal or hers hurts the most."

"The Harpies… is that --"

"Yes. Ginny Weasley. Weasley-Wood, as she calls herself now."

"That's a fucking stupid name. 'Weasley-Wood.' Sounds like a rodent with a boner."

Harry promptly sprayed the mouthful he'd just taken across the floor. "Fuck," he choked. "That was priceless."

"What's priceless is that the silly bint who claimed to lurve you so much over the years decided to screw you over so royally. You're better off without the both of them."

"I suppose. It's not missing Oliver that gets me -- it's what they did. And I'm not looking forward to spending holidays alone, but I'll be damned if I'm going to the Burrow and watching the happy couple together."

"Then stay here. I'll be here, and we can pretend we're not complete losers together."

"We aren't," Harry protested. "Just because we had the disfortune to find a pair of unfaithful pricks…"

"Misfortune."

"Huh?"

"You said… I don't know, something different. But it's 'misfortune.'" Draco took a swig from the bottle, not bothering with his glass. "I miss having a regular shag partner."

"Thought you didn't need a lover."

"I don't. Just miss things. Like morning sex."

"Morning sex?"

"You know, spontaneous, fucking despite having morning breath, desperate and hot and sometimes still sloppy in the arse from the night before…"

Harry's breath hitched. "Er… yeah, that sounds nice."

"It's easy enough to pull at the clubs, but I don't have much time for that anymore. And it's sort of depressing. Shouldn't be seen out like that anyway." Draco threw an arm over his eyes. "So I'll be the cranky, celibate Headmaster, I suppose."

"If…" Harry cleared his throat. "I could, you know, we could always…"

"Not pissed enough for that, Potter."

Harry frowned, stung. "Sorry I repulse you."

Draco snorted and struggled to his feet. "Believe me, you're anything but repulsive. That's the problem."

"What?"

"You make it very hard." He chuckled. "In so many ways."

"What's hard?" Harry stumbled in his hurry to stand and knocked into Draco.

"My cock, every time I look at you." Draco laid a palm on Harry's cheek. "And if it wasn't such a spectacularly bad idea, I'd bend over for you right now."

Someone whimpered. Harry wondered if it wasn't him. "But… why can't we? I care about you, so if you're worried about something casual…"

"You wouldn't see it. I can't, not right now. I need to focus --"

"Stop hiding behind the bloody job!" Harry exclaimed. "You said you're attracted to me, and I know you feel something for me, too. Why can't we try?"

"Because I would hate to lose this! Close to twenty years too late we're finally friends. Aren't we?"

Harry nearly swooned at the flash of desperation in Draco's eyes, and he nuzzled the hand that was still cupping his cheek. "Yes, we are. Don't you think that makes it easier to become something more?"

"I think…" Draco's eyelids fluttered shut when Harry pressed warm lips to his palm. "I think we've had too much to drink, and we're crossing quite a few lines that shouldn't be crossed."

"But…"

"Good night, Harry." Draco dropped his hand and gave Harry a searching look before disappearing into his bedroom.

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Harry awoke some hours later to a brass band playing at top volume in his head and a thousand spotlights beaming directly into his eyes.

Groaning, he struggled to sit up and keep the contents of his stomach inside. A glance at the small table beside the sofa rewarded him with the sight of a precious vial. "Hangover potion," he mumbled. "Bless you, Draco."

After downing the potion Harry stretched and stood, then frowned at Draco's closed door. Generally when Harry used the en suite bathroom Draco was gone, since he spent most of his days away, but Harry was dying for a proper bath. He supposed he could wait, except he

needed to piss badly.

He pushed open the door and stepped into the room on quiet feet. Draco lay in bed, huddled under a mound of covers, and Harry had to smile at his light snores. "You look beautiful asleep," he whispered, pulling a blanket up to cover a bare shoulder.

The bath felt marvelous, and Harry wrapped a hand around his cock as he relaxed. He pictured Draco entering the room, naked, and climbing in beside him. Straddling him, perhaps, and kissing him with fervor. Harry would embrace him and hold on tightly, just as he'd wanted to do for the past few days. Funny how the idea of giving the man a simple hug was nearly as appealing as sucking his cock, Harry mused.

The door clicked open, unheard by Harry as he continued to stroke himself beneath the water and bubbles. It was only when he heard a throat being cleared that he opened his eyes and flushed. "Er… hello."

"Good morning. I see you're… occupied." Draco stood in the door frame wearing only a pair of satiny black sleep trousers.

"I was -- well, I was just --"

"Having a morning wank. Got it. I'd wait, but the gallon or so of Firewhiskey I drank last night is demanding to be released." He ambled over to the toilet, hidden from Harry's view but not his ears.

I'm clearly a sick man if the sound of Draco taking a piss turns me on. God, he's got his hand on his cock right now…

Harry coughed. "So, thank you for the potion."

"You're welcome. Thank Merlin for that creation." The toilet flushed and Draco stepped back into view. "Sorry to disturb you. A bath is an excellent idea -- I do believe I'll enjoy one myself when you're finished."

"You can join me," Harry blurted.

Draco sighed. "I hardly think that's the best idea."

"I think it's a great one. I'll wash your back."

"Harry…"

"Come on, Draco. Wouldn't it be nice? A lazy Saturday morning in the bath? I'll soap you up and --"

"Just stop." Draco ran a shaky hand over his eyes and turned away, but not before Harry saw the sight tenting in his pajamas. "I meant what I said before. It's not a good idea for us to become intimate."

"But you want me," Harry said stubbornly. "And I want you. Why is that wrong?"

"Lust is simple enough, but acting on it makes things complicated."

"Maybe I want complicated. I told you last night that I care for you. It's not just lust for me. If it is for you, then…"

"It isn't, but that's what makes it so… so dangerous."

"But why?"

"I don't have any other friends!" Draco cried. "I don't have -- I just have colleagues. Minerva is like a parent to me, except that I can share far more with her than I can with my own parents since she actually approves of me unconditionally. No one else here is really a friend. They're all nice people, we work well together, and we share a mutual respect. But that's where it ends. With you…"

"I'm your friend." Harry's voice was earnest.

"I know, and I need that! I didn't expect us to learn to get along so well, and so quickly, but you finally accept me and I don't want to ruin it. I don't know how to be in a relationship, clearly, since I've failed at every one I've tried to have. If you and I didn't work out I'd lose my b--" He swallowed. "My best friend. And my Defense professor, as well."

Harry's heart stuttered. "But if we don't try --"

"Then I'm safe. Unless you choose to leave since I won't give you what you're after." Draco's eyes were sad. "I suppose I wouldn't blame you."

"I won't leave. I'll be your friend no matter what." Harry grinned. "But I'm not giving up on you. You don't gain anything by being afraid."

"Perhaps not." Draco looked at the floor. "But you've always known I'm a coward. Apparently some things never change."

"I don't think that, not at all. Maybe over cautious, but not a coward."

"Right. I'll just see you when you're finished here." Draco closed the door quietly behind him.

Harry heaved a sigh before climbing out of the tub and wrapping a towel around his waist. He wasn't sure how to make Draco see that they made perfect sense together, but he wasn't about to give up. "It took me a few weeks to see that he's serious about this job," Harry murmured. "So maybe I just need to give him time to see that I'm serious about him."

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Dear Hermione,

Sorry it's taken me a bit to write back, but I wasn't entirely sure how to tell you what's going on. Actually, I'm not at all sure what is going on. Less than I'd liked, but far more than I thought possible.

You see, I'm not suspicious of Draco anymore. I invited him out one evening to see if I could discover his secrets, and it turns out I was wrong. Happy? I'm certain you are. He truly wants to do good things for the school and I feel like a right berk for having doubted him after hearing what he had to say. Perhaps I should have just listened to him in the first place.

Go on and be smug about being right; I don't care. I have bigger problems now, mainly ones involving how I feel about Draco. I like him, Hermione. I like him a lot. We're finally friends, and I'm so bloody attracted to him I can't stand it. I want to pounce on him all the time! The good news is that he's attracted to me, too. The bad news is that he refuses to act on it.

Did you know that he sees me as his best friend now? Me, the prat who wanted to expose him – not that he knows that. I don't deserve his friendship, but I'm glad for it. He doesn't have anyone else in his life. He's built everything around his job and the school, and it's clear his old friends aren't in the picture. He's hinted at the fact that his parents don't approve of him, too, so he really must feel alone to consider me his best friend. But I want to be. I want it so very much, and I want more than that, too. I wish he'd let me show him that we could have so much more.

So don't worry about things anymore. I've been set right and now I'm just going to focus on work, and on Draco – but in a good way.

Love,

Harry

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Harry sipped his tea and snuck a glance at Draco, who was reading the Prophet and chewing absently. They'd evolved into a sort of routine over the weeks, and as August loomed ever closer Harry was growing quite sad at the thought of losing his roommate.

"Draco?" Harry ventured.

"Hmm?" Draco didn't look up.

"Did you want to do anything this weekend?"

"You'll make me whether I want to or not, won't you?" Draco laid the paper aside and took a bite of his scone.

"Oh, hush. You can pretend it's me, but you wouldn't let me drag you off if you didn't want to be dragged. Last weekend was the first time you took a day off all summer, and it wasn't so bad, was it?"

"Mmm. So are you planning another Firewhiskey-soaked evening, or shall we do something else?"

"I'd like to take you out to dinner, and then I thought we could go to a club and dance." Harry held Draco's gaze even when it turned weary.

"Harry…"

"Draco, come on. It will be fun. We'll go to a Muggle club where no one will know us, if you're worried, but we're just going to dance."

Draco fidgeted with his teacup. "Tonight?"

"Yes, tonight."

"We're only going as friends. If we go."

"As you wish."

"I'll think about it." Draco pushed away from the table. "I've got to get to work."

Harry followed him into the corridor. "I'll be waiting for you when you're finished today."

"I'm not promising I'll go."

"I'm making reservations at Alohomora for eight, so leave yourself enough time to change."

"I love Alohomora," Draco said wistfully.

"I know, you mentioned it once."

"Well, as I said, I'll think about it."

"Good. I'll be ready."

Draco huffed in exasperation. "You're nothing if not persistent, aren't you?"

"You know me." Harry shrugged. "So off with you, and tell Minerva you've got plans tonight."

"And watch her smirk at me all day? I think not." He paused. "Make the reservation for seven. I'll be famished."

Harry's grin was triumphant. "Your wish is my command."

"I like the sound of that." Draco gave him a shy smile before turning away, and Harry nearly melted at the sight.

"I'm a grown man, and he makes me feel like a teenager again," Harry murmured.

"Love will do that to a person."

Harry jumped and whirled around. The painting of a meadow he'd been standing beside now contained a smiling Dumbledore. "Professor!"

"Hello, Harry. I'd been hoping you'd come to see me, but you haven't."

"I'm sorry, I --"

"No matter, I simply came to find you myself. So much has gone on here, hasn't it? Minerva retiring, young Mr. Malfoy taking her place… I must say, you made quite the scene when you found out."

"You saw -- of course you saw. Yeah, not one of my finer moments."

"No, it wasn't. What's important now, though, is that you set things right. I'm very proud of what Draco has accomplished. I dare say he might be one of the finest Headmasters in history before he's finished, once he begins and the public allows him to rest."

"He mentioned he got a few angry letters at first."

"He still does. Not many, but there are a small and persistent group who won't cease their hate mail. Minerva intercepts most of them so that he's spared the vitriol, but he knows. It's difficult for him. Imagine how you might feel if you had someone watching your every move, hoping for your inevitable mistake in order to have you removed from a position you'd worked very hard to achieve."

Guilt clawed at Harry's insides. "He doesn't deserve that."

"No, he doesn't." Dumbledore adjusted his painted spectacles. "Whatever brought you here, Harry, whatever you were thinking then… I'm relieved you've come around. I believe your intentions toward Draco are sincere now."

"Even as a painting you know everything, don't you?"

"I try. This school was my very life, after all. I had a chance at happiness with a partner once, and it didn't work as I'd hoped. I gave up after that. I fear Mr. Malfoy intends to fall into the same pattern."

"He doesn't want to give me a chance. I'm not giving up, but…"

"This job is redemption to him. I know that's how he views it, and I know he's terrified of failure when he's already facing some opposition. What he needs most right now is an ally. I do hope you'll be that for him, even if it takes far longer than you hope to convince him to change things."

"I will," Harry assured him.

"Although…" Dumbledore stroked his acrylic beard. "I'm not sure it will take as long as you think if the way he was just looking at you is anything to go by."

Harry reddened. "Well, here's hoping."

"Best of luck on your date tonight."

"Thanks, but less of that to Draco – he's not terribly keen on that word."

"He'll adjust."

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Harry dressed in all black, hoping the outfit was attractive enough for dinner but comfortable enough for dancing once he removed his jacket and tie. What's more, he hoped Draco would be relaxed enough to dance with him. Just the thought of that lithe body moving against his had Harry's trousers tightening.

He stood and smoothed his clothing when the door clicked open. "Hello," he said, feeling unaccountably anxious.

"Well." Draco closed the door and gave Harry a thorough study. "Don't you clean up nicely. I do believe I like you dressed up this way even more than in robes."

"Thank you." Harry tried not to fidget. "I got the reservations, so…"

"I'll be quick."

Harry paced the room while he waited, unable to calm his nerves. When Draco finally reemerged he stopped short. "You look… wow."

Draco smirked. "I'll take that as a compliment. Shall we?"

As they walked across the Hogwarts grounds together Harry stuffed his hands into his pockets, as the one nearest Draco itched to join with the slender fingers only inches away. He hoped that by the end of the evening that might be a possibility.

"I do love it here," Draco commented once they'd ordered. "I haven't been in awhile. I'm actually surprised you were able to get us in with a same-day reservation."

"Sometimes being Harry Potter has its benefits." Harry shrugged. "I don't much care for throwing my name around, but I knew you'd like to come here and I didn't want to wait a week to bring you."

Draco smiled. "Aren't you quite the gentleman."

"I just wanted you to have a good time."

"I am. It's lovely to spend the evening with a friend, out somewhere nice instead of cooped up in my office. Yes, I can admit that," he added in response to Harry's arched brow. "Look, it may have taken some pushing on your part, but… thank you. I like having someone to spend time with." I've been very lonely for a long time seemed to go unsaid, and Harry couldn't stop himself from reaching for Draco's hand this time.

"I like spending time with you, too," Harry told him. "Truly. I'm glad you came."

Draco stared at their twined fingers, then raised his gaze to Harry's earnest face. "I am too."

Their food arrived just then and Harry could have happily hexed the cheerful waitress for her poor timing. He released Draco's hand with reluctance and dug into his meal. "Are you sure you don't want any wine?" he asked.

Draco shook his head. "No. I think it's best at least one of us has a clear head this evening, don't you?"

"No. I think we should get utterly sloshed and see where the night leads." He chuckled at Draco's glare. "I'm only kidding. Eat your lobster."

It was an experience in itself to watch Draco eat. He hadn't really noticed before, but then Draco's usual fare didn't include so much melted butter and the lip-licking that resulted. Harry was vaguely aware that he might be drooling, but with every flick of that pink tongue over glistening lips his cock swelled further and he couldn't be bothered to care.

"Are you quite all right, Potter? Is your meal not as expected? If it's not properly prepared you should send it back." Draco dabbed at his mouth with his napkin.

"Er, no, I'm fine." Harry blinked and forked up a small potato. "It's all delicious."

Draco declined dessert, though he spoke longingly of the chocolate mousse, and Harry made a mental note to have some boxed for takeaway one night as a surprise. He settled the bill and ushered Draco outside.

"The club is in the Muggle district just a few blocks from here, if you don't mind the walk," he said. He removed his jacket and tie and shrunk them to fit in his pocket. Draco followed suit.

"I don't. It's a beautiful night." Draco looped his arm easily through Harry's as they walked, and Harry thought he might burst from the rightness of it all.

How could he think we wouldn't work out? he wondered. This is perfect.

It was beginning to drizzle slightly by the time they reached the club, and Harry opened the door for Draco. The music was loud and pulsing and there were bodies everywhere, not to mention eyes that looked at Draco with far too much interest for Harry's liking, so he placed a possessive hand on the small of Draco's back and led him toward the bar.

"Do you want anything to drink?" Harry shouted. "Or would you like to dance?"

"Let's dance." Draco's eyes sparkled with life, and Harry smiled.

He was a good dancer, not flashy like some around them but with decidedly better rhythm than Harry. They didn't touch much even though Harry ached to draw him close and grind against him.

It was difficult to watch when Draco took turns with other partners. Harry did, as well, but he

never took his eyes away from Draco. He wondered for a fleeting moment if Ginny and Oliver hadn't done him a favor by buggering off together; he'd never felt such an intense longing for either of them, and there was a very good chance he'd never have come to work at Hogwarts if he was still with Oliver. He'd never have known how incredible Draco truly was. He'd never have fallen in love with him.

The realization hit him with a jolt and he stopped moving. His current dance partner said something, but he couldn't hear it over the pounding in his ears and he walked away without a word.

"Draco!" he shouted, approaching the blond and the far too handsy man dancing beside him. Draco gave him a questioning look and Harry reached for him.

"Hey!" the other bloke protested. Harry spared him a finger before turning away entirely with Draco in his embrace.

"What's wrong, Harry?" Draco asked.

"You weren't dancing with me, and I hated it," Harry replied honestly.

Draco smiled. "Don't like to share?"

"Not you." Harry held him firmly and pressed their bodies together, marveling at the easy way they fit together.

"Harry…"

"Just dance with me. Please."

Draco looped his arms around Harry's neck and groaned. "Harry, you're not playing fair. I can feel everything."

"Good, because it's all for you." Harry pushed his groin against Draco's muscled thigh. "I can't help it, Draco. I've never wanted anyone this way. You can't tell me you don't feel what I do."

"I do, but --"

"Give me a chance." Harry nuzzled his neck. "Let me show you it's all right to let someone love you."

"Love me?" Draco repeated. "You… it's not like that."

"It's exactly like that. I realized it tonight, actually. I've known that I have feelings for you for awhile, but this… I want all of you. And I don't want to let you go."

"Harry…" Draco's voice sounded like a sob and he rubbed his hardened groin into Harry's. "You can't say things like that to me and expect me to resist you."

"Then don't resist me."

"I have to, I can't…"

"You can." Harry released Draco and took his hand. "Come on. We aren't doing this here."

He pulled Draco through the crowd and outside, into the steadily beating rain. "We'll get around the corner so that we can Apparate back to Hogsmeade," he called over his shoulder. "Then we can take the secret passage back to the castle."

"Wait." Draco stopped and tugged on Harry's arm until he turned around. "Just wait. Tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"How you feel. I want to hear it. I… please, Harry."

Harry stared at him, standing in the rain with water streaming down his reddened cheeks and hair plastered to his forehead in golden clumps. A droplet hung from the end of his pointed nose, quivering and threatening to detach itself as Draco shivered. Harry thought he'd never looked more beautiful.

"I love you," he said, voice hoarse. "I love you, Draco."

"Then kiss me."

Harry didn't hesitate. He pulled Draco close and their mouths crashed together, devouring one another with desperation. Rain continued to fall around them, over them, but all that mattered in that moment was the kiss.

"Should we go now?" Harry breathed when they finally broke apart.

"We should dry off, I suppose."

"Or get into a nice, hot bath so I can wash your back like I offered to before."

Draco's lips curved. "That does sound appealing. Say it again."

"I love you."

"It sounds better every time."

"Then I'll just keep saying it."

~*~*~*~*~

"Fuck," Draco groaned, arching his back.

Harry continued to rub circles on Draco's abdomen with the flannel, taking care to come as close to Draco's bits as possible without touching them. "Like that?"

"Bloody tease. Touch my cock!"

Harry chuckled and wrapped an arm around Draco's chest. The man was nestled securely between Harry's thighs, legs bowed to the sides, and his head was resting on Harry's shoulder. "You didn't want me to before, and now you're so impatient."

"I always wanted you to. I was just… trying to be smart."

"And now?"

"I've apparently gone stupid. Oh, do that again!"

Harry grinned and brushed the flannel over Draco's balls again, tweaking a rosy pink nipple with his other hand. "My pleasure."

"Harry!" Draco's hips bucked up when Harry's hand closed around his shaft. "Fuck!"

"I've wanted to touch you like this for ages now," Harry murmured in his ear. "Feels like ages, anyway."

"Just… oh, faster…"

"Come for me," Harry urged, wrist pumping and sending water sloshing over the sides of the bath. Draco was writhing in his lap, his arse rubbing against Harry's erection, and Harry was close to completion.

"Going to -- yes, fucking yes!" Draco's hips shot up as his cock began to spurt.

Harry groaned and let himself go. Breathing heavily, he tightened his hold on Draco. "Can we just stay here?"

"Appealing as it is, I think the bed might be more comfortable. In a minute." Draco sighed. "Besides, we'll be spending most of the weekend in bed, so we may as well get used to it."

"Sounds wonderful."

"Yes, it does. I should try and get something done, but…"

"You work hard enough for two men all week long. Give yourself a break."

"You're a bad influence on me."

"I'm a good one," Harry corrected. "You'll be much more effective if you're relaxed, you know. Happy. Satisfied." He fondled Draco's sac.

"I suppose."

"Besides, if I get too far out of line, you can just punish me, Headmaster."

"Something tells me you'd like that." Draco trailed his fingertips over Harry's forearm.

"I do enjoy a good spanking." Harry nipped at Draco's earlobe.

"I'll keep that in mind. How about a bit of light bondage? I wouldn't mind coming home to find a sexy man tied to my bed."

"That's hot."

"You know what?"

"What?"

Draco laced his fingers with Harry's and turned his face to rest against Harry's neck. "I'm happy. I don't know if I've ever been this happy. I almost missed out on it, but you didn't give up on me."

"I never will."

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When Harry woke in Draco's bed the next morning, he yawned and sat up. Draco wasn't in bed and the door to the en suite was open, so Harry got out of bed and padded out of the room.

"Hey, there you are." Harry scratched his belly and smiled at Draco, who sat on the sofa.

"Here I am."

Harry frowned at Draco's frosty tone. "Er… are you all right?"

"Not especially, no."

"You aren't having doubts, are you? I know that you --"

"No, I'm not having doubts," Draco interrupted. "Not at all. I'm completely certain that I made a big mistake in trusting you. The fault is all mine, really, though. I should never have believed things would work out for me. Who am I but a filthy fucking Death Eater, after all?"

"Draco, what the hell are you talking about?" Harry asked, bewildered.

"I was supposed to have brunch with my parents today. I completely forgot, with the excitement and all last night, so I was going to go over there and see them briefly and reschedule a longer visit. Perhaps arrange a time for them to properly meet my new lover." Draco laughed bitterly. "I didn't want you to worry that I'd disappeared, so I thought I'd leave a note on your desk."

"All right…" Harry said slowly.

"I was looking for parchment and I came across this." Draco held up a familiar piece of paper and the color drained from Harry's face. "Recognize it, do you? I wouldn't have read it but I saw my name." He looked at the letter. '" It's a bit cold, even for you, to be living with the man merely to poke into his private life so that you can expose him.' Well, at least Granger was on my side."

"Draco, listen." Harry rushed to him and reached for his hand, but Draco pulled away. "Please. I did come here thinking you might be… doing something wrong. And I did think that if I stayed here I'd find out what it was. But I stopped thinking about it, and then we talked that night in Hogsmeade --"

"That night when you told me you supported me?" Draco's lower lip trembled. "I believed every last line you fed me. I believed you thought I was worth something. And worst of all, I believed you last night."

"I meant every word! I know you aren't doing anything wrong. I think you're doing a wonderful job, I do, and I love you! I meant that! I lo --"

"Don't say it again. I can't -- I can't look at you now." Draco tossed the letter aside. "I won't make trouble for you. You're looking forward to teaching here -- that's what you told me, anyway -- and you can stay." He stood and strode toward the door.

"Draco!" Harry said desperately. "Please, don't go."

"I wish…" Draco paused, then shook his head. "I would have failed. I see that now. Father told me I would fail, and he was right. You wanted me out of here so badly that you exploited my every weakness, and it's my fault for allowing myself to be vulnerable with you. I should have known better, but I thought I finally had a real friend here."

"I am your friend! I was wrong, but I --"

"It's over. It's all over." Draco let himself out quietly.

"Draco, dammit!" Harry rushed to the door and flung it open, but the cool draft reminded him that he was naked and he closed it again quickly. "Fuck!" he yelled, slamming his fist against the door. The pain that spread through his fingers didn't begin to compare to the ache in his chest.

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Harry sat on the sofa for what felt like hours, staring at the wall and trying to come up with something, anything, to show Draco that he was serious about him. About them.

A pounding across the room made him jump, and he hurried to answer it. "Draco!" he cried, throwing the door open. "I -- Headmistress."

McGonagall glared at him. "Indeed. Why would Mr. Malfoy need to knock on his own door?"

"I don't know, I was just hoping… come in."

"I have never been so disgusted with anyone in all my life, Mr. Potter." McGonagall rounded on him, her voice an angry hiss. "I never thought I'd say that about you of all people, but there it is."

"Headmistress…"

"Do you know how hard that boy has worked? Do you even know?"

"I do, but --"

"Do you know how critical his parents are of him? They'd have preferred for him to marry a proper witch and live off the family fortune, but he wanted to make something of himself. He came here, looking for a way to atone for his past, and I wasn't certain how well he would work out but I needed someone and I hired him. I have never regretted that decision. He's an excellent teacher and a hard worker, and he doesn't deserve the public distrust or the thinly-veiled barbs from his parents. He most certainly does not deserve to be double crossed by you."

Harry held up his hands. "I know."

"I told you not to hurt him. I encouraged you because I thought you genuinely cared for him."

"I did. I do. And if it's any consolation, I've hurt me too." Harry rubbed his eyes. "I'm leaving, don't worry. If he won't talk to me, if he doesn't want me around… then I'll go and make it easier for him."

"You'll go, all right, because I can't stand the sight of you. And if I'm to remain the Headmistress of this bloody school I'm already going to be irritated enough without having you about to remind me why I'm still here." McGonagall crossed her arms.

"Wait, what? What are you talking about?"

"Draco has submitted his resignation, effective immediately."

"He -- he what? But he can't!"

"He has."

"I didn't think he'd…" Harry shook his head. "It's a mistake. I'll -- I'll fix it. I promise. I don't

know how, exactly, but I'll fix it."

"You most certainly will, Mr. Potter. And if I'm well and truly satisfied that you've repaired the damage you've caused I'll consider letting you work here again."

Harry hung his head. "I understand."

"Mr. Potter."

It was difficult to meet her eyes through all the shame. "I'm sorry."

"I've no doubt you are." The lines around her mouth softened. "I don't want to believe that you would do all of this deliberately."

"I didn't! I mean… I had my doubts about him at first, but I truly want to teach here, and I stopped suspecting him of anything after our first evening out. When we spoke before, I was telling the truth. It's just that he found out about my initial suspicions, and…"

"And thought you were using him."

"Yes. But I wasn't. I love him, Headmistress. I really do."

"Then make things right." She swept out the door, and Harry was left wondering how to do as he was told.

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"I'm an idiot." Harry curled up in a ball on the sofa.

"Yes, you are." Hermione sipped from her mug. "I believe I warned you."

"That's not helpful!"

"What do you want me to say? You should have listened in the first place."

"You know, it was your letter that got me into trouble!"

"No, it was your behavior." She sighed. "I'm sorry you're hurting, but you're not going to fix anything by hiding out here."

"I've sent him letters, but he won't respond."

"Then you need to do something bigger, don't you?"

"Mate, when did you get here?" Ron headed for the kitchen, hair still damp from his shower.

"Awhile ago. Hermione's doing her best to not help me."

"Help you with what? The whole Malfoy thing? I'd say you're on your own there."

"But you were on my side!"

Ron reappeared with a sandwich. "Sorry, but I'd say she's right. If it's as you say and he's really fit to be the Headmaster, then you should have been honest with him when you became

friends. Or at least thrown away the incriminating evidence."

"Evidence!" Hermione jumped up. "Maybe I can help. But you still need to show him you're sorry, Harry, and you need to make it big."

"Were you really shagging him?" Ron asked. "I mean, I'm glad you're finally getting over the whole Oliver thing, but you picked Malfoy to have a fling with?"

"It wasn't a fling. I love him, Ron. More than I ever loved Oliver."

"Wow." Ron frowned. "Well, then, I'd say Hermione's right -- you'll need something grand."

"But what?"

"I don't know. Take out an ad in the Prophet or something," Ron joked. "So he's really a good teacher? You said his Defense stuff was pretty solid."

"Yes, he's developed a really great program…" Harry frowned. "Ron, I think you might be on to something!"

"Huh?"

"I have to go. I'll see you later!" Harry leaped up and disappeared into the Floo.

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HARRY POTTER APPROVES!

In an exclusive interview given today, The Boy-Who-Lived gave a glowing endorsement in regards to Draco Malfoy, newly appointed Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Although Malfoy has been rumored to have been the target of a slew of angry letters after his promotion, Potter tells us he's not worried.

"Draco Malfoy is an outstanding educator," said Potter. "I'll admit, I didn't know what to expect from him -- we were pretty much rivals in school, after all. But as I've been preparing to take over his classes this summer for the upcoming term, it's become very apparent that he has the school's best interests at heart."

Still, a man with a checkered past running Hogwarts? Several parents have expressed unease at that idea, but Potter only laughed when asked to comment.

"There aren't many of us who don't have a 'checkered past,'" Potter pointed out. "Draco Malfoy isn't his father. He's not the same person he was as a student, either. I can only hope that he's still running Hogwarts if and when any children I may have attend the school. He's going to be one of the finest Headmasters Hogwarts has ever seen, Dumbledore included. I'm pleased and excited at the prospect of teaching under Headmaster Malfoy -- I have already learned so much from him, and I'm still learning every day. "

Additionally, Mr. Potter slipped us another bit of interesting information when we inquired about the possible children he mentioned.

"Oh, of course, I'd welcome children. If I don't have any I'll be content to surround myself with students, but I'd love one or two of my own. One often thinks of children when in love, though, right?"

Harry Potter is in love! When asked to reveal the identity of this mystery individual, our Savior had this to say.

"Let's just say that it's someone I've reacquainted with this summer, and someone I plan to spend a lot of time with this school year. He's very easy to love, and I've never been happier."

Could he be discussing the new Headmaster himself? We asked, and Mr. Potter merely smiled and said, "Perhaps."

You heard it here first, faithful readers -- Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy appear to be in love! It should be quite a year at Hogwarts as this intriguing duo take over with Headmaster Malfoy at the helm. If there were any doubters left, surely their concerns have been put to rest.

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Harry returned to Hogwarts to pack his things. It pained him to be back in the familiar quarters he'd shared with Draco, but when he hadn't heard from the man after the article was printed and twenty-seven letters were returned unopened he had to assume that it was over.

"Why am I such a bloody child?" he muttered, stuffing his socks into a trunk. "I'm nearly thirty and still expecting people to be up to something."

"You were right about that once."

Harry spun around. "Draco!"

"I knew you were following me sixth year, but I didn't really have the time to care. And I was, indeed, up to something." Draco stood in the doorway, face expressionless as he watched Harry.

"You weren't this time, though. Once I got here I had to admit you weren't really suspicious at all, and that night in Hogsmeade took care of any lingering doubts. I was an idiot."

"Yes." Draco pulled out a slip of parchment. "But you've got your redeeming qualities, as well. Like your decision to give such a cheerful interview about me to the paper, for instance.

Thanks for outing me to my parents, by the way."

"They didn't know?" Harry yelped. "I've fucked it all up even further, haven't I? I thought -- you'd said you wanted to introduce me to them properly, and you were dating that other bloke, and…"

Draco chuckled. "They never knew about him, and I was planning to tell them before I took you there. I think they have to have known on some level, but I honestly don't give a damn what they think anymore. I wouldn't be working here if I did. Besides, my father was apoplectic when he read it, and I happened to be there. Priceless."

"I just wanted you to know that I love you and support you, and that I'm not afraid who knows it."

"Oh, clearly. Stop looking so miserable. Anyway, here." He handed Harry the parchment. "Granger sent me this -- your response to the letter of hers I read, apparently."

"Oh." Harry flushed when he read the familiar words.

"I suppose I can forgive you for being a prat. I've done far worse to you over the years, after all. I've… I've missed you, Harry."

"You know I mean it, right?" Harry grasped his hand desperately. "I meant every word in the article, and this letter, and every time I told you how I feel about you."

"I know. I believe you."

"And you're going to take your job back, aren't you?"

"Sort of have to after that article, don't I?" Draco grinned. "Can't let my adoring public down, after all. I've gotten loads of letters since it printed -- letters of support, this time. A few warning me not to hurt the Chosen One, too, but mainly support. "

"I'm so glad." Harry pulled him close. "Can I… I mean, are we…"

"We are, and you can. Although I expect you to spend some time groveling…"

"Anything. I'm sorry, Draco."

"It's over." Draco kissed him gently. "Now unpack, because McGonagall's leaving before I change my mind again, she says, and my things will be moved upstairs this afternoon so this is all yours now."

"Oh." Harry's shoulders sagged. "I'll miss you."

"We're living in the same building, you great prat. Besides…" Draco leaned in to whisper in Harry's ear. "We have a Floo connection between our offices, and I want to wake up with you every morning."

"That sounds perfect." Harry nuzzled Draco's neck. "Still going to take me to meet your parents, or are they too angry?"

"Our relationship is… complicated. They didn't want this for me -- a 'common' profession, a gay lifestyle, et cetera. They've never been hesitant to tell me they're disappointed in me. But I'm disappointed in them, too, after everything that happened during the war. I'm disappointed they didn't even try to keep me out of it until it was too late. I love them, and I want them in my life, but it's not the same as it used to be."

"I'm sorry."

"I am, too. But it's the way it is now. I'll take you there in time. I really should take you up to my office and properly introduce you to Snape, though."

Harry shuddered. "We've been acquainted."

"Prat. You told me you saw him differently after the war, didn't you?"

"Yeah…"

"He's my godfather. He was a certain way in public, but when we were alone… unlike my parents, I never had to guess whether he cared for me. I miss him. I think he'd like to see me happy."

"Then we'll go and see him." Harry squeezed Draco's hand. "Although I'm certain he'll be looking to tear a strip off me for hurting you."

"Well, he's protective."

"I wish your parents were more accepting of what you've accomplished. They should be proud of you."

Draco smiled sadly. "They are, in their way, I suppose. It doesn't matter. The faculty here has been a sort of family to me in the past few years, you know? And now that you're here… I have everything I need. I'll miss Minerva, though."

"Me, too. If she's stopped hating me."

Draco laughed. "She did say to tell you she forgives you."

"Good to know."

"I've got to go and meet with her again before she leaves. I'll be back in an hour or so, and then perhaps we can go out somewhere to celebrate."

"It's a deal."

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Harry tugged experimentally at his bonds and smiled when he found them secure. His cock was already standing at attention, anticipating everything he hoped was to come.

"Harry?"

He grinned at the sound of Draco's voice floating in from the other room. "In here!" he called.

"Where do you -- oh!" Draco appeared in the doorway and his jaw dropped when he encountered the sight before him. "I thought… not going out, then?"

"I do want to celebrate, but I thought perhaps we'd stay in tonight." Harry allowed his legs to fall open, exposing himself completely. "You mentioned once that you wanted to find a man tied up in your bed. And as it happens, I know a handy little spell… so here I am."

"I see." Draco's voice was hoarse, and he cleared his throat. "You look delightful this way."

"Do I?" Harry's lips curved. "You look delightful all the time."

"Flatterer."

"I do have a bit to make up for, don't I? Come closer, please."

Draco stepped up to the bed and ran his palm slowly up Harry's thigh. "Look at you -- hard and gagging for it."

"You get to me like no other." Harry's breath hitched. "And I'm yours, so do anything you want with me. The bonds are spelled to release only at your command."

"Oh, I do love the way that sounds." Draco combed his fingers through Harry's dark pubic hair. "I want to suck you."

Harry moaned. "I want that, too. And I want to suck you, too. I want you to straddle my chest and fuck my mouth."

It was Draco's turn to moan. "Yes. Let's do that."

"Will you kiss me?"

"Of course." Draco disrobed quickly and climbed on top of Harry, dropping to his hands and knees so that he could attach their mouths together.

Harry lost himself in the kiss, wishing only that he could wrap his arms around Draco. Draco must have wished it, too, because moments later his hands were free and he wasted no time in embracing his lover.

They rolled all over the large bed, devouring one another and allowing their hands to roam across heated skin. "Love you," Harry managed when their mouths parted for a brief moment.

Draco lifted his head and looked down at the man pinned beneath him. "I love you, Harry," he said quietly.

Harry released a choked sob at hearing Draco say the words he'd been longing to hear. "Let me taste you."

Draco nodded and crawled up Harry's body. "Open up," he husked, taking hold of his cock and feeding it between Harry's parted lips.

Harry sucked Draco's erection in as far as he could manage. He'd never really mastered the whole 'deep-throating' thing, a shortcoming Oliver had never failed to ridicule, but Draco didn't seem to mind that he couldn't take all of him inside and Harry trusted him not to be too rough.

"Yes," Draco rasped when Harry reached behind him to stroke his puckered hole. "Wait, I want to turn around." He scrambled to rearrange himself so that his face was hovering over Harry's groin, then took Harry into his mouth.

Harry's groan was muffled by his own mouthful and he tried to concentrate on his task, though the wicked tongue twining around his cock made things difficult. He rubbed Draco's opening with the pad of a saliva-soaked thumb while he sucked, enjoying the way the muscle twitched and gave way bit by bit until his thumb was inside to the first joint.

Draco whimpered at the onslaught of sensation and released Harry's cock all together. "That's so bloody good."

Harry hummed in response and licked a stripe up Draco's cock until he reached his sac, then

pulled each testicle into his mouth for a thorough suck. Once satisfied, he dragged his tongue over Draco's perineum and plunged it inside Draco's hole in place of this thumb.

Draco nearly howled and bucked his hips against Harry's face. "More!" he demanded. "Oh, Harry, fucking -- yes, don't stop!"

"Mmm," Harry managed, tongue thrusting as deeply as possible. He grasped Draco's hips, his fingers clutching at the pale flesh, and savored the taste of his lover.

"I could come like this." Draco's voice was strangled. "Just from you eating me this way."

Harry sucked at his hole in response, freeing one hand to reach for Draco's cock.

"No… no." Draco crawled away, leaving a panting Harry watching him with a grin. "I'm going to ride you. Get the lube out of the drawer next to you."

"Yes, sir." Harry chuckled and reached for it. "Impatient, hmm?"

"I can't bloody help it," Draco growled. He murmured a wandless spell and Harry's hands were fastened to the headboard again. "You do things to me, Harry. I want everything all at once and it's going to take ages to do it all, and by then I'll need to start all over again."

"I'm not going anywhere." Harry grinned. "And not just because you have me tied up."

"You told me you'd never give up on me." Draco took the lube out of Harry's bound hands and drizzled it over Harry's cock, smiling at the hiss he received in response. "I hope you meant it."

"I did." Harry's throat worked convulsively to swallow. "You're so fucking hot."

"I am. I'm also difficult and opinionated and anal -- stop smirking at me, that is my expression -- and I'm easily irritated. I'm going to be buried in work, and --"

"And you'll have me there to help you, if you'll ever allow it. You're not going to talk me out of loving you, Draco. I'm in this for far more than the sex."

Draco cleared his throat and looked away quickly. "Good," he said gruffly. "Sometimes I... you know, worry."

"Yeah, me too. Lucky for me I don't have any other long-term exes, so I don't have to worry about you running off with one of them."

"As if I'd take your sloppy seconds," Draco told him in a haughty tone.

"You shouldn't. I wouldn't even take them at this point." Harry circled his hips beneath Draco. "Going to ride me, then?"

"Yes." Draco reached for Harry's cock and held it steady while beginning to sink onto it, hissing as the wide end breached him.

"You're killing me," Harry whimpered. He arched up beneath Draco when his cock was fully encased in snug warmth, tugging at his restraints.

"Don't worry, there's no way I'm lasting for any respectable length of time." Draco braced himself, a bead of perspiration making its way down his cheek, and began to rise and fall. His arse clenched around Harry's erection again and again as he tried to hold his orgasm at bay.

"I want to touch you!" Harry whined.

"Your cock is touching me." Draco began to bounce faster. "Watch me fucking myself on it, Harry."

Harry looked up at Draco and tried not to come on the spot. Draco looked unbelievably sexy riding him. "Please," Harry begged. "Release my hands, Draco, please!"

"No," Draco panted.

"Please! I need to touch you!"

Draco waved a hand and the bonds disappeared. Harry reached for Draco and gripped his waist, thrusting upward wildly and rushing toward his peak.

"Going… going to…" Draco choked. He fisted his cock and came, back bowed as his release spilled over his fingers and onto Harry's abdomen and chest.

"Draco…" Harry groaned and let himself go at last.

They finally lay side by side, sticky and spent, and Harry reached for Draco. "'M tired now," Draco mumbled.

"Good thing we're in a bed."

"Shut it." Draco curled into Harry's side. "I still owe you a spanking, you know."

Harry's eyes widened. "Yeah?"

"You've misbehaved quite a lot recently, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," Harry said with feeling. "I've been awful."

"Sleep now, spank later."

"A sound strategy." Harry yawned. "I learned one thing tonight, you know."

"What's that?"

"You are the master of head. So, you know, it's a good thing you're the headmaster."

Draco was silent for a moment. "For fuck's sake, Harry, that was terrible."

"What? It was funny!"

"It was not even a little funny. Don't ever try to make a joke again."

"Come on, master of head? Headmaster?"

"I understood it, I just didn't like it. Go to sleep."

Harry pouted. "You have no sense of humor."

"I most certainly do. The problem is that I'm not sensing any in this room."

"Prat," Harry muttered.

"Go to sleep," Draco said again. "If you're still full of horrid jokes later on I'll spank them out of you."

"Oh, fine."

Draco kissed his forehead. "But I love you anyway."

Harry smiled. "I know."

Don't forget to go back to H/D Holidays on LJ and leave feedback!