Normal Does It

Ta cree doie ny share na kione croutagh - A kind heart is better than a crafty head.

... an old Celtic saying

Why, why, why! Because it's all logic and reason now. Science, progress, laws of hydraulics, laws of social dynamics, laws of this, that, and the other. No place for the three-legged Cyclops in the South Seas. No place for cucumber trees and oceans of wine. No place for me.

... Baron Münchhausen

'Draco, my son, come a little closer.'

Without hesitation, Draco approached his father. Kneeling beside the bed and taking his father's paper-thin hand, Draco memorized every detail of Lucius's sallow and pinched face.

Lucius shivered underneath the heavy wool quilts. The movement prompted Narcissa to fuss, pulling the covers in tighter around her husband and brushing away lint that wasn't there. After a few moments, in which Narcissa's face threatened to burst into tears, Lucius began to speak again.

'There is a scroll sewn into the back of the Malfoy family tapestry. Inside the scroll is a map. This map is your birthright. You must follow where this map leads you, no matter the cost. This is our family's burden, and I would not have set it upon your shoulders if I did not believe it needed to be done. I have ruined the Malfoy name, but this journey will give you the power to make it right again.'

Placing a hand on his shoulder, Lucius pulled Draco in until his ear was flush with his father's mouth. His whispered words tickled, but Draco listened intently, soaking in each and every syllable. His mother worried the ends of the blankets as she watched, her eyes never leaving her dying husband's face.

After Lucius finished speaking, he fell back into the bed. The message he had given Draco had drained him of all his energy. Draco stood away from the bed, watching his mother resume her fussing, brushing out the creases in the quilts and placing small kisses on Lucius's forehead.

Draco refused to allow the nearing death of his father or the horror of his task to faze him. He pulled in his emotions, like pieces of stone flying together to make a wall, and shied back into the shadows of the room. These last moments, Draco believed, should be between a husband and wife.

Draco fled the room, unable to face what was to come.

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Harry lived a normal life. His silver analogue alarm clock was set at six-fifteen; the clamouring buzz silenced by a single brave hand darting out from underneath the warm covers. He allowed the alarm to sound twice more before his brain roused enough to send the message through his nervous system to wake up. After receiving the message, Harry crawled out on the left side of the bed and scratched his stomach, placed his cold feet into a pair of warm, red slippers waiting for him on the side of the bed and picked up his soft, worn robe from off the bedpost. Fumbling around the top of his oak nightstand, Harry searched for his glasses, which were put on as soon as they were found, and the wand underneath Harry's pillow was quickly stashed inside his right robe pocket.

Breakfast was the same every morning: a piece of slightly burnt toast, apple-grape jam and a cup of

black coffee, served slightly cold. It took Harry ten minutes to finish his meagre breakfast and read through his morning post before he jumped into the shower for a quick wash.

After breakfast and a shower, still wearing his soft, worn robe, Harry headed for his small closet, choosing a nice set of Calvary twill trousers, freshly pressed, and a warm, blue jumper. As he pulled the jumper over his head, Harry's hair and glasses tangled in the material. He rearranged his glasses and ran a hand through his hair, foolishly believing that to be enough to tame his messy locks.

Before heading out the door, Harry picked up his black travelling cloak and his brown leather briefcase that was sitting on the side table and said goodbye to Kreacher, even though Harry was certain Kreacher was deaf.

Rather than Apparate to his office, today Harry chose to walk to the Underground station to take the tube to the Ministry of Magic. As a member of the Department of Magical Transportation, Harry made it a point to be abreast of all Magical and Muggle forms of travel. The day before, he had taken an old shoe Portkey to the office, finding his trip to be quick and efficient. The day before that, he had ridden the newest broom from Nimbus, which was quick, but not as efficient, as the wind made it terribly hard to hold onto his briefcase. Harry was pondering the possibility of riding a bicycle to work the next day, which could prove to be the slowest of them all as well as the least efficient, as he was unsure as to where to park his bicycle once he arrived at the Ministry.

Harry greeted all he passed on his way to the sixth level with a firm nod and small friendly smile. He did not stop to chat, nor did he stay and listen to the morning gossip, preferring to purchase the latest Daily Prophet and read the headlines on his way up the lift.

Harry's office was to the right and in the back of his Department. It was small, but efficient, containing only a desk, two filing cabinets, and a small fern next to the door. Harry placed his travelling cloak on the coat rack and put his briefcase next to his desk.

This was Harry's morning routine. It was normal. It was typical. It was the same as any other witch or wizard of his station. He owned slippers. He ate toast. He carried a briefcase.

Before work could begin, Harry's Floo-Free Fire flared on his desk. A mix between a Muggle phone and

the wizarding fire-call system, the Floo-Free Fire was another successful Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes product that became a necessity in modern life. Equipped in every office, the Floo-Free Fire, or F3 as the youngsters calls it, saved the Ministry thousands of galleons, and saved hundreds of trees from being cut down, by diminishing the need for paper aeroplane communications.

The tiny fire-pit flame rose and Ron's miniature freckled head popped through.

'Mate! Glad I caught you, I've heard something that's so bizarre, I just had to tell you.'

Harry shuffled his papers and sighed. Ron often had something he had to tell Harry first thing in the morning. The rambling stories usually only served to delay his schedule, but as Ron's only male companionship amongst a household of girls, Harry felt obliged to listen to him. He leaned closer to the small flame to hear Ron better.

'First, how's Hermione? The twins giving her trouble?'

The fire cracked and swelled as Ron scratched his head. 'The girls are fine; it's the one in the oven that's driving her mental. The little bugger sleeps during the day and kicks all night. If it continues, Hermione's threatened to make me carry the baby. It's scary!'

An image of a bloated Ron waddling down the street in a floral maternity dress and sensible shoes popped into Harry's head. He couldn't help but laugh aloud. 'Ron, she can't make you carry the baby. It's not possible.'

Ron's face pinched, probably in reaction to his own imagination on what he would look like pregnant. 'With Hermione, anything is possible.' But, as Ron was not one to dwell on the negative, his face brightened quickly and he continued again. 'But mate, you have to listen to what I heard from George, who heard from Hannah, who heard from Ernie, who heard from Justin, who heard from Lisa, what barmy plan Malfoy has cooked up!'

'No, stop, I don't want to hear it.'

'But, Harry!' Ron whined. 'It's Malfoy. And he's gone nuts.'

It wasn't that Harry didn't find Malfoy's gone demented stories funny. Who wouldn't? But the gossip surrounding the Malfoy family was just as loony and preposterous as the stories told about him. Unfortunately, Ron believed all of them to be true, no matter how far-fetched or unreliable the source. Just last week, Ron was sure Narcissa was carrying Voldemort's love-child, and a few months ago had claimed Draco had chosen to marry a house-elf in defiance of his arranged marriage.

'Ron, his father died last month; I have no doubt that Malfoy is acting a bit strangely, considering the circumstance.'

Ron attempted to continue, but there was a knock on the door. Harry panicked, as he was not supposed to have personal Fire calls during working hours.

'I'm sorry, Ron, but I have to go back to work.'

Ron waved his hands. 'Wait! But you have to hear this, it'll only take a second, and I promise it's all true. Lisa told Justin who told Ernie who told Hannah who told George who told me that Malfoy's gone completely mental and has now started to dress like a Druidic Warrior!'

At that very instant, as if summoned by Ron's rant, a Druidic Warrior, wearing brown leather shoes laced up the sides with brown leather string, no trousers, a brown tunic, a lambskin vest over the tunic, a solid silver belt with a large sheathed knife attached above the right hip, heavy leather fingerless gloves over each hand, long braided blond hair tied back with leather bands, stood in his doorway.

Harry was unsure what to say, until he remembered Ron was still on Firecall. 'Ron, can I call you back later? I seem to have a visitor.'

Ron's energy deflated. 'Sure thing, Harry. I probably should call Hermione to check up on her. But I'm

telling you the thing about Malfoy is true.'

Harry looked up and watched the Warrior's pale eyebrow lift.

'Ron, no worries, mate. I believe you.'

brown 2

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Nary a thought came to mind as Harry stared at his visitor lounging comfortably in his office chair, his leather-fitted feet plopped up on Harry's desk. After several conversation starters came to mind and were hastily dismissed, Harry took a deep breath and decided on a more professional approach.

'How may I help you?'

The Druidic Warrior smirked.

'Fail to recognize me, then, Potter?'

Harry had, in fact, not failed to recognize the resemblance the man bore to his Hogwarts rival, Draco Malfoy. But Harry was having a hard time convincing his brain that the man with the long braided hair

sitting across from him was the aristocratic pure-blooded man Harry had seen preening in front of a mirror not three months before during a Ministry Gala.

But, as a member of the Department of Magical Transportation, Harry forced himself to suspend his disbelief and continued his standard questions for those who sought his help.

'Are you in need of a Portkey, permit, or have you come to file a complaint?'

Draco rearranged himself in Harry's office chair, switching his crossed feet from one to the other, plopping dirt onto Harry's clean desk. Harry promptly spelled the dirt away without a sound.

'I've come to take the Wave-Sweeper [1]. I heard from your secretary that I have to go through you.'

Without even a blink, Harry replied, 'No.'

Clearly not expecting such a swift negative, Draco dropped his feet, leaving more dirt on Harry's clean rug, and leaned menacingly forward.

'I don't think you heard me correctly. I'm not asking your permission, I am informing you of my actions. It is out of my fondness for this current Ministry that I do so, not out of obligation. Technically, as a descendant of Lugh LámhfadaI [2] have every right to do with the ship as I please.'

Harry cleared his throat and began to speak, using his official dry Ministry tone of voice. 'The Wave-Sweeper is under Ministry control. If you would like to file for a complaint of ownership, I am afraid I cannot help you there. My secretary can help you find your way to the Department of Magical Law. If you are in need of a permit to use the Wave-Sweeper, I am afraid my denial is final. The Wave-Sweeper is a historical artefact and therefore cannot leave the Ministry under any circumstances.'

With a calculated quizzical look, Draco sat back into the office chair and rested his head on top of his raised fingers. 'Strange that you say that. According to my sources, the Wave-Sweeper is currently not in

care of the Ministry.'

Draco's statement made him pause, just for a second, but that second ruined any credibility Harry had and he was forced to admit defeat. With a large sigh, and a quick Imperturbable charm, Harry attempted to salvage the situation.

Returning to his normal tone of voice, Harry spoke sharply, 'What have you heard?'

With a swift kick, Draco's feet returned to the top of Harry's desk with a large thud. 'Very interesting things, very interesting. According to my mother, the Wave-Sweeper had been in the care of the Black family for centuries, handed down from their Druidic ancestors and kept in the family vault. Much to my surprise, when I inquired with the goblins at Gringotts as to its whereabouts, I was told that the Wave-Sweeper was owned by the Ministry and was stored in their historical vaults. Now, I thought that quite strange, and my mother only lies when it serves her best interest, so I had my family lawyers look into it, and much to my surprise, I learned that the Wave-Sweeper had in fact been bequeathed to a certain bespectacled Potter, and not to the Ministry.'

'So,' Draco continued, his mouth arching ever upwards, 'I'm a little confused as to why the Ministry would be under the impression that they owned something that currently is owned by you. Care to enlighten me?'

A headache began to grow behind Harry's right eye, but to acknowledge it would have been seen as confirmation of Draco's statements. While what Draco said was true, Harry had no desire to continue the line of conversation.

'I gave the Ministry the Wave-Sweeper after the war. Your family lawyers can request a copy of the statement of ownership from the Department of Magical Law.'

With a flick of his wrist, Draco pulled out a small leather pouch. He pulled out a piece of yellowed parchment and placed it on top of Harry's papers on his desk.

'Actually, you didn't. You filed the paperwork without the official Ministry seal, deeming the contract null

and void. Funny, but I thought all contracts were magically checked for the seal by the Ministry clerks. A certain Lavender Brown, fellow Gryffindor and current Ministry clerk, wouldn't have anything to do with that, now would she?'

He certainly is his father's son, Harry thought. The Malfoys' political plotting had been legendary before the war with Voldemort. Lucius had most Department heads and important political figures in his back pocket through his own blackmailing schemes. And while the Malfoys held no political clout currently, tales of their devious plots still circulated around the water cooler.

At the mention of Lavender Brown, Harry had no choice but to listen to what Draco had to say. Filing a document without an official seal was grounds for an instant sacking. Draco only had to make the document he currently sported in his hands public, and Lavender would be out on the street.

'What do you want, Malfoy?'

Draco rolled the document and placed it safely into his pouch once again. 'Use of the Wave-Sweeper. I only intend to borrow it for a few months, and then you can have it back, along with my silence as to the true owner. And, as sign of friendship, I won't inquire as to why you insist on hiding your ownership, although I am dying to know.'

Harry bit his lip. He had quickly run out of options.

'What do you need her for?'

Draco's smug face turned serious. 'On my father's deathbed, he gave me a map. He claimed that the map led to something that would bring the Malfoy name back from ruin, an object that could make us known for our goodness to humanity, and not our evil. But the map is old, inaccurate, and the location names are no longer current. The Wave-Sweeper has the magical ability of locating any place, no matter how difficult. I need that ship to fulfil my destiny.'

'What sort of an object is this?'

Draco looked away, and lowered his eyes. 'It's called the Magical Cauldron. What it does, I can't tell you. The properties of the object are a family secret. I would be struck dead if I were to speak of it to someone who was not a Malfoy. But know this,' Draco stared straight into Harry's eyes, 'I swore to my father that I would complete this mission, no matter the cost. You have no reason to trust me, but I had hoped you would realize that if I had planned on taking over the world, I wouldn't have come to the Saviour of it first, now would I?

Harry rubbed his temple. Thank Merlin he had stockpiled weeks of leave.

'Fine, but I'm going with you. I want to see this map of yours, as well as your plans. There will be no surprises on this trip, Malfoy. The moment we step into danger, we will go back.'

Draco laughed a deep belly laugh that shook his braided hair and rattled his sheathed sword.

'What? Don't trust me with your precious ship?'

Harry stood, gathering his briefcase and cloak.

'Not in the least.'

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It had been a few years since the Wave-Sweeper had been at sea. Stored in an isolated cave near Polperro, Cornwall, the previously Disillusioned Wave-Sweeper stood majestically against the dark rock. The sails of the single-mast sloop were down, and the hull was covered in a thin layer of dust that sparkled underneath the beams of sunlight coming in through tiny holes in the cave walls. The haughty mermaid resting on the prow yawned and stretched, sending Harry a sleepy wave before curling back

onto her side. The girl had never been a morning person.

Running a hand over the smooth mahogany, Harry could almost feel all of the water and air that had rushed along the sides throughout its career. She was a fine ship, but he wished dearly he didn't have to see her so soon.

'How are you doing, old girl?'

If the boat could speak, Harry was sure her response would have been a long series of questions as to why she was hidden away and why she wasn't in the open air as she was made to be.

Harry patted the hull. 'It was better this way, old girl. But, I do have good news for you. We'll be sailing again, you and me, and a few of the crew will be returning. But none of this action first, thought later business, okay? This time, we'll make use of our heads before we get involved.'

Harry began the arduous task of magically hauling the ship out of the cave and out into the ocean, roping it in tight beside the high dock and releasing the anchor. Once secure, Harry transfigured a small coin from his pocket into a ramp and climbed aboard the main deck. He sent a myriad of cleaning spells throughout the boat, creating magical brushes to soap and soak the dirty oak beams and dancing dusters to clean the magically-enlarged cabins below deck, making sure each room was sea-worthy.

The elevated quarterdeck on the rear of the ship was the last place Harry cleaned, preferring to hand dust the captain's wheel and the elaborately carved brightwork [3]. The quarterdeck was Harry's favourite place, having the best view of the open ocean. The morning water against the dark rocks was beautiful with the sunlight playfully dancing with the blue-green waves, but Harry was looking forward to watching the sun dip underneath the sea, changing the blue and greens of the waves to a vibrant orange and red.

Even though he knew he shouldn't, Harry was glad to be back as the Captain of the Wave-Sweeper once more.

'We have a guest coming aboard,' Harry told the ship. 'He's a nasty tosser, but I'm here to protect you.'

A board creaked. Harry whipped his body toward the sound, aiming his wand at the intruder.

Still dressed like his Celtic ancestors, Draco approached Harry slowly, keeping a firm eye on Harry's wand.

'Do you often speak to inanimate objects?'

Harry put the wand away sheepishly, remembering belatedly that Draco was meeting him here, just ahead of the crew.

'The Wave-Sweeper may not be able to speak, but I have no doubt she has a soul. If I were you, I'd try to stay on her good side, lest she throw you overboard.'

Draco snorted, relaxing on his heels and folding his arms together. 'Fine, my captain, I will endeavour to endear the ship to me. But beware, I'm a known charmer and I would hate to get between a man and his boat.'

'Ship. I think those braids have rattled your mind." Harry retorted with a snort. 'I've never known you to have this sort of humour.'

'What, my badges fourth year didn't clue you in?' Draco scoffed. 'I rather thought the Potter Stinks slogan was a mark of brilliance.'

Caught in the nostalgic annoyance of Draco's jibes and pranks, Harry had failed to hear his friend's approach.

'Unfortunately for you, Malfoy, your Hogwarts cronies will not be here to laugh at your lame jokes. Step

out of line, and you might find yourself on the bottom of the ocean with a rock tied to your leg.'

Harry brightened at the sound of his old friend's voice.

'It's been too long, Dean.' Harry said before engulfing Dean in a firm hug. It had been six months since Harry had last seen Dean. After the Wave-Sweeper had been grounded, Dean had aimlessly wandered the world, working a variety of odd jobs and sampling the local delights, as Dean liked to call them. He came back to England occasionally, full of fantastical tales and new tattoos, but he never lingered long enough for Harry to have a real conversation with him.

Dean had been the first one to volunteer as a crewman of the Wave-Sweeper after the war, and he was the first to object to Harry's decision to end their adventures. Harry never revealed his reasons to the crew. But Dean, and what had happened to him, played a large role in Harry's change of heart.

Even now, Harry's throat constricted at the sight of Dean's eye patch and his slow limp.

'So,' Dean began with his one eye boring into Harry's, 'any reason why you thought you could sail the high seas without your first-mate by your side? Planning on replacing me with Malfoy, even though he's clearly touched in the head?'

Dean raked a condescending look down Draco's front. Harry watched Draco's body arch like an angered cat. He wouldn't have been surprised if Draco had hissed.

'I wasn't sure if you were in town.' What Harry said was a lie, and Dean clearly knew it, but he kept his mouth shut, most likely due to Draco's presence.

Instead, Dean put his arm around Harry and plastered a bright smile on his face. 'Lucky for you I was visiting Luna, and was with her when she received your post. If I hadn't, you might have been stuck with goldilocks over there.'

Draco was clearly not amused at Dean's remarks, and had his mouth open, presumably to whip out a scathing retort, when a small yellow goldfinch landed delicately on Draco's shoulder. When he attempted to push the bird off, it bit his finger.

'Ouch!'

Dean and Harry fell into uncontrollable laughter. Between chuckles, Harry tried to speak.

'The bird is another thing you need to get used to, Draco. She's the ship's only form of communication with the outside world.'

Draco continued to swat at the bird. 'I have my own owl, thank you. I don't trust a tiny bird not to lose my post.'

Suddenly, the bird flew off Draco's shoulder and quickly began to morph. Where a goldfinch once was, a small pale girl with blond hair and large wide blue eyes now stood.

'Hello, Draco. I apologise for biting you, but you wouldn't let me sit on your shoulder.' Luna turned her head and raised a finger. 'And I don't think you should use your owl. Harry doesn't like them. But don't worry, I'm a much better carrier than an owl any day.'

Luna smiled and flitted over to Dean and Harry kissing them both on the cheek. 'Why is Draco dressed like Lugh Lámhfada? Is this the new uniform? Should I change too?'

Dean walked over to Draco and hit him hard on the shoulder. 'Yes, Draco, why are you dressed like a girl?'

Draco massaged his shoulder and glared at Dean. 'Mind your own,' he replied petulantly.

Completely ignoring the exchange, Luna waved a wand from the tip of her head to bottom of her shoes,

changing her garb from eclectic witch's wear to Celtic princess, her radish earrings turning into yellow goldfinch feathers.

Draco turned away from Dean and Luna toward Harry. He attempted to gather his anger, but Harry spied a twitch of his eyebrow.

'Your crew is lovely,' Draco's sarcasm rolled off his tongue like perfumed air, 'but I was under the impression that you were the only one accompanying me on this quest.'

'Like Luna said earlier, I don't like owls. I need a way to communicate if something goes wrong. I trust Luna, and with more than my post.' Harry replied, walking away from Draco and releasing the main sail. Draco followed him.

'Well then, I trust you won't mind if I asked a few of my colleagues to join us.'

As if called, a band of scrappy warriors stepped onto the boat. In the lead was an older grizzled man, his salt and pepper beard hiding the deep pocket scars that lined his face. Behind him was a smaller redheaded boy, his eyes constantly turning to scan his surroundings, his face in a scowl. And behind him was a tall, scantily clad, muscular dark woman with long black hair in a single braid, and a bow and arrow strapped to her back.

'Let me introduce you to my crew. First, we have Sir Dylan Culhwich, a fine wizard well versed in magical history. He will be our navigator, as he is familiar with most of what is said on the map.'

Harry scrunched his eyebrows on Draco's emphasis on most.

'Next we have Finn MacCool, a young genius straight out of Hogwarts. With his Ravenclaw brain and the sly cunning of a Slytherin, I'm not sure how the hat placed the boy in Gryffindor. At least he didn't have to suffer as a Hufflepuff. I met the boy at Honeydukes where he had the nerve to fight me over a bar of chocolates with no regard to who I was. I admired his tenacity.'

Finn puffed out his stomach and stomped around the deck, until Sir Culhwich gave him the eye.

'And finally we come to the beauty in our group.' The tall Amazon-like woman raised an eyebrow. 'You might recognize her as your fellow classmate, although she was in Ravenclaw. Harry, meet Padma Patil. She's been living in the jungles of South America, trailing the ferocious Chupacabra. I convinced her to accompany us, only by promising to fund her next excursion.'

Harry had heard that Padma had run away from her family after refusing their arranged marriage, going native in the Amazon, hunting down rare and unusual magical animals. But, it was still such a shock to see Padma so changed.

Luna, suddenly appearing from behind the fore mast, stepped up to Padma, her tiny stature reaching only Padma's leather covered breasts. 'Why were you searching South America? The Chupacabra lives in a shack on the east side of Texas, eating up all the goats on a nearby farm. We reported on it a few years ago in the Quibbler.'

Padma sneered, 'I am a trained tracker. I follow scientific clues, not fantasy conjecture. But I see you are still set on creating stories, rather than learning anything real.'

Luna huffed and returned to working on the fore sail. Having heard many a witch and wizard mock Luna with nary a change in her disposition, it was a shock to Harry to see Luna react to Padma's statement in such a way.

Dean hobbled forward, extending his hand to each visitor, 'Welcome to the Wave-Sweeper! Harry is our Captain, and we listen to him at all times. I'm his first-mate, so you listen to me only part of the time. Luna is our communication specialist, so if you have a post that needs to be sent, you give it to her. Your cabins are all downstairs, we sleep two to a room. Padma and Luna will share the first cabin, Finn and Sir Culhwich will be in the second, and Malfoy and I will share the third cabin, where I can keep my eye on you.'

Dean laughed at his own joke, but Draco was not laughing in return. 'Where is Harry going to sleep?'

'I sleep in the Captain's cabin, below the quarterdeck.' Harry replied, waving a wand to release the ropes that secured the ship to the dock.

'Then I'll sleep in the Captain's cabin as well.'

Harry gaped.

'Fine with me.' Dean replied, shaking his shoulders. 'I have my suspicions that you are a loud snorer.'

'The anchor's up, Captain!' Luna cried, her tiny body leaning over the forecastle..

Harry grinned. 'You all better hold onto something until you get your sea legs'

Harry then Apparated to the quarterdeck, behind the captain's wheel and shouted. 'Raise the gangplank and set sail!'

The ship shivered for a moment, forcing Draco and his crew to all reach for something to hold. It then paused, as if suspended on the top of the waves. Harry's stomach lifted in anticipation. And then, the Wave-Sweeper zoomed.

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In the meeting room, the crew's eyes were all glued to the nautical map in front of them, Harry more so than the rest. The old parchment was slightly burned on the right corner, and frayed around the edges, but the markings were quite clear. Unfortunately, the landmarks were all names and places Harry had

never heard of, nor had anyone else on the ship, with the exception of Sir Culhwich. But that knowledge had been gained through his studies of magical myths and folklore passed down from witch to wizard that he had been collecting throughout his career. There was nothing on the map that referenced anything current, and Sir Culhwich's knowledge was all hearsay. Nothing was solid, nothing real.

This made Harry very concerned. In the modern world, there were no more uncharted territories. There were lands that were led by unknown leaders, there were islands that were less studied, there were animals and plants that were rare and unique, there were peoples with cultures that were foreign and strange, but there was never a complete absence of information. The unknown felt like an itch in the back of Harry's throat that he just could not scratch. He attempted to silently create a copy of the map in hopes of sending it someone, specifically Hermione, for more information, or at the very least to study the map himself in private, but the spell just did not work.

Harry had no choice but to voice his doubts.

'I've been around the world several times over and never have I come across a land such as the one shown here. Even if these places have changed their names over time, the coordinates of these locations point to the middle of the Atlantic,' Harry stated, watching Draco's reaction closely. Draco's eyes were glued to his.

'The map also shows no indication of the specific whereabouts of the Magical Cauldron.'

Dean chimed in his support, 'Is this a fool's errand? Do you even know what you are doing, Malfoy?'

Draco stood tall, his eyes remaining firm on Harry's. 'If I knew exactly where the Magical Cauldron was, then I wouldn't need your help. The best plan is to find this land and start the search, but if you don't trust me, then trust your ship. Tell the Wave-Sweeper the first location and let's see where it takes us.'

Padma adjusted her bow and threw her braid behind her. 'So, boys, where do we start first?'

'Before we rush into things, how do we know its safe?' Harry interrupted, his face growing hard. 'I won't risk the lives of my crew.' Without forethought, Harry glanced over at Dean who instantly turned his face

away from Harry's. Harry's stomach flipped realizing his mistake.

'If you're too scared, we can rush in and clear any danger before you touch your prissy foot on land, Captain.' Finn replied, his tiny fists up in readiness for a fight. Harry sighed silently in his mind. The boy's Gryffindor tendencies were out loud and proud, and that was always a dangerous characteristic in the face of the unknown.

Dean came forward, enraged by Finn's statement, and grabbed Finn by the collar, shaking the boy's small frame. 'Do you even know who you are speaking to?'

'I've heard all the stories about Harry Potter, but clearly the old man's lost his touch.' Finn snapped back, his chin held high as he pulled away from Dean's clutches.

Dean's body clenched and he lifted a hand, threatening to land a punch on Finn's freckled face.

'Harry's not old,' Luna interjected. 'He's only been on this earth thirty-two years, six months, and three days. Most wizards live more than a hundred years. My great-great grandfather lived for two hundred years and four days before he choked on a frog's leg.'

With those words, all stopped their morbid fascination with the ensuing fight between Dean and Finn and turned to stare at Luna who was busy twirling her yellow-feathered earrings around her fingers.

'He never liked frog legs.'

The crew laughed. With a single nod from Harry, Dean let Finn loose, but not before pushing him off balance. Finn was ready to return the favour, but one look from Draco stopped him in his tracks. Finn brushed himself off and stood closer to Padma, on the other side of the map. The woman sniffed in his direction, but said nothing.

Draco approached Harry, waving his hand in dismissal to the others. 'This fighting will get us nowhere. All

of you, wait outside. I want to speak to Potter alone.'

Dean began to object, but Harry held up a hand and nodded to Draco. They watched as the crew piled out of the room. Then, Harry turned to Draco with an inkling of what the other man was about to say.

'This is not the Harry Potter that I used to know. What happened to the boy who mindlessly disregarded rules and jumped head first into danger? You were the epitome of Gryffindor stupidity, much like Finn. When did you become a timid Hufflepuff? Does it have anything to do with your first-mate, Thomas? You need to learn to hide your pitying looks, Potter. The man clearly does not want them.'

Harry placed his fists on the table, attempting to curb his agitation. He counted to ten before he responded to Draco's irritating questions. 'It's been fourteen years since we belonged to any house, Malfoy. Some of us grew beyond who we were when we were eleven. Right now, I have an obligation to this crew to keep them safe and if that means looking like an old fart, so be it. I do not like walking into things blindly, and I have a terrible feeling about this map of yours.'

Harry then looked directly into Draco's eyes, so hard he could see the other man shift ever so slightly back. 'And regarding Dean, do not judge us for things you do not understand.'

Draco bowed his head in a surprisingly submissive manner. But Harry caught the smirk that he hid underneath his long fringe. Draco was still the bane of his existence, and still the only man that could get under his skin. Though irritated, this was still Harry's ship. He was the Captain, and therefore had the upper hand.

'If you wish to find your Magical Cauldron, you'll learn to stop poking your nose in where it doesn't belong. We'll begin the search, but I claim the right to stop this mission at any time.'

Draco smirked, as if what Harry had said had revealed more that it should. 'Oh no, there is something else going on here, Potter. You have piqued my interest.' Draco stepped forward, his face coming impossibly close to Harry's, enough for Harry to smell his musky cologne. 'And when my interest is piqued, I never stop until that interest is satisfied.' Draco licked his lips. Harry unconsciously mirrored the action. 'So, my Captain,' Draco purred, 'I say we go here first.'

Harry looked down, thankful for the distraction. He took a moment to refocus before reading where Draco pointed.

Seeing the location, Harry nodded his head and walked swiftly away from Draco, unsure what had just happened, but unwilling to dwell on it. Instead he headed directly out of the room and out onto the deck. Once behind his wheel Harry yelled out to the Wave-Sweeper.

'Find us Towl Creg Y Vaggane, my ship, and bring us there safely.'

The ship slowed, as it usually did when Harry would call out a location. But there was something different. The location Harry had called seemed to require something new from the Wave-Sweeper as it did not immediately set sail in a direction. Instead, the wood on the deck began to vibrate. Harry could see the magic swirling around the boat, surrounding everything and everyone in a thin mist of sparks and light.

Harry did not turn to see, but he could feel Draco standing close behind him, and smelled his musky scent, still strong even though Draco wasn't standing as close to Harry as he was in the meeting room. Luna changed into her goldfinch form and settled upon Harry's shoulder. Harry reached up and petted her back feathers.

For a moment, Harry believed that the location he had called out must not have existed. Their journey would end here, as the land the map displayed surely was not real.

But then, as if answering Harry's doubts, the ship began to move, but not right or left as Harry had expected, but rather up, rising high into the sky at an alarming rate, the waves below swishing against the sides until the ship cleared the water entirely.

'What's going on?' Finn yelled, holding on tightly to the foremast. Padma and Sir Culhwich were both behind him, keeping one hand firmly gripped in the ropes.

Harry had no response, too engrossed in watching the sea grow farther and farther away.

'I believe I know why you have never seen this land on a map before, Potter.'

Harry ignored Draco's jibe as his heart dropped to his stomach. For the first time, Harry felt unsafe on board the Wave-Sweeper, as the strong and sturdy oak beams turned and became as light and airy as white clouds.

~*~

It took Harry's brain exactly five minutes of shock and mild terror to finally wrap itself around the fact that he was standing firmly on a cloud and not falling to his death. He reached out with his left hand for his captain's wheel. Based on the cloudy material, Harry had assumed his hand would go right through, but instead it wrapped around the solid wood of his wheel, the object cold and firm as always.

If the captain's wheel was solid, Harry thought it was safe to assume that perhaps the rest of the ship was also the same. He took a tiny step forward, and then another, before he felt secure that the Wave-Sweeper was still a solid object, although he did keep hold of his wand tightly in his right hand, just in case.

Once Harry felt stabilized, he then searched for the rest of the crew and discovered that they were all having similar issues. Each were slowly reaching out and testing the stability of the cloud material around them. Only Luna seemed unaffected, still in her goldfinch form flying around the billowy white substance that once was their ship.

'Harry, what is going on?' Dean yelled, slowly limping up the main deck, his movement awkward and unsure. With each step Harry held his breath, mentally aware that the ship should hold, but still afraid that at any moment Dean would fall through the cloud never to be seen again.

'Potter's ship turned into a bloody cloud, Thomas! Are you blind in both eyes? I thought it was just the one.'

Dean growled at Draco, which just made Draco laugh in return. Draco moved up beside Harry, his steps shaky even while his face stayed firm. 'Neat trick, Potter. Now change the ship back.'

Harry stared at his wand, sure that he didn't say or think a spell that would transfigure the Wave-Sweeper into a cloud. He had never seen this happen before, but he was sure that it was the ship's own magic that caused the transformation. Was it a Glamour? An illusion? Harry wasn't sure.

'This isn't my doing. The ship changed on her own.'

Draco grumbled underneath his breath, but said nothing. Instead, he looked out into the sky. Harry followed his movements.

They were higher than Harry had ever been on his broom. Logically, with such height, the air should have been too cold, and yet it felt just as warm as it was moments ago on the sea. The view around them was breathtaking. Instead of water, there was an endless blanket of white, and just like on the water, the Wave-Sweeper cut through the clouds at a fast pace.

Above the white blanket were small flimsy clouds that danced across the sky and brushed past the ship. Draco reached out and grazed his fingertips along one.

'Cold,' he observed. His eyes closed as he kept his hand out, his soft eyelashes falling on his pink cheeks.

Harry shook his head and returned to observing his surroundings. While exciting, Harry still needed to keep a look out for dangers around them. The Wave-Sweeper seemed to know what it was doing, but she was a ship, not a person, and therefore might not have the safety of the crew in mind.

It was then that a strange object appeared to the far right. Harry squinted his eyes before transfiguring his glasses to binoculars.

'Land!' Harry yelled, pointing in the direction of the object. The crew all strained to see what Harry was seeing, especially Draco who had precariously leaned over the side of the boat for a better view.

Then, a large cloud moved and suddenly the small blob Harry had seen far off in the distance bloomed into a large expansive land that loomed heavy in the sky. It was a mountainous island floating high in the air. The tree-covered green mountains were surrounded by a river of dark blue water that ended abruptly a few metres from its shore. And below the land was only air and clouds. It was an island suspended in the sky.

There was a rustling sound and then Draco held up the map for both he and Harry to see. The shape of the island fitted the shape of the island on his map.

The Wave-Sweeper had found the land. Now it was their turn to find the Magical Cauldron.

The ship continued its pace towards the island. Harry continued his look out, keeping a firm hand on the wheel. The ship slowed when it neared the water, floating above the calm waves.

Once again the ship began to shake. All hands held onto whatever they could as magic zoomed around them as the ship returned to its wooden form. It then slowly lowered into the water smoothly, as if turning from a flying cloud into a pirate ship was a simple act.

Harry looked towards the sun. Its bright orange light was low in the sky.

'Dean, lower the sails. Padma, I believe Luna showed you how to lower the anchor.'

Draco pulled Harry's arm roughly. 'What are you doing? Why aren't we landing on shore?'

Harry raised his eyebrows at Draco's strong grip and shook his hand off his arm. 'Do you see a dock? Also, the sun is about to set. We stop here until dawn and then we go to the island. I would prefer to explore during daylight.'

Luna transformed beside Harry, her yellow feathers disappearing underneath her skin. 'Harry, I need to fly back to England. There is an urgent message for you. I'll be back in a few hours.'

Harry waved Luna off, knowing Luna wouldn't leave at such a time unless the letter was important. He never understood how Luna sensed the need for a letter retrieval for someone on the ship, she just did, like a post owl. When asked, Luna always replied it was magic that would tell her what to do.

Luna transformed into her bird form once more and took out into the clouds, diving fast into the white cloud sheet below.

The crew, Padma, Dean, Finn, and Sir Culhwich, were working together to secure the ship for the night. All had been firmly trained by Dean and Luna in their first hour on board on the basic functions and duties of a crewmember of the Wave-Sweeper. In the past, the ship was mostly crewed by lost Gryffindors and old friends looking for work for a few months. As the days, years, went by, they all left for more stable jobs. Ron went back home after only a week, missing the regular meals of the Burrow and Hermione's nagging voice. Lavender lasted six months until she procured her clerk position at the Ministry. Seamus was with them for a year, but left to get married to a girl five years younger. Dennis left after two, the frequent pleas from his mother to come home becoming too much for the young man. And after that, Harry would hire transient workers from wizarding shipping ports to work for a few months at a time.

It was only Dean and Luna who stayed until the end. Luna loved the open air and the exploration of new and exciting places. Because of her form, she often was able to fly back home at any time to pick up post or just say hello. So Harry understood why Luna felt no inclination to leave the pirate life.

It was Dean that always worried Harry. Why was he so willing to stay, so far from his home, isolated from his friends and family? Harry wondered if it was because he couldn't leave the nomadic life of a pirate.

He seemed to love meeting new people, and the thrill of a little danger. After the Wave-Sweeper was put to shore, he continued to explore the globe with no signs of stopping. But there was a fear that woke Harry up in the middle of the night sometimes. He worried that it had been something else keeping Dean. Harry worried that he had made a mistake and their few times together, times Harry had regretted almost immediately after they happened, made it impossible for Dean to leave.

Draco flicked Harry's cheek. 'Again with the staring. You'd best be careful, or else your First Mate might get the wrong idea.' Draco and Harry both looked over at Dean who quickly turned his head back to the rope he was securing, obviously embarrassed at being caught staring. 'Oops, looks like he already has.'

The guilt waved over Harry's body. His mouth tasted bitter and his stomach plummeted to his knees. 'I thought I told you not to talk to me about Dean.' Harry replied stiltedly, his tongue dry and heavy.

'Need the place to yourself tonight, roomie?'

Harry's blurted 'no' was loud enough for all the crew to hear. They all turned to look at Harry, which just made his cheeks flame. He turned his embarrassment to angered annoyance towards Draco, whispering harshly to the man. 'Oh, sod off, Malfoy! There is nothing between Dean and I anymore. So stop your ridiculous speculation.'

Harry hadn't realized his mistake until it was too late. Draco wrapped his arm around Harry's shoulders and pulled him in tight in a mock embrace that was more painful then tender. 'Don't worry, I won't tell anyone your big dark secret, Harry, as long as you tell me how big that big dark secret was, if you know what I mean.'

Harry shoved Draco and stormed off the deck, down the steps, and into his cabin, slamming the doors behind him. He was so angry with himself for letting Draco get to him so easily! Had he learned nothing from his Hogwarts days? He'd faced countless ruthless men, stood up to murderers, rapists and thieves. And yet a blond prick wearing a tunic and Viking braids was able to make him look a fool on his own ship. Draco's silver tongue was like Veritaserum, his probing jabs mysteriously forcing Harry to admit things he held close to his chest with others.

There was a knock on the door and for a second Harry thought it was Draco, coming back for a second

round. He geared up his defences, but the concerned sound of Dean's voice made them crumble down again.

'Are you all right, Harry?'

Still jumbled from his earlier thoughts about their past relationship, Harry wasn't ready to see Dean, but he didn't want Dean to know he wanted to avoid him.

'Just Malfoy talking. You know how that goes.'

Dean laughed on the other side of the door. Then there was silence. Harry moved closer to the door to hear if Dean had left. He could hear Dean breathing on the other side, and yet he wasn't speaking.

'I'm fine, Dean, really. Just need a moment to clear my head.'

There was a thud on the door, as if something had knocked into it. 'I heard what you and Malfoy were talking about, Harry. You forget how sound carries on water.'

Balls. Harry closed his eyes, wishing there was a hole he could crawl into.

'Listen, Harry, I know you worry about me. I see the way you look at me. At first I thought it was just my injuries, and trust me Harry, we do need to talk about that some day. But today, I think I sensed something different.'

Harry gulped, not trusting himself to speak. What was he supposed to say? Dean was his friend, nothing more. What they had done together had been years ago. They were both different people. Harry just didn't see him in that way.

And then Dean began to speak again, 'I met someone, Harry. Someone wonderful on my last trip to

Ecuador. His name is Sam, and he's sweet and kind and hot as hell. I came home to tell everyone that I was moving back there permanently when I saw the letter from you to Luna about this last mission. I wrote to Sam and he understood why I needed to come along on this last mission.'

There was another thud on the door. 'I loved you for a long time, Harry. I knew you didn't feel the same, but I thought it was okay as long as I could be your First Mate. It hurt me when you shut down the Wave-Sweeper and it took me a while to get over it, but I did; couldn't pine for you forever. It was then that I met Sam who, sorry to say this Harry, is light years better for me than you. You're my Captain, Harry, not my lover. So please, don't worry so much about me. Okay?'

Harry's breathed out a sigh. He thought he would feel more relieved knowing Dean wasn't suffering because of him, but instead it just felt lonely.

Harry went to reply, but the sound of Dean's retreating steps swallowed his words.

Harry fell back into his bed like dead weight. He looked over to the freshly transfigured bed beside him. Merlin, having Draco on his ship was driving him mental, how would it be to share a room? Harry was pretty sure it would be a nightmare.

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It was hard to sleep in the silence. Harry was used to using the sound of the crashing waves against the side of the Wave-Sweeper to lull him to sleep. But the clouds made no sound. There were no birds chirping in the air, no fish splashing in the water. Just the silence of the night, and Draco tossing and turning in his bed.

The man had thrown off most of his sheets and now lay only partially covered on the bed, one arm thrown over his eyes, the other over his rising chest. Harry stared at Draco's small pert nipple peaking out from underneath his elbow. All the past memories of his relationship with Dean, and Harry's recent unwittingly adopted celibacy for the past few years, meant that Harry was easily aroused by a gorgeous man, even if it was Draco Malfoy.

Harry pulled his own sheet over his head and closed his eyes. He had a long day tomorrow, and lustily staring at the bane of his existence was unhealthy.

Draco yelled out 'Father' before turning loudly in his bed again. Harry rolled his eyes and adjusted himself in the bed, unable to stop himself from checking out Draco. This time Draco had pushed his sheet completely off, giving Harry quite a view.

Draco had not entered his bed nude, but he was now. Sleeping on his stomach with the sheet twisted around his right leg, Harry could see the sweat trickle from the top of his back, down his spine, and off to the side, right before reaching his perfectly-shaped arse.

Harry gathered the edge of his sheet and bit into it. It wasn't fair. Enemies were not allowed to be naked and sweaty and fit and edible and within reach.

Harry grabbed his wand and waved it at Draco's bed, summoning Draco's sheet and placing it back on his arse, giving the man some modesty. Then he settled in for what he knew was going to be a long night.

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Harry awoke just as the sun breached the clouds. He squinted at the porthole, unsure why his bedroom window was so small. Knowing it was early, Harry reached over to turn off the silver alarm to find instead of the cool feel of metal, Harry's hand only met air. Perhaps, Harry thought, he had fallen asleep on the opposite side of the bed. Harry shuffled over to the other side until his head met with a very firm wood wall.

'My head,' he bemoaned, closing his eyes tight until the pain subsided.

Suddenly a pillow landed on the back of his head, jerking his eyes open.

'Shut it, Potter. It's too early for your snivelling.'

With Draco's voice the reality of the situation came into focus. Harry was no longer in his house, waking for his normal morning routine. Instead, he was on the Wave-Sweeper soon to embark on a fruitless search for an unknown magical object.

And Draco Malfoy was sharing his room.

Blearily, Harry reached around the floor without getting out of bed, searching for his glasses. Once found, Harry blinked up at Draco who was in the process of getting up, his pale arse illuminated underneath the sunlight.

Harry yelled. 'Put that away, Malfoy!'

Draco turned his head and smirked, giving Harry a little wiggle.

'Just giving the audience what it wants.'

Harry ignored the comment and instead got up, pulling his wand out from underneath his pillow and swishing it to make his bed. Harry could hear Draco fussing in front of the bedroom mirror, but Harry refused to turn around to see, fairly sure Draco had yet to put on a stitch of clothing. He headed for the bathroom for a quick shower, letting the cool water wake his body and mind up fully.

Ten minutes into his shower Draco walked into the bathroom.

'It's good manners to allow your guest first use of the shower.'

Harry rolled his eyes, turning his body underneath the spray. While having another man in the bathroom was uncomfortable, the shower curtain to the claw-footed bathtub was solid, allowing Harry his modesty.

'I just hope you don't plan on using all the hot water.'

Harry jumped, realizing the voice was much too close and feeling the sudden gush of cold air that could only be caused by a sudden opening of the shower curtain. Harry wiped his eyes with one hand and covered his bits with the other, only to see Draco, still naked, smirking at him, the shower curtain now pulled back.

'Damn it, Malfoy. I'll be out in a second.'

Draco reached out and smacked Harry's arse. 'There better be hot water available or else you will suffer.'

Harry slammed the curtain shut. 'Watch it or there will be no shower at all.'

Draco laughed, not opening the shower curtain again, but remaining in the bathroom.

Harry took the opportunity to speak his mind. 'I'm not sure what game you are playing at, Malfoy, but I do not appreciate it. Personally, I think you have something to hide and all this poking and prodding is just a way to distract me. As I said from the beginning, the instant I see danger, this mission is over. And that includes if I think this Magical Cauldron of yours is dangerous. I'm keeping my eye on this island, and you.'

Draco didn't respond at first. Harry heard what sounded like brushing. Considering Draco's now-long

locks, it made sense.

After a few moments, Draco finally responded, but with a more serious tone, 'I can't make any promises, Potter. I've never been on this island and I'm not a Seer.'

Harry dragged the soap over his torso. 'But you do know what the Magical Cauldron does, don't you. Can't you give me a hint as to its purpose?'

"Not if I want to live,' Draco replied shortly. 'Also, I'm not trying to distract you. I just enjoy getting underneath your skin. You make the cutest face when you're mad.'

Harry swallowed some of the water spraying down, causing him to choke.

Draco opened the curtain quickly. 'Are you all right, Potter?'

Harry turned off the water. 'I'm fine, hand me a towel, then the shower is all yours.'

Draco handed Harry a towel and Harry walked out of the bathroom. As soon as he dressed and left his quarters, Harry realized Draco had once again distracted him from asking any more questions about the quest.

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Without a dock, the Wave-Sweeper would be unable to land on the island. Rather than piling into a small boat and rowing to shore, Harry had discovered years ago that brooms were always better in situations like these. He and Dean gathered the various older brooms and passed them around to each

crew-member.

Harry looked out into the sky hoping to see a certain yellow bird, but all Harry could see was blue and white. Luna was not back yet.

Finn, grabbing the smallest and fastest broom, zoomed off into the air first, flying in circles above the rest, eager to begin. The small man was practically bouncing with excitement on his broom, his feet swaying in the wind.

Sir Culhwich, taking the largest broom, sighed before carefully mounting it. 'Been a while,' he said before swaying into the sky, his hands wrapped tight around the shaft.

Padma grabbed a thin broom from Dean more harshly than intended, throwing the First Mate off balance. Harry was there to support him as he fell backwards, but Dean shied away from his hands, moving quickly away to mount his own broom. Harry looked up to see Draco watching him intently, a strange look in his eyes. Still annoyed after the morning shower intrusion, Harry mounted his brand new Firebolt X and headed to the front of the group.

The island landscape was hilly, covered in trees, ending in cliffs as it met the water. There was a small clearing to the right, low and large enough for the group to land. Harry headed toward it, gesturing with his arm to the group. They all followed in a tight formation, silently agreeing to keep a look out for any unknown and dangerous objects or people.

Harry landed in the clearing first, followed shortly by the rest. Sir Culhwich was last, stumbling on the landing. Finn and Draco were there to help him off his broom. They all strapped the brooms to their backs and took a look around, unsure what to do next.

The island was quiet, only the sound of birds, insects, and rustling leaves filled the air. The silence was both peaceful and lonely, making Harry feel uneasy. He saw Finn shiver while his tiny head scanned the trees and Padma jump at the sound of a screeching bird.

Draco lifted the map. 'We landed here,' he pointed to the edge of the island, leaving a small black mark

on the map, 'I marked it so we know how to get back to the ship tonight. Towl Creg Y Vaggane is up ahead, maybe a kilometre or two deeper into the island.'

Harry stood next to Draco scanning the map. 'Does it say anything else about what's ahead or the inhabitants?'

Draco shook his head. 'It tells us nothing about who lives on the island. But considering the amount of tree growth and the lack of sound, I would say there aren't many, if any at all.'

Harry turned to his crew. 'All right, this is the plan. Draco and I will lead the group. Dean, you take up the rear and watch our backs. We are to stay alert at all times. We have no idea who or what is on this island. We have to stay vigilant and be smart. We will stick together as a group, got it? No wandering off.'

Dean replied first, 'No problem, Harry,' while Finn yelled out a sarcastic response, 'Yes sir, captain sir! We'll keep a look out for all the scary monsters.' Finn began to laugh until Sir Culhwich hit him upside the head.

'Mind yourself, laddie.'

Harry ignored them and began to march into the woods, slashing the branches and leaves that stood in their way.

A few hours later, the crew was no closer to Towl Creg Y Vaggane. Harry had spelled the map to follow their movements, spell work he learned while studying the Marauders Map, and yet their shoe prints never came close to the location. Harry swore the destination was changing as they travelled.

Draco growled beside him, 'I hate hiking.'

Harry looked down at Draco's feet wrapped loosely with brown felt and tied with leather straps. 'It might

be better if you weren't wearing such flimsy shoes.'

Snorting, Draco pushed away an errant branch. 'I've no choice in my attire, I'm afraid. The instant I touched the map, I looked like this. I would change into a proper robe and not a second later this flimsy tunic would take its place. The hair too; my mother had been quiet shocked to see it so long, I tried to cut it, but it just grew back. I figured it was the Malfoy family's way of creating motivation.'

Harry began to laugh. Draco swotted his arm. 'I'm sorry Malfoy, but you must admit it has a certain karmic charm to it.'

'How much longer, Harry?' Dean yelled from the back. Harry turned in response, walking backwards. Unfortunately, not looking in front of him, Harry failed to see the hole in the path and fell backwards into it. Draco attempted to catch him, but instead was pulled down into the hole as well. They fell for a second, before landing harshly on the hard ground.

Harry groaned, taking a moment to regain his breath. He slowly sat up, peering up above him.

'Harry! Are you okay, mate?'

'Malfoy! Is everything all right?'

Harry gathered his breath and shouted up to his concerned crew. 'I'm okay! Give me a minute to get my bearings.'

Harry rubbed his face and slowly sat up before realizing he hadn't checked on Draco. He turned over, rushing to Draco who was lying very still on the ground. He shook his chest and bent down, listening for a heartbeat. There was one, but it was faint. Harry then grabbed Draco's face, feeling for a breath. When there was none, he brought his lips down upon Draco's to perform mouth to mouth resuscitation.

Draco, of course, took that opportunity to shove his tongue down Harry's throat.

Harry shuffled away from the chuckling Draco, wiping his mouth on his sleeve.

'Oh come off it, Potter. It wasn't that bad. Not the best place for a little snog, but where else are we going to get any privacy?'

'Everything all right down there?' Sir Culhwich shouted.

Draco yelled back, 'Everything's fine. We'll use the brooms to fly back up.'

'Wait,' Harry said, standing and stepping closer to Draco. In the fall, the map Draco was holding fell out of his hands and landed on the dirt floor. Harry had grabbed it while Draco was speaking to Sir Culhwich. 'The map says we've arrived. This hole is Towl Creg Y Vaggane.'

Draco grabbed the map out of Harry's hands. 'Let me see.'

Suddenly there was a rustle from behind them, and then a voice.

'Leave my hole alone! Get out of here! You don't belong here!'

Harry whipped out his wand and attempted to find the source of the voice, but it seemed to surround them.

'Harry! Malfoy! Is that sound coming form you?'

Harry answered Dean, 'No! There's something down here with us in the hole.' He turned to Draco, 'We

are getting out of here now.'

Harry went to pull his broom off his back, but Draco grabbed his hand, stopping him.

'Wait! This is where we are supposed to be. We can't give up now because some creepy voice told us to leave.'

Draco turned towards the walls, 'My name is Draco Malfoy and I come in search of the Magical Cauldron. I am the last descendant of the Malfoy family line. It is my duty to find the Magical Cauldron, and I implore you to help me.'

There was a deep sinister laugh that echoed around the hole. 'Go away. No one knows where the Magical Cauldron is. Probably stolen by thieves long ago. It has nothing to do with me, so leave me be!'

The hole shook. Harry and Draco were tossed around, smashing into the sides.

'Draco, we leave now.'

Draco yelled. 'No! I'm not leaving here until this hole tells us where to go. It's lying. It has to know where the Magical Cauldron is!'

The voice boomed again, 'Foolish boy! What you seek should not be sought. Leave it be. Leave the island and never look back.'

Draco retorted, yelling into the dirt walls, 'Ha! So you do know where it is!'

The voice stalled. 'I never said that.'

Harry, still attempting to find the source of the voice, decided that it was his turn to try his hand at negotiations.

'We don't mean you any harm. My friend just needs information. Once you let us know where to find the Magical Cauldron, we'll leave and never come back here.'

The voice stilled. Harry and Draco paced around the hole.

Suddenly a door appeared on the floor. It opened, flooding the hole with a golden light. Harry and Draco stared in amazement as a tiny goblin appeared out of the door and onto the hole floor, shutting the door behind it.

'Do you promise?'

Harry bent his head. 'You have our word.'

The goblin sized Harry up and then gave a stern look to Draco. 'I'm not fond of magical folks. They have a penchant for stealing.'

Harry gulped, remembering his few run-ins with goblins. He could see how one might jump to that conclusion.

The goblin turned a sharp eye back to him as if he could read Harry's thoughts. 'I know a few tricks myself so you best not try to come below.'

Harry shook his head, 'Wouldn't dream of it.'

Draco approached the goblin. 'If you would please give me a moment of your time, madam, I just want information on the Magical Cauldron's whereabouts. I have no intention of stealing from such a fine beauty as yourself.'

Harry had no idea how Draco was able to determine the goblin's sex, but he didn't seem to be wrong as the goblin preened in front of Draco.

'Finally, a man with some sense. That is why it is such a shame to tell you that I was telling the truth. I have no idea where the Magical Cauldron is.'

Draco visibly deflated. 'You really have no idea? Do you even know if it's on this island?'

The goblin grabbed Draco's tunic. 'Per the legend, the Magical Cauldron is here, but I have never seen it. But, all hope is not lost. I came to this island a few hundred years ago, but there is someone here who has lived here longer. King Ascon has been here six-hundred years. If anyone knows where the Magical Cauldron is, it would be him.'

Harry looked down at the map Draco was holding and suddenly a large black dot appeared on the opposite side of the island. The goblin took a look at the map as well.

'See, there he is.'

The goblin smiled a very wide and toothy smile. But then she frowned again, pulling on Draco's tunic harshly until he knelt on the ground so she could speak directly to his face. 'I know what you are planning, boy.'

Draco's face turned white. Harry stepped forward, unsure whether to intervene or to listen to what the goblin had to say.

'What you plan on doing is dangerous unless you really mean it. You must be willing to do what you must

with all your soul. Good intentions are not good enough. Do you understand? The proof of the pudding is in the eating of it.'

The goblin let go of Draco and smiled her toothy smile again. 'Now leave me be.' She then turned swiftly around, opened her floor door and jumped back into the golden light, shutting the door loudly behind her.

Harry grabbed Draco's tunic collar and lifted Draco to his feet. 'What was that goblin saying to you?'

Draco waved Harry off, pulling his broom from his back. Harry grabbed his arm.

'I asked you a question.'

Draco stared at Harry, his haunted look making Harry pause. He pushed off Harry's hand and mounted his broom, flying up and out of the hole. Harry mounted his broom as well and followed, very uneasy with what had just occurred.

~*~

The crew flew back to the ship as the sun began to set. Draco headed directly to the captain's quarters and slammed the door, locking Harry out. The rest of the crew dissembled, disappearing below deck, happy to rest their tired feet.

Harry retreated to the quarterdeck and his trusty wheel, looking out onto the water, knowing where the edge met the sky that indeed that was the end of the world, at least for this floating island.

He couldn't stop his brain from retreating back to the goblin's warning remarks to Draco. What did she

mean? Was Draco planning on doing something dangerous with the Magical Cauldron once he found it?

Harry didn't like being kept in the dark. It reminded him too much of his past mistakes. Well, no matter what, he wasn't going to let his guard down. No matter how much Draco would try to distract him, Harry was just going to have to keep a cool head around the man, even if he attempted to invade his shower again.

There was a birdcall, and then a yellow goldfinch landed on Harry's shoulder. He petted the goldfinch's head and retrieved the letter from her leg.

'Luna, you missed quite a day.'

The bird smartly remained on Harry's shoulder, allowing him the illusion of privacy while still silently supporting him.

Harry,

I thought you might want to know that some creep has dug up

You-Know-Who and the Ministry can't seem to find the body. With you

and Malfoy gone the papers are having a field day. I'd search

your ship. The Prophet claims Malfoy has stolen the body and is

forcing you to smuggle it out of the country.

Be careful.

Ron

Harry took a deep breath and crumpled the paper. It was just another one of Ron's crazy rumours. Luna flew off of Harry's shoulder and transformed back to her normal self.

'Ron's not lying. Voldemort's body is really gone. My father thinks the Unspeakables stole the body to run tests on his skin. His body secreted a natural sun block, keeping his body free from melanoma.'

Harry turned, leaning on the wooden rail, 'And what do you think?'

Luna wrapped a large lock of her hair around her finger. 'If the Unspeakables stole the body, the Aurors wouldn't be looking for it.'

Harry agreed with her. For all her strange antics, Luna was more logical than anyone else he knew -- even Hermione, although he was sure never to tell her that.

But Voldemort was dead. No matter who had the body, or for what reason, the monster was never coming back. Harry had seen to it. There was no revival in the graveyard this time. Harry rubbed his forehead where his now faded scar lie dormant.

Harry had bigger things to worry about, like what Draco Malfoy was really up to and if Harry wanted any part of it.

'Luna, have you ever heard of the Magical Cauldron?'

Luna silently thought for a while, her forehead bunching around the eyebrows.

'No, I haven't.'

Harry released a breath, knowing that was probably going to be Luna's answer, but disappointed

nonetheless.

'But,' Harry's spirit rose again with Luna's now positive tone, 'I have heard stories of ancient magical cauldrons that acted without a witch or wizard instructing it what to do, magical cauldrons that contained their own magic. There was one that would replenish food whenever a witch or wizard struck the sides with their wand. Perhaps Draco's Magical Cauldron does that. That would certainly make Draco a hero. The human race would never run out of food.'

Harry scratched his chin. 'I just don't see Draco putting up such a fuss for a cauldron that makes food. In my gut, I feel like it does something else.'

Luna hummed. 'Well, there was one ancient myth about a black cauldron, but in the myth the cauldron was destroyed. If Draco is looking for that cauldron, then he's too late.'

'What do you mean?' Harry retorted.

Suddenly there was a creak behind him. Sir Culhwich and Padma were standing on the steps.

'I wondered myself if that was what we were looking for,' Sir Culhwich interjected, taking his time walking up the steps.

Padma continued, 'I asked, but as Draco stated before, he can't answer any of our questions due to the Unbreakable Vow. The black cauldron myth is the only thing that makes sense, although I have no idea what Draco would want with a broken cauldron.'

Harry folded his arms. 'Would someone kindly tell me exactly what this myth entailed?'

Sir Culhwich stepped forward and laid out his tale.

'Many years ago there was a man named Matholwch. He was obsessed with a black cauldron he observed being used by an elderly couple. The pair had strapped this black cauldron to their backs and were using it to revive dead warriors. They would place a dead warrior in the cauldron and the man would revive the next morning alive, except without the power of speech. Matholwch had attempted to steal the cauldron, trapping the elderly couple along with their children and the warriors in a house and setting it on fire. Everyone died, but the couple was lucky enough to escape. They fled the country with the black cauldron and escaped to the Isle of the Mighty. The leader of the Isle, Bran, offered the couple sanctuary. In return, the couple gave Bran the black cauldron to do with as he wished.

Later, Bran, unaware of Matholwch's true nature, decided to marry his sister, Branwen, off to him as he was a leader of a warring country, thus creating peace between the two kingdoms. But Bran's cousin Efnisien did not approve of the marriage. In protest, Efnisien cut off the tails, ears, eyebrows, and lips of all of Matholwch's horses.

Bran, in an attempt to mollify the now enraged Matholwch, replaced each of Matholwch's horses with new ones, showered the man with gold, and offered him the black cauldron, not knowing its magical properties. Matholwch noticed the black cauldron for what it was right away and accepted the gifts willingly.

The wedding continued and soon Matholwch took Branwen back to his own kingdom where they lived a happy life, for a while. After a few years Matholwch's evilness began to come out and he abused Branwen and kept her locked in the attic. But, training an injured bird, Branwen was able to send word to Bran.

Bran and his army stormed Matholwch's land. A great battle ensued, but Matholwch's army was not to be defeated, for every time a warrior was killed, he would return in full health the next day, but without the power of speech.

Efnisien, who had joined Bran's army, and who was in desperate need for redemption, decided to pretend to be an injured warrior to see exactly what was happening. He spied the opposing army dumping the dead warriors into the black cauldron and watched as the warriors emerged from the opening fully alive.'

Luna stepped forward, placing a hand on Harry's arm as Sir Culhwich continued, 'Efnisien entered the

black cauldron alive, knowing nothing else but the want to end this horrible magical spell. With all his might, he tore open the black cauldron from the inside, but the act of it was too much for his heart, and he died. But the black cauldron's spell no longer worked.'

Harry rubbed his scar again, shaken by what he just heard. 'And you think this is what Malfoy is looking for?'

Sir Culhwich shrugged. 'I don't know. If it is, the dark magic is long gone. It would be just broken fragments. But then again, myths are stories told generation to generation. Details would be lost. Names changed. And sometimes, myths were stories designed to hide the truth.'

'So it's possible the cauldron wasn't destroyed?' Harry questioned. As soon as he said it, his mind raced to what Draco might want to revive. His father, perhaps.

Or worse.

Luna flicked Harry's forehead. 'Your brain is showing a sudden infestation of Wrackspurts.'

Harry's eyes grew stern. 'If this Magical Cauldron has the power to revive people and it isn't broken, there is no way I would allow Malfoy to get his hands on it, no matter his reasons. Let's just hope we're wrong.'

Padma and Sir Culhwich exchanged worried looks. Luna just frowned.

'You should all get some rest,' Harry calmly stated, turning back towards the water. 'I'll take first watch.'

As Padma, Luna, and Sir Culhwich left the quarterdeck, Harry could hear Padma arguing with Luna.

'There is no scientific proof that Wrackspurts exist. Why do you continuously insist that they do?'

Luna replied shortly back, 'I'd like to know why you continue to insist that they don't?'

Padma bristled. 'You are much too smart to believe in such tales.'

'And you,' Luna replied, 'are too young to forget the beauty of magic.'

Padma had no reply for Luna. Harry smiled, thankful for the distraction, but glad to have the rest of the night to himself.

~*~

That night, Draco's endless tossing and turning only incensed Harry's anger and distrust. He threw an arm over his eyes and tried desperately to reign in his urge to shake the man awake and demand to know what is going on.

When he woke in the morning Draco was already gone. Irrationally, it only made Harry more angry.

~*~

The morning was cold and grey. There was a storm cloud due west on the horizon that would most likely hit the island by midday. Harry instructed the Wave-Sweeper to find King Ascon's castle on the other side of the island and focused on steering his ship, enjoying the cooling wind on his face.

The island landscape continued to be astonishingly uninhabited. There was a relief to it, after living and working in crowded London, to be surrounded by untouched nature.

Harry paused. He had never felt suffocated where he lived before. In fact, the constant horns and shouts of London's streets lulled him to sleep at night, and the morning rush for work, thousands of Muggles and wizards rushing towards their destination, all travelling together and yet not together, endlessly fascinated Harry.

But, seeing this open unblemished island hit Harry somewhere deep in his core.

People were like ants, Harry thought, crawling over a Sunday picnic in the park. Human power was in numbers, and if people knew of this isolated undeveloped island, they would crawl all over it with their industry and jobs and daily routines and this peaceful simplicity of trees, birds, water, and cliffs, would end.

There was something in man that drove him to control his surroundings. Harry had seen it before, the need to own and devour a piece of land for every last drop of its resource. Even Voldemort, in a way, was just trying to be the king of the anthill, wanting to control where and how the ants took over the unsuspecting grapes and pies atop the picnic blanket.

Harry had naively believed that instinct to be one only the most devilish of men and women possessed. But in his years of travel Harry had met many people, many so-called friends, that would not hesitate when presented with the opportunity to be in control.

The human heart had a deeper dark side. That was why Harry had abandoned his silly childish dreams of running in and saving the day all around the world using this bloody ship and needlessly throwing his friends in danger.

He had trusted someone he shouldn't have, and it had almost cost the life of one of his closest friends.

Which is why he was so frustrated with himself for not saying no to Draco's foolish adventure. He knew better.

There was a call from Luna to look to the left. High in the trees there was one single stone turret peaking out, its manmade structure sticking out like a sore thumb.

The storm on the horizon hadn't moved, but storm clouds had a funny way of sneaking up on a person. Harry took in a deep breath and made a decision, hoping it was the right one.

'We are in and then we are out. I want to be back in the Wave-Sweeper before the storm hits.'

His crew all nodded and began to anchor the ship.

Draco stepped up beside Harry, his broom in hand, his face a portrait of concentration. 'It might be better to be in a secure castle rather than a wooden ship if that storm hits.'

Harry bristled at the sound of Draco's voice. 'I trust this ship much more than a man who has lived alone on an island for 600 years.'

'I'm not sure I'd be able to live that long by myself. My wrist would get mighty sore.'

Draco laughed at his own joke, but when Harry failed to respond, his laughter cut short. Draco then had the good sense not to question Harry's lack of interest in his banter and mounted his broom. Harry shoved down the irritant thought of disappointment for ending Draco's flirting. He mounted his own broom and zoomed towards the island.

~*~

The castle was quiet. Harry knocked on the large wooden door a few times before pushing it open and letting himself in. His crew branched out, Padma and Dean in the back, Padma with her bow out, Dean holding his wand steady. Sir Culhwich and Luna were in the middle looking around the castle in both seriousness and delight. Finn attempted to race in front, but Draco held him back behind Harry and himself.

As the crew ventured deeper into the castle, Harry's concern grew. The small windows and long corridors made a quick escape almost impossible. If there was an enemy here, they had every ability to overtake his crew; Harry just had to make sure he never gave them the opportunity.

The castle was oddly barren. There were no talking portraits or dancing tapestries on the wall. However, there was a small wooden table with a bowl of water and a bowl of seeds, and in some corridors there were tall perches for birds.

The group turned a corner and were suddenly overpowered by the smell of birds. There were thousands of them, all different types and sizes, locked up in cages, crying out into the stone room, their calls echoing around the hall.

Harry took a step back and instructed his crew to stop. 'Scan the cages, tell me if you see a person,' he whispered.

But before he could really begin to search, an older gentleman haggardly shuffled out from behind a larger cage and mumbled into it, throwing a large handful of seed to the bird confined within.

Harry took a cautious step forward, his wand out. 'King Ascon?'

The man jumped and turned, flattening his body against the cage.

The man's robes were tattered. He wore a crown, but it had long ago lost its shine, looking more brass than gold. His hair was stringy and thin, his cheeks sallow.

'We're not here to hurt you, we just want to ask you some questions. We spoke to a goblin in the woods. She said perhaps you might know a thing or two about the island.'

King Ascon shook his head, pushing himself closer and closer to the large cage, his eyes darting around the room.

Finally he whispered something, but Harry couldn't hear him. 'I'm sorry, can you repeat that?'

The old man whispered it again, and again, and again, his voice rising with each word.

'My goldfinch. Where is my goldfinch? Do you have my goldfinch? My poor goldfinch. My one and only goldfinch.'

Harry's concern grew even more. The King was obviously mad, and would be no help to them. Ready to call his crew back to the ship, Harry was startled to see Luna step toward the King. Before he could stop her, Luna transformed, flying toward the King. His eyes grew wide at her approach and his smile was genuine.

For a moment, Harry thought that Luna had just saved the day. Perhaps her presence would soothe the old man's fears.

But then, as soon as Luna came within arm's reach, the previously shabby, mad King changed, now

standing tall, and waved his wand, surrounding Luna in a small gold cage. The King smiled viciously and laughed. Harry began to yell 'Petrificus Totalus' and he could hear the others calling out spells, but it was too late. Suddenly, the crew, minus Luna, found themselves outside the castle, in the rain, a ward shimmering between them and the castle, keeping them out.

'No!' Harry yelled, throwing every spell he could think of at the ward to no avail. 'No, no, no!'

Taking a breath, Harry took a step back, throwing his wet hair out of his face, and tried to think about the situation at hand. This wasn't supposed to happen! He should have known. He should have listened to his instincts.

'What just happened?' Finn asked, throwing blasting spells at the ward.

Sir Culhwich stepped beside Harry. 'This is the strongest ward I've seen. I've never seen one that would kick a group of people out like that. I'm not sure we'll be able to get through by throwing spells at it.'

'Do you have a better idea, then?' Harry asked hotly. He knew he's projecting his anger, but Luna was trapped inside subjected to the whims of a crazy man. And it was all his fault.

Harry searched out for Draco, irrationally believing perhaps he had a part of it. Instead the man looked oddly fearful, running a hand along the ward, as if he couldn't believe its existence.

'Any ideas, Malfoy?'

The sudden question jerked Draco from his concentration. 'I've never seen anything like this. Not even my father could create something this strong.'

Harry yelled. 'I don't give a rat's arse what your father could or could not do. I just want to know how to get inside and get Luna out. Or is this a happy circumstance? Was this your plan all along, to drag us to

this unknown island in hopes of us all getting picked off one by one?'

In response to Harry's accusation, Draco's face had paled of colour and his mouth was left open wide.

Harry was fuming. Thoughts, doubts, and concerns were swirling in his head. Why had he agreed to come to this place? Why had he allowed himself to get swept up in the mission of others? Time and time again Harry and his friends were used as ammunition for other people's battles. And right now, Harry had no idea why he had agreed to put his friends in danger, once again, for Draco Malfoy, of all people.

Harry's head was spinning. His breath was coming in faster and faster and he was having a tough time concentrating. Dean came in to focus, a hand on his arm, and for a moment Harry was right back to that time five years ago in Africa, when instead of Luna trapped with an unknown mad man, it was Dean held hostage and tortured by a so-called friend.

'Harry, get a hold of yourself!' Dean whispered, shaking Harry's shoulders.

'I'm sorry, Dean!' Harry whispered frantically. 'I had no idea Shiraq would be like that. He told me he wanted freedom for his people. Venazu was a crazed man. We had to remove him from power, but I had no idea Shiraq would... would...'

Dean tried to interrupt. 'Harry, I know all of this. You don't have to apologise to me.'

Harry cried out. 'But it was my fault! I made the decision to help Shiraq! I dragged you all into that mess when we should have stayed out of it! We had no business being involved.'

The rain came down harder.

'Listen to me, Harry.' Dean said firmly, his eye boring into Harry's. 'You may have made the decision, but if Luna or I didn't agree to it, we wouldn't have followed you. We all had the opportunity to leave you, and we didn't. We stayed on your ship, followed your missions, because we believed in you and what

you fought for. We had no way of knowing Shiraq just wanted control of the country. We did what we thought was right.'

'But...' Harry tried to respond, but Dean placed a muddy hand on his lips.

'You saved me, Harry.' Dean said. He lifted his eye-patch, showing the gaping hole that was left. 'Shiraq did this to me, and would have done the other eye, had you not stormed his stronghold and rescued me. You could have died, but you didn't care. You just cared about making sure I was safe. No matter what Harry, I would follow you anywhere. No matter what.'

Suddenly where they were came sweeping back to Harry. He took a frantic look and saw Draco staring at him with concerned eyes.

'Harry!' Padma shouted somewhere to Harry's left. 'Over here, I think I found a way in.'

Padma's words were like a slap in the face. This was not a time to get hysterical about the past. Luna was trapped inside and he needed to get her out.

He patted Dean's arm, giving him a firm smile. 'Thank you, Dean.'

He wanted to say more, but nothing better than a short thank you seemed to suffice. He nodded to Draco, shamed that Draco had heard the interchange, but unwilling to think about it when Luna's life was on the line.

Harry rushed to Padma whose long, braided hair hung heavy under the weight of the rain. Her eyes were large and her breath laboured.

'The ward goes around the castle, up and around. But there is one place it does not go. And that is under! There is a small hole here and I was able to push my hand through it.'

Before anyone could even ask a question, Padma and Harry were on their knees digging into the wet earth. Padma transfigured one of her arrows into a shovel, but Harry had little time to think about magic and used his hands to push the dirt away from where Padma was digging.

Soon the rest of the crew was digging like mad using a variety of tools and spells.

Draco pulled on Harry's shirt, away from the digging. 'Stand back.' He then yelled at the rest of the crew. 'Everyone, stand back!'

The crew shuffled back, covered in mud, dirt, and rain. Harry didn't want to stop digging but there was something in Draco's eyes that urged Harry to trust him.

Draco drew up his wand and pointed at the hole the crew had just dug. 'Reducto!'

The dirt blasted away until there was a large crater like hole, much larger than any of them would have been able to create in such a short time.

The rest of the crew joined in, yelling 'Reducto at the hole of dirt, making it larger and larger.

Padma then jumped into the hole, crawling on her hands and knees until she reached the other side. She continued to crawl until she reached a wall, touching the side of the castle and yelling in triumph.

Harry crawled in after her, the dirt filling his nails. He looks over to see Draco right next to him, his long blond hair covered in mud, his felt tunic soaked through.

They reached the castle and ran towards the door, blasting it open, Padma leading the charge.

'Wait!' Harry yelled, but Padma had already begun to rush down the hallways leading to the bird filled hall, Finn close on her heels.

'I don't think Padma wants to wait.' Draco retorted, still cheeky even while running.

'Does no one think that perhaps we should think about a plan first?'

Draco began to laugh, the adrenaline of the stressful situation clearly getting to him. 'The plan is brute force, Potter. Get with the times.'

After only a few minutes, they reached the room filled with birds, who were all screeching louder than they had been before. Finally, Padma had the good sense to look back at Harry for instructions.

'Fan out, search the room. Keep your wands out and don't do anything stupid.' Harry warned before breaking to the right. He scanned each cage, hoping to find Luna before they came across the King. He had underestimated the man the first time. It would not happen again.

But luck was not on their side. Standing below a large window was the King, a cage in his right hand that contained Luna, still in her goldfinch form, and a wand in his other hand pointed at Luna's head.

'You can't take away my goldfinch!' King Ascon yelled, his hands shaking.

'Give her back!' Padma yelled back from his right, shooting off an arrow in the King's direction. It hit his wand arm, piercing the robe and pinning it to the wall.

The King dropped Luna's cage, switched his wand to the other hand and threw an unknown spell at Padma, blasting her into the wall behind her. He then swished his wand in a large upswing and suddenly all of the birdcages opened, releasing hundreds of birds into the hall.

Harry struggled to see through the massive sea of birds. They pecked at his arms, back, hair, and glasses. The rest of his crew were no better, vainly trying to get free of the sudden avian onslaught. Harry saw a swish of robes exit the room with a gold cage and Harry headed in that direction, pushing away the crows that attempted to stand in his way.

There was a blast and the window above them shattered, the birds fleeing through the opening. A protection shield suddenly appeared above Harry, saving him from the falling shards. He looked behind him to see Draco creating the spell to cover both of them. He then looked to the rest of his crew to see that Sir Culhwich was holding a shield above the injured Padma who was suspiciously holding her bow toward the window, and Dean and Finn holding shields of their own.

Once the glass finished falling, Harry continued his chase, Draco hot on his heels. Wand up, he threw open the door to a small throne room. King Ascon was sitting on the highest chair, softly singing to Luna, who was still in her cage.

Harry slowly approached the man, his wand pointed out. 'Put down your wand, sir. You are surrounded.'

Draco stood beside him, his wand out as well. They were then joined by Sir Culhwich, Dean, Finn, and Padma, her eyes murderous, her bow loaded with three arrows.

The King's eyes were frenzied as he cravenly held Luna's cage close.

Without warning, Padma shot out her arrows, pinning King Ascon to his throne. This time, Padma made sure to pin both arms. She also managed to pin the King's neck, shooting an arrow straight through the man's collar, trapping his throat so he wouldn't be able to speak.

Both Harry and Draco yelled out Incarcerous, tying King Ascon tightly to his throne while Sir Culhwich summoned Luna's cage.

Only then did Harry allow himself to take a look around the room. Like the hall earlier, the throne room was also filled with various sized cages containing all different types of birds. But in here, Harry could feel the magic surrounding the cages, keeping the animals confined. Upon further inspection Harry

discovered that these birds were different than the ones in the hall. These birds were all magical.

Far down on the right hand side was a familiar bird, its bright red plumage shining underneath the sunlight, its head bowed very low.

'Fawkes,' Harry breathed, wanting desperately to reach out and release his old friend.

'Harry, we have a problem.' Sir Culhwich stated calmly, 'I'm not able to release Luna's cage.'

The King, while still partially strangled by his own collar, began to laugh.

Harry rushed over to the cage and attempted to throw every unlocking and opening spell he could think of at the cage, but nothing worked.

Suddenly, there was a click and a cage to the left opened. A black raven-like creature with three legs emerged and flew to the ceiling.

The King began to struggle madly with the ropes.

'Do not move', Draco bellowed, his wand pointed to the cages. 'Tell us how to open our friend's cage or I release more of your birds.'

Harry stood beside him, whispering out of the corner of his mouth. 'How were you able to release that bird?'

Draco smirked. 'I'm not sure what's holding Luna, but the rest of the cages have basic stasis and containment spells.'

The King stared longingly up at the released bird, but shook his head. Draco released another cage, and then another, and then another.

'No!' The King finally yelled, choking and straining in his pinned clothing.

Padma stormed up to King Ascon, resting her knee dangerously close to his privates, and pulled out the arrow holding back his collar. 'Tell us how to release her.'

The King began to laugh again, until Padma shoved her knee forward.

After a few short coughs and wheezes, the King responded. 'It requires a key. The key is around my neck. Please, stop releasing my birds.'

Padma yanked into the King's robe and pulled off the key from around his neck. She ran toward Luna's cage, quickly unlocking it and releasing Luna. Luna instantly transformed, her eyes wide at Padma. Padma ignored Luna's questioning stare and instead concentrated on checking her person for injuries.

Draco then released another bird, this time a flaming Zhar-Ptitsa [4].

'Wait,' the King cried, 'I've told you how to open her cage. Why are you releasing more of my birds?'

Draco folded his arms. 'Our real purpose is to find the Magical Cauldron. A goblin on the island told us you might have information as to its whereabouts. I'm just making sure you tell us.'

The King groused, his lips in a firm frown. 'I have no idea what you are talking about.'

Draco tsked. 'Wrong answer, sir.'

Draco pointed his wand, looking back at Harry, and then turning hard to the right, releasing Harry's long lost friend. Fawkes flew, not to Harry's shoulder, but to Draco's. Harry reached out and petted his back feathers.

'Tell me what we need to know now.'

The King swallowed, peering around his half empty cages with a sorrowful face.

'I really don't know anything,' he sighed regrettably. 'The Magical Cauldron was only a myth when I arrived six-hundred years ago.'

Draco sighed. 'Is there no one on this island that could help us?'

The King lifted his hand to his temple. 'Well, there is someone older here, but he doesn't live on the island. Just outside it, in fact. He's the oldest and wisest creature here. If anyone would know where the Magical Cauldron lived, it would be the Cock-Eyed Squid. He lives in a cave on the North Shore.'

Draco scrounged out the map from his pocket. A small squid-like creature appeared on the north side of the island.

'But you should leave the Magical Cauldron alone. It is an object that brings nothing but trouble.'

Draco snorted. 'Thanks for the advice.'

But this time, Harry wasn't going to let an opportunity to know more pass him by. 'Why does it bring trouble? Is it dangerous?'

The King shook his head. 'The Cauldron itself is not dangerous. But men tend to use it for nefarious purposes. I would keep a keen eye on that lad of yours. His morals are questionable.'

Harry nodded, but Fawkes cried out, flashing off of Draco's shoulder and reappearing on King Ascon's. Fawkes bit the King's ear and then flashed back to Draco's shoulder, his head standing proud.

'Fawkes seems to have a high opinion of the King's advice.' Draco sarcastically responded before petting the bird's head and heading out of the door.

Harry rounded up the rest of crew, including a confused Luna and an overly protective Padma. They ran out of the castle and out into the rain, mounting their brooms as soon as they reached the dirt and flying towards the Wave-Sweeper at a break-neck speed.

As soon as they landed on the ship, Padma swept Luna away to their cabin below. Dean laughed and began placing bets with Finn and Sir Culhwich on how late they would emerge from their cabin the next morning.

Dean then smiled up at Harry. And for the first time, Harry didn't feel the weight of guilt on his heart. Perhaps something good had come from his day.

Harry rubbed his temples, just glad to have survived another close call and happy to have Luna back in one piece.

Draco was standing on the quarterdeck, petting the perched Fawkes and conversing with it hushed tones, the phoenix's golden tail swishing back and forth.

With his long hair and his strange attire, for a moment Harry flashed back to his memories of Dumbledore, sharing secrets with his favourite bird. According to Dumbledore, Fawkes was a very good judge of character, so why would the bird willingly go to Draco? Why wouldn't he come to him?

Perhaps it had been because Draco had been one to release Fawkes. But, the bird had even defended Draco when the King had suggested Draco's was approaching the cauldron with ill intentions. What were his intentions? Had Harry assumed the worst?

Perhaps this strange day had rattled Harry's brain. A headache was blooming behind his right eye.

Dean placed a hand on his shoulder. 'I've got watch tonight, Harry. Take a shower, and go to sleep.'

Harry nodded, rubbing his eyes underneath his glasses.

'Harry!' Draco yelled, his hand still stroking Fawkes's feathers. 'May I speak with you a moment?'

Harry nodded. 'Let's speak in our quarters.'

Draco gave Fawkes one final pet and sent the bird on its way. Fawkes flew to the top of the foresail and trilled.

~*~

'I want to apologise for what happened today. I know I never promised this trip would be free of danger, but I can't help but feel responsible for today's fight.'

Harry sighed. How dare Draco be rational? 'It's not your fault. You aren't a mind reader or a Seer. Today's

events were my fault. My gut was telling me to retreat and I ignored it.'

Draco folded his arms and looked out the small porthole. 'It's not your fault, either. The King was mad, let's just leave it at that.'

Draco then paused, as if searching out his words. 'I know I wasn't meant to overhear your conversation with Dean earlier. But I have to admit I'm glad I did. I was having trouble reconciling the boy I knew back in Hogwarts with you.'

Harry folded into himself, unwilling to discuss such thing with Draco Malfoy. 'You're right. You weren't meant to hear that.'

Draco turned. Harry had a hard time reading the look on his face. 'I'm not trying to pick a fight here, Potter.'

Harry looked down into his lap. 'Then drop it.'

Draco sighed and nodded, changing the topic. 'It's been a long while since I've been in a situation like today.'

It was a shame Harry couldn't say the same. 'It didn't seem like it. You have quite persuasive means of getting your way.'

Snorting, Draco turned back to Harry with a soft smile. The look of it took Harry's breath away. 'I think I was channelling my father. For all his faults, the man had a talent for playing hard ball.'

'I don't think I can share in your admiration of the man. He was a bigot and a killer.'

Seeing Draco's smiling face turn cold made Harry want to rip those last words right out of his mouth.

'Yes, well, thank you for that. It's what every boy wants to hear when his father just dies, how much people hated him.'

While Harry wished to see the smile again, he wasn't going to apologise for speaking the truth. 'While I am sorry for your loss, I am not sorry for what I said. I almost died in second year because of your father.'

'And yet you implored the court to display leniency towards our family after the war.'

Harry twiddled with a string dangling from his shirtsleeve. 'Only because I knew what your family went through when Voldemort was living at your house. To me, your family, even your father, were clearly not willing participants, at that point.'

Draco shrugged, rubbing his left shirt sleeve, right above where Harry knew the dark mark was still burned onto Draco's arm. 'That time feels like ages ago. Funny how something so traumatic and life altering can be pushed back into a corner of the brain never to be reviewed again. Unfortunately for my father, his last days were filled with those memories. He regretted his allegiance with the Dark Lord with each final breath.'

Harry had no idea what to say in response. Should he comfort Draco? Even though his thoughts were clearly heavy, he spoke with such a clear voice. Such comfort seemed unnecessary.

'And what do you think? Do you regret following him?'

Draco hissed harshly. 'Of course I do! I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't.'

Harry wanted to believe him, but it was so hard considering how little remorse Harry had seen from Draco these past years. The few interactions Harry had with the Malfoy family, each member had treated him like he was scum beneath their boots, even though he had been the only reason they had been

saved from spending their living years in Azkaban.

And Draco was still the snob he had always been, openly mocking others at public functions and giving scathing quotes about lesser Wizarding families in the Prophet.

'But I don't know exactly what you are doing.' Harry responded. 'By not giving me any clue as to what we are looking for, my mind is only going to think the worst. Perhaps I should follow Ron's advice and search your luggage for Voldemort's body.'

Draco paled. 'What do you mean?'

Harry's heart stopped. 'Don't tell me you actually have Voldemort's body.'

Draco suddenly stood. 'Of course not, you twit! But I thought the Dark Lord's body was buried in an unmarked grave somewhere. Why would I have it?'

'Because someone stole his body.'

Draco began to pace. 'Who?'

Harry shrugged. 'No one knows. The Prophet seems to think you're forcing me to smuggle it out of the country.'

'The Prophet is a waste of paper that belongs in the rubbish bin. Do you know they fill their articles with quotes from me and yet have never actually interviewed me? My mother made a complaint once and the next day they printed that she liked to eat fairies raw.'

Well that had answered that question. 'Do people actually eat fairies?'

Draco yelled. 'Focus, Potter! Voldemort's body truly has been taken?'

Harry sighed. 'I'm afraid so. Luna confirmed it.'

Draco sat down heavily on his bed. 'Merlin help us.'

There was a sudden knock on the door. Harry answered it.

Dean was on the other side of the door looking concerned. 'Harry, I think you need to come on deck.'

Harry followed Dean to the quarterdeck, following where Dean was pointing. Far, far, into the clouds was a small black spot.

'What is it?'

'I'm not sure, Harry, but I think it might be another flying ship.'

Harry transfigured his glasses to binoculars to take a closer look. There in the sky was a small flying fishing boat, but it was too far away to see any more details.

'It is a ship. A small one, and at least a day or two behind us. I can't tell if its heading in this direction.'

'Merlin's testicle, this isn't good.'

Draco's loud voice in Harry's ear made him jump. Draco was pressed practically on top of Harry, looking through his glasses to see the object. Harry's entire body instantly could feel every inch of Draco on his

back.

He could feel his face flush scarlet.

Harry coughed and shifted away from Draco. 'At this point all we can do is a keep a watch on it until it comes closer. For all we know, it could be a resident of this island.'

Fawkes flew to Draco's shoulder and began to rub his head against Draco's chin. 'Hells,' he whispered, continuously staring at the far away black dot.

~*~

That night Draco's nightmares were worse than before. Harry threw over a silencing charm, but couldn't stop himself from staring at Draco's nude body thrashing unpleasantly around the bed.

~*~

The rain had finally stopped, but the clouds above were still dark and foreboding. The waves had picked up speed and if it wasn't for the magic of the Wave-Sweeper Harry was sure he would have been pitched out of his bed that morning.

The ship far on the horizon had come closer, now clearly on a path to the island. While Harry was holding off judgement on the boat's intentions, Draco was clearly distressed by its appearance.

More than likely, the ship had originally come from the island, so Harry planned to keep an eye on it, but held off his concern until it posed an actual threat. At the moment, it was too far away to tell in what direction it was heading.

The Wave-Sweeper was on its way to the Cock-Eyed Squid, barrelling through the high waves. Littering the water were large rocks, forcing Harry to keep the ship far from the cliff shore. That distance meant that Harry was unable to spot the cave before the ship had suddenly stopped.

Dean's voice boomed out. 'Lower the sails! Drop the anchor!'

As his word rang out around the ship, Padma and Luna suspiciously chose that moment to come above deck, Padma with a firm hold on Luna's arm. Harry raised his eyebrow to Luna, who just shrugged in response.

Harry had never known Luna to have interests beyond the opposite sex, but she looked happy, and seemed to thrive under the quite possessive nature of Padma.

Once the ship was secured, the crew mounted their brooms, Luna opting to travel in her bird form, and Fawkes insisting on staying on Draco's shoulder. Heading toward the dark cave, the sound of the waves crashing into the cliffs echoed around.

The sound suddenly stopped once they entered the mouth of the cave. There was little light, and no real place to land.

Then there was a rumbling vibration that shook the walls, and water dripped heavily from the sides of the cave.

The crew tightened their formation, Harry in front.

Then, out of the darkness, came movement. It was something large, and slow, a substantial body too big to create a discernable shape. Several tentacles rose and lined the walls. It was as if the animal was pulling itself from the depths of the cave, dragging its sizeable body along the rock and dirt.

The mass rose, filling the cave entirely.

It was a very, very large squid.

Harry held his breath, unsure what the animal was going to do next.

Without warning, the body moved and suddenly a large eye appeared before the crew, its black orb as tall as a Centaur and as wide as a Hippogriff.

There was another move, another vibration, and then a sound.

'Are you a submarine?'

Harry paused, unsure how to respond. It was not what he had expected the Cock-Eyed Squid to say first.

'Um, no. We're humans.'

The squid sighed, rumbling the cave walls. 'Never fall in love with a submarine. It brings nothing but pain and heartache.'

Harry shifted on his broom looking to the crew for something to say in reply. Ever the eloquent speaker,

Draco swept in beside Harry and began to work his magic. Harry's only worry was the likely possibility that Draco had no idea what a submarine was.

'I've heard tales of the submarine. They are a nasty philandering sort.'

Harry groaned as Draco winked at him.

The squid's eye continued to stare at the group. 'Are they? Well then, the fight was for naught. Had I known the submarine would make me a cuckold, I would not have pursued it so vigilantly. We believed it was another squid and were each overwhelmed with covetous lust. To lose such a precious younger brother over such a thing!'

'Love can make us all do crazy things.' Draco empathetically replied.

The squid nodded, forcing the crew to swerve away lest they be hit by the massive squid head.

Abruptly, a weight materialized behind Harry on his broom. Luna had transformed back into a human.

'Fly closer to the squid.' Luna whispered into his ear. Harry complied.

Once close, Luna reached out a hand to pet the body of the squid. Harry could see the damp moisture on the smooth rubbery skin and imagined what Luna was touching could not be pleasant.

Luna hummed and then spoke. 'If you regret what you did, why not apologise to your brother?'

The squid moaned. 'Oh, but he will never forgive me! He moved to Scotland, of all places, to get away from me!'

Harry had a sudden scary thought. 'Your brother isn't the Giant Squid, is he?'

The squid wiggled below them. 'You know him? Is he all right? Somewhere safe? Is he eating enough?'

Harry chuckled. He would have never had imagined anyone speaking of the Giant Squid in such a caring familial way, apart from Hagrid.

'I've spoken with the Giant Squid,' Luna answered. Harry was not surprised that Luna had spoken to the mollusc. But that was Luna. She always made it a point to speak to all creatures, no matter the species or ability to respond. 'He's found himself a nice lake, but sometimes he's lonely. I'm sure he misses his brother.'

The squid was silent. He blinked slowly, a drip of water falling from the eye. After a few minutes, the squid spoke. 'You are a wise human. Please, if you see my brother again, ask him if I can visit.'

'Of course.'

Luna rested her head on Harry's back. He could feel her smile. Harry looked over to the crew. Padma was smiling brightly, her eyes never leaving Luna's.

'Enough of my past woes, you must have come to me for a reason. Please, what information do you seek?'

Harry flew back into formation, and signalled to Draco to take over the floor. Draco accepted with a nod.

'We're in search of an ancient magical item called the Magical Cauldron. I am the last descendant of the Malfoy family line and it is my duty to find the object. Do you know where we can find it?'

The squid's eye bored into Draco. The tentacles curled and uncurled, sliding along the wet walls.

'There was once a wise druid I knew many years ago. He told me of the Magical Cauldron and where he had placed it.' Harry held his breath. His heart began to beat loudly in his chest.

'He believed someone like you might come looking for it one day, but I can't say I am pleased to hear it is so soon.'

'That druid was the first Malfoy. I have his map, but it fails to tell me where the Magical Cauldron actually is.'

'It wouldn't,' the squid replied, 'unless I told you where it was. Tell me, what is the Malfoy family motto?'

Luna gasped behind him. Seeing Harry's confused face, Sir Culhwich flew beside Harry to explain.

'To a pureblood, the family motto is a sacred phrase that only those born or married into the family are to know. To recite the motto to non-family members is considered taboo.'

Draco hesitated, looking back to the crew and back to the Cock-Eyed Squid. Harry sympathized and understood Draco's hesitation, but if Draco truly wanted the information he would have to reveal his motto. After a few moments, Draco nodded towards the crew in an unsaid acceptance and turned back to the Cock-Eyed Squid. 'Will you tell me the location of the Magical Cauldron if I recite it?'

The squid nodded, his big head forcing everyone to shift once more.

Draco visibly swallowed and then spoke out clear and strong. 'He who holds, must first have discovered. He who has discovered, must first have sought. He who has sought, must first have braved all impediments. Thus did the druids teach.'

Draco's words echoed throughout the cave and in Harry's mind. Draco flew back into formation, next to Harry, unmistakably apprehensive. Sir Culhwich laid a hand on his shoulder.

'It is a fine motto; a fitting one for adventurers like ourselves.'

Harry stared down at the cave floor, unsure why the motto affected him so much. There was something in those words, something greater than just a fancy tying together of sentences. To Harry, the saying meant that in order to truly hold onto anything, one had to seek it out for themselves, journeying to any length to achieve it, suffering trials and tribulations to attain their heart's desire. And only then would the object of their desire truly be theirs.

Harry wanted a normal life. Had running away back to London, away from the call of the sea and the thrill of exploring new places and people, truly given him the normal life he desired? What was this so-called normal life? Was it daily routines and morning toast? Or, was that the brand of normal his aunt and uncle had always tried to shove down his throat?

Before Harry could answer those thoughts, the squid responded.

'Very well done, youngest Malfoy. You can find the Magical Cauldron at the bottom of Lake Bheith in the centre of the island.'

Harry thought Draco would be happy. He expected to see a large smile on the man's face. Instead, his face was pulled in and his eyes had glazed over. Fawkes was on his shoulder, his head slung low, singing a soft trill.

'Thank you.'

Draco turned to leave the cave, but a single tentacle stopped Draco in his tracks.

'Do you know your purpose? You and the Magical Cauldron are linked. You do realize what that means?'

Draco continued to stare out of the cave wall, not turning to address the Squid's concern. Harry looked beyond Draco to see what he was looking at. The ship on the horizon had come into focus. There was a single man riding on the deck.

Draco responded, still staring at the ship. 'I understand what I must do.'

With that, Draco flew out of the cave and towards the Wave-Sweeper, never looking back. Harry signalled to his crew to follow him.

Harry held back. Luna transformed into her bird form and flew to Padma's shoulder, tweeting back to Harry.

Harry waited until his crew had all left the cave to speak to the Cock-Eyed Squid.

'I've heard nothing but warnings from those on the island. I don't wish to risk my crew, so please, tell me what the Magical Cauldron does.'

The squid sighed and blinked his eye. 'While I feel your concern for the youngest Malfoy, the purpose of the Magical Cauldron is not my secret to tell.'

'My friends believe the Magical Cauldron is the same as the mythological black cauldron. Can you at least tell me if that's true?'

'The black cauldron is a myth, a story passed down for generations. Many details have been lost throughout time, but some truth remains. The black cauldron's myth was born out of the true tales of the Magical Cauldron. Its story was spun as way to warn young witches and wizards away from darker

magic regarding life and death. The truth is much darker, and more sinister than you can ever imagine. Many years ago, the oldest Malfoy fought against those dark forces and stole the Magical Cauldron. He hid it here on this island, but was unable to perform the task necessary to destroy it. It has fallen on this youngest Malfoy to complete what his ancestors could not. '

Harry was confused. 'But if Draco's purpose is to destroy the cauldron, why does everyone warn him of the dangers?'

'Because,' the squid replied solemnly, 'to destroy the cauldron, one must willingly give up their own life in return for ending the spell.'

Harry's heart turned cold. 'Give up their own life? Do you mean he's going to die?'

Harry was losing all feeling in his limbs.

'Aye,' replied the squid, 'it is inevitable.'

Harry had no recollection of how he returned back to the Wave-Sweeper. Upon landing, he took up the helm and gave out the location, keeping an eye out for the small ship on the horizon. The ship was probably nothing, but Draco's agitation was infectious. The more Harry wondered about it, the more he began to worry. But, at this point, all he could do was keep his eye on it.

The Wave-Sweeper turned south and then up a river. According to Draco's map, this river fed into Lake Bheith.

The sky began to darken. Sir Culhwich patted Harry on the shoulder and volunteered to take first watch, Finn close on his heels. He was ushered down to his quarters and deposited neatly inside.

Draco was already asleep, or at least appeared to be so. His quilt was pulled up over his head, only the

white tuft of his hair peaking out from underneath.

Harry undressed and curled up into his own bed, absolutely sure sleep would not come to him.

~*~

Draco tossed and turned again in his bed, but this time Harry had a fairly good idea what his nightmares were about. Harry's scar began to ache.

Draco had known, from the beginning that he was going to die. When he had blithely walked into Harry's office and plopped his muddy feet on his desk, he had known how this journey was to end. All of the annoying jibes and flirting distractions were all words spoken by a dying man.

Faced with imminent death, Harry was quite surprised at how Draco was spending his last days. Harry would have suspected the man would have complained to anyone who would listen about the unfairness of it all. And yet, there was Draco, stoically accepting his destiny without complaint, continuing his days as if he had not a care in the world.

Had his father known what was required of his son? Had Lucius sent his only son to die for the greater good?

It felt surreal, that a Malfoy would act so altruistically.

And yet, it was surreal enough for Harry to walk into that forest many moons ago to face Voldemort, knowing that he was going to die.

At this point, Harry was the only person that would understand what Draco was going through. Perhaps,

in part, it was why Draco had searched out for his help.

Draco's nude body was completely uncovered in his bed. Beads of sweat covered his body. His skin was flushed pink.

For all his faults, Harry had always found Draco outwardly beautiful. His porcelain skin begged to be touched and marked, his soft downy hair pleaded to be tugged.

But his personality never lived up to his attractiveness. Harry had no interest in an overgrown brat.

However, this new Draco, a Draco willing to sacrifice everything for his family and the wizarding world as a whole, finally matched up to the captivating charm he naturally exuded.

Harry wished Draco was awake so that perhaps they could talk about tomorrow's events. But Harry was unsure what he could really say. Sorry about the whole dying thing, seemed terribly trite. Would it be better just to wrap his arms around him to give him a bit of last minute comfort? Would Draco even want that?

Startling Harry out of his thoughts, Draco abruptly sat up in his bed. His breath was coming in short pants as his eyes focused intensely on Harry.

Draco then left his bed and stood in the middle of their quarters. Harry was unsure if Draco was awake or still in midst of his nightmare, but Draco's intensity led Harry to believe that Draco was awake and fully aware of what he was doing.

Draco stalked towards Harry's bed.

Harry felt frozen. His body refused to move, refused to turn away from Draco as he approached his bed. Harry did nothing when Draco slowly lifted Harry's sheets and he did nothing when Draco lay on top of

him, his long hair blocking Harry's peripheral vision so all he could see was Draco's face.

The first kiss felt like barely anything, just a brush of two lips together, gone before Harry had a chance to process what was happening.

Then it happened again, except this time Draco used his whole body to kiss Harry, pressing his calves, thighs, hips, chest, and face into him. Harry was completely trapped and surrounded by Draco, unable to get away, and unsure if he wanted to.

Harry tentatively reached out and placed a single hand on Draco's back. His skin was on fire and the touch seemed to ignite Draco even more.

His kisses grew in passion. Harry felt more than just lips and a tongue, he felt Draco's whole being presented to him. And Harry took it all in, bravely lifting another hand and laying it flat on Draco's skin.

Draco's skin was scorching hot. It was like touching hot coals. Harry curled his fingers and raked his fingernails down Draco's back.

Draco moaned and bit down on Harry's lip. The copper taste of blood filled his mouth. Harry bit on Draco's lip in response, causing it to bleed as well. Their blood intermingled in their mouths and Harry loved the taste of it.

Harry was still wearing pants and Draco made a show of removing them slowly, kissing down Harry's chest, Draco's burning lips searing into Harry's skin. His wandering fingers brushed Harry's lower stomach, making Harry gasp, and then the fingers moved lower, brushing against Harry's hip bones, thighs, and the back of his knees, as Draco lowered the pants down his legs.

Once removed, Draco returned, lying flat against Harry. For the first time in their exchange, Draco's intense look changed. The edge of his lips began to rise. Harry's lips on their own accord rose with them. Without thinking he reached out, kissing those tempting, smirking lips.

Draco began to chuckle at Harry's sudden vigorous enthusiasm, the vibrations running through Harry's body and down his spine. Soon Harry was grabbing at all he could get his hands on, pulling Draco's shoulder's, back, and hips impossibly closer. The two continued to laugh as the grabbing became a game of strength, each party attempting to get closer than the other.

All hilarity stopped when Draco reached down and unceremoniously grabbed Harry's cock. Harry moaned deep in this throat and began to thrust into Draco's hand, the feel of his smooth skin like silken sheets running back and forth on his tender cock.

Harry moved his hand to reciprocate, but Draco brushed it away, instead distracting Harry by shoving two fingers into his mouth. Harry sucked on them hard, getting them nice and wet, swiping his tongue up and down the digits.

Once fully lathered, Harry lifted his hips in supplication of surrender, the touching on his cock not enough.

Draco teased Harry entrance with the wet fingers, circling in a maddeningly slow way. Harry arched into it, his movements begging Draco to go in deeper. Draco relented, probing first with one and then adding another after Harry whinged and wiggled for more.

Finally, after entering a third finger, Harry cries for more were answered. Spitting into his palm, Draco rubbed his cock with the moisture and then slowly entered Harry.

The burn was too much for the first second, and then it bloomed into something more than just pain. Harry's eyes rolled into the back of his head and he arched his back, his arms splayed, his fingers digging into the sheets.

Draco pulled Harry up until he was sitting on Draco's lap. Harry wrapped his legs around Draco's back and his arms around his neck. Draco thrust, his voice grunting with effort. Harry just held on tight and allowed Draco to take him with every ounce of his being.

After a while, it was not enough. Draco pushed Harry down onto the bed and roughly yanked up his knees, hooking his arms around them. He then began to thrust harder than before, so hard that Harry felt like he could feel Draco's cock all the way up to the tip of his head.

Harry clawed at Draco's back, knowing his fingernails were leaving marks. He bit Draco's shoulder and ear lobes. Draco just bit back, yanking on Harry's nipples and tearing skin.

Harry was getting close. He pushed at Draco to get him to slow down, but Draco just smirked and went faster, finding that spot within Harry that made him scream and lose all control.

Three more thrusts and Harry was gone, screaming Draco's name over and over again.

Draco continued to thrust, in and out, prolonging Harry's orgasm into a slow burn.

Now pliant, Draco lifted himself up, gripped Harry's hips hard, his thrusts shoving Harry against the headboard.

Harry savoured the sheer brutality of it all and said whatever filthy thing came to mind, encouraging Draco to move harder, faster. He wanted to be claimed, to be taken, to be owned in such a primal and simple way.

Without warning, Draco cried out a wordless short sound, and then came, filling Harry.

Harry relished in Draco's look of ecstasy. He burned into memory the way his eyebrows twitched and Draco's cheeks blooming into spots of red.

Draco then fell on top of Harry, completely drained. Within moments his breathing became slower and his body heavier.

Harry buried his nose into Draco's neck, surrounding his olfactory senses with Draco, and allowed himself to finally close his eyes as sleep overtook him.

~*~

When Harry woke he reached out, not for his glasses or his alarm clock, not for his wand or his fuzzy slippers, but rather for Draco, sweaty and dirty from their late night activities.

But there was no one there. Harry opened one eye, and then the other, confirming that indeed he was alone in the bed, stuck to the sheets, a mess between his legs.

He gingerly plucked his sheet off his body and headed for the shower, feeling tender and sore all over.

The cold shower felt good on his joints and limbs. Upon inspection, Harry counted seven bruises, including one on each hip that resembled finger marks and one around his right nipple where Draco had been quite enthusiastically biting.

Once dressed, Harry exited his quarters, enjoying the sights and sounds of his crew working together on the Wave-Sweeper. Padma was securing a line on the mainsail, Luna right beside her moving the boom. Sir Culhwich was just emerging from the decks below, nodding to Harry before walking toward Padma and Luna to lend a hand. Finn was running about the deck, spelling off all the unwanted dirt and bird droppings. Dean was holding firm the captain's wheel on the quarterdeck, steering the ship straight and true down the wide lazy river. Fawkes was perched high on the main topmast looking out into their surroundings. And Draco was standing on the forecastle staring into Lake Bheith.

Harry headed towards him, stopping to stand next to him slightly closer than he had in the days before.

'Morning,' Harry smirked, holding off the urge to brush a finger down Draco's smooth cheek.

Draco nodded, but continued to look out in front of him. The lack of response irritated Harry.

'Some night.' Harry stated, taking hold of the ship's railing.

Draco did turn then, but not to look at Harry, but to look behind him, behind the ship.

'That ship that is following us has gotten closer. He's following us down the river. We need to find the Magical Cauldron now.'

Harry leaned over the railing for a better look and sure enough, the small fishing boat was closer.

There was a single man on board, but his back was to Harry and he couldn't make what he looked like. For a fishing boat, the deck was suspiciously empty of cargo. Draco had been right to worry. The ship appeared to be following them into the river.

The Wave-Sweeper pulled short. They had reached the Lake.

The crew began to lower the anchor and the sails. Draco was pacing along the deck, agitated.

As Harry passed around the brooms so the crew could fly toward the edge of the Lake, there was a splash. Draco had dived off the boat and began to swim deeper into the Lake.

'Draco!' Harry yelled. He mounted his broom and began to fly toward him.

Draco continued to swim, diving under the water periodically and coming up with big gasps. The rest of the crew flew to the edge of the lake and were stuck watching Draco desperately search the watery depths.

Draco took in a big breath and then dove below again, disappearing for a long time. Harry yelled into the lake, flying low to the water, desperately trying to see where Draco had gone.

Finally, after a few more terrifying moments, Draco emerged, and in his hand was a large black cauldron.

He reached out to Harry with his free hand, his face triumphant. Harry grabbed hold and pulled Draco atop his broom.

The cauldron was heavy, weighing Harry's broom down. He had no idea how Draco had been able to find the cauldron in the large lake, let alone carry it above water.

Draco's free arm was wrapped tightly against Harry's waist, his chest flush against Harry's back, his breath in Harry's ear. They began to fly towards the edge of the lake but Draco whispered softly. 'No, I don't want them to see this. Take me to the other side, to that thicket of trees.'

Harry nodded, biting his tongue to stop himself from lashing out and demanding that Draco throw the cauldron back into the water and forget about his mission entirely.

His heart had felt only admiration and sympathy yesterday. He had willingly allowed Draco to approach him because he felt it was the only true comfort he could give him.

And yet, in the midst of their coupling, his feelings had turned into an overwhelming ache of despair. Why, when they had just discovered each other, discovered that there was more than just an old schoolyard rivalry, was Draco then to be taken away from him?

Harry had no idea where to begin and felt woefully unprepared to adequately beg for Draco to spare his own life. Instead he consented to follow Draco's lead, knowing that the ending was destined to be tragic.

They landed silently, Draco uncurling from Harry slower than necessary. He placed the cauldron down upon the dirt and began to fill it with water.

Once filled, he gathered bits of wood and brush from the area, stuffing it below the cauldron, and lit the pile on fire.

He kept the flame hot, so in only minutes, the cauldron began to boil.

Suddenly there was a large sound from the other side of the lake. There was shouting and loud noises and then nothing.

In his effort to help Draco, Harry had forgotten about the safety of his crew. Harry silently cursed himself and ran towards the sound.

Harry and Draco lifted their wands, slowly emerging from the trees.

There was no one on the other side of the lake. Harry looked around frantically for his crew, but they had disappeared.

'Stay here, Draco. Don't do anything until I come back.'

Harry mounted his broom and headed towards the other side of the lake.

When he arrived, all hell had broken loose.

The crew had all retreated into the woods. Harry could hear shouts and yelled out spells; he rushed into the woods, sprinting toward the sounds.

He found Padma, Dean, and Luna first, throwing arrows and spells deep into the trees. 'What is going on?' He shouted, desperately looking for an attacker.

Dean spoke first 'As soon as you and Malfoy disappeared behind those trees, the fishing boat landed on our shore of the lake. Harry, it was Rastaban Lestrange. And he wasn't alone.'

It was like a bucket of ice had been poured over his head. 'How many?'

'Harry.' Padma placed and arm on his shoulder. 'He didn't mean he brought reinforcements. He meant he had Voldemort's body with him.'

Harry began to panic, looking back between Dean, Padma and Luna. 'Rastaban Lestrange is here? Why? How did he find us?'

Dean's face turned cold. 'He said he came for the cauldron, to bring Voldemort back to life, and that a friend had told him it would be here. I think we can all guess who that friend was.'

Harry closed his eyes in shame. Of course. It all made sense now. Of course Draco was acting out of character. Of course he wasn't complaining about his impossible task. Because he had never planned on completing it.

He had lied directly to Harry's face. He had created such a good show of acting surprised at the news that Voldemort's body had been taken, his show of worry when the fishing boat appeared on the horizon. He wasn't fearful, he was running out of time.

Harry should have known better. No task sent by Lucius would ever be altruistic. This was one way to redeem the Malfoy name, in the eyes of Voldemort at least. And, considering their pureblood supremacy beliefs, they probably believed bringing back the mad man was in the best interest of the wizarding world.

Harry was such a fool. He wanted to jump in the lake and scrub off all traces of the night before.

'Where's Finn?' Harry asked.

'He was the first one to chase after Lestrange.' Dean responded.

Harry cursed Finn's impetuousness. Harry saw too much of himself in the boy.

Harry signalled to his crew to continue their search in the woods without him. Harry had other plans. He was going to go back to the other side of the lake to stop Draco from using the Magical Cauldron.

When he arrived, the cauldron was furiously boiling. Voldemort's body lay limp next to it. The body was badly decomposed, the skin on his face rotted away, his hands and feet curled up and brittle, his robe tattered and worm-eaten.

Lestrange looked half mad, with his hair pulled out in clumps, his clothes mere rags. The man had been on the run for years, on the Aurors' wanted list since the end of the war. The years had not been good to him.

But what worried Harry was the firm wand he had pressed against their crew member, Finn.

And that Draco was nowhere to be found.

Harry lifted his wand. 'Let him go, Lestrange.'

Lestrange began to laugh manically. 'You're going to fight me, Potter? You're nothing but a small-time ministry hack.'

Harry bristled, taking a step forward. 'Put your wand down and let Finn go.'

Lestrange strengthened his hold, shaking Finn around. Finn looked scared, his freckled face pale underneath Lestrange's arm. Lestrange had must have placed a sticking charm on his lips because he looked to be vainly trying to pry his lips open.

Lestrange began to slowly inch towards the cauldron.

'Stay where you are!'

Lestrange, still with his arm held tightly around Finn, began to use his wand to levitate Voldemort's body into the air.

Harry raised his wand to fight back, but suddenly there was a noise behind him and then pressure on his temple.

'I wouldn't do that if I were you.'

Harry's eyes went wide. 'Sir Culhwich, what are you doing?'

The older man laughed. 'Sir Culhwich?'

Harry twisted around to see that while the voice speaking to him was the same as Sir Culhwich, his body had changed to look exactly like Theodore Nott Senior.

'Surprised to see me?' Nott whispered, his voice like sharp knives in his ear.

Both Lestrange and Nott began to laugh.

Harry took that time to stare at Finn, a plan forming in his mind. He hoped Finn understood what Harry wanted him to do, but at this point he had to do something.

He sharply nodded his head and suddenly both he and Finn pushed back against their captors. Harry shoved his elbow hard into Nott, making him bend over. He then sent a sharp stinging spell toward Lestrange to help Finn get away. Once free, Harry pushed Finn behind him.

At that moment Dean, Luna and Padma had finally arrived, their wands drawn.

Realizing they were outnumbered, Lestrange and Nott began to run into the forest. Harry and his crew ran after them. Arrows flew ahead as Harry yelled out Expelliarmus, disarming Lestrange. who dived into the underbrush, disappearing from view.

Harry and Dean charged through first and Dean cast a quick Impedimenta spell before he even saw what was on the other side. His instincts were correct and he caught Lestrange. Luna was a step behind them, casting Locomotor Mortis, essentially stopping his movements and locking his feet together.

As Lestrange fell his head hit a rock, knocking him out cold. Finn cast a quick Levicorpus, spelling Lestrange upside down. He then secured his ankles to a tree, grinning up at Harry.

'Serves him right for yanking me about.'

Harry grinned back and patted Finn on the shoulder.

Nott was not as easy to catch. His movements were erratic and his spell casting much quicker. Harry and his crew, were struggling to throw up shield charms and avoid his blasting curses.

Nott sent a strong Severing Charm toward Luna, who deftly avoided the spell by transforming into a goldfinch. The tree behind her fell over as she transformed right back. She threw an Oppugno in response, sending a flock of goldfinches at his head. Nott leapt out of the way, banishing the birds as he fell.

Padma shot out an arrow that hit Nott's arm. Angry, Nott yelled, "Crucio," but Harry sent a Freezing charm to his arm, distracting him enough to send the curse off balance, missing Padma completely.

Finn yelled out, "Confringo," setting fire to a tree standing beside Nott. Nott avoided it and screamed, "Petrificus Totalus!"

Padma hit the ground with a thud. Harry started to move toward her, but a shout of "Diffindo " had him diving for cover. Nott pressed his advantage on Harry and charged, firing curses. Harry scrambled on the ground trying to stay low and spitting out shield charms to protect himself and Padma.

Dean jumped on Nott's distraction, casting an Obscuro curse, covering Nott's eyes with a blindfold. Luna, right beside him, cried, "Langlock," sealing Nott's tongue to the roof of his mouth Harry leapt to his feet and cast an Incarcerous , biding Nott with a tight rope.

The crew rushed forward and surrounded him, Harry quickly taking his wand.

Padma grabbed Harry's arm. 'Where's Sir Culhwich?'

Harry pulled on Nott's hair. 'This is Sir Culhwich. He was using a Glamour. Isn't that right? Tell us, how did Lestrange know about the Magical Cauldron? Did Draco send you?'

Harry released the Langlock spell to let the man speak. He began to laugh. 'You aren't a bright one, are you, Potter? The Malfoys are under an unbreakable vow to never speak of the Magical Cauldron's true nature, but I knew something was up when the Malfoy boy started snooping around and asking people for information about cauldron myths. Voldemort thought perhaps the black cauldron was real, but we never found proof. So I decided to approach the brat to offer my services as a recluse history expert. From there, it was quite easy to put the pieces together. You led us right to it.'

Luna approached Nott and wagged her finger in his face. 'It's not nice to lie.'

She then cast a Petrificus Totalus and watched with satisfaction as Nott's body fell over with a thud.

The group all took a large gulp of air and looked around to each other. Padma had wrapped a tight protective arm around Luna's shoulder. Dean was healing a scratch on Finn's face.

It was then that it hit Harry. Where had Draco gone?

Harry rushed back toward the cauldron. Luna suddenly began running next to him.

'What's the matter, Harry?'

Harry shook his head and continued to run. 'I don't know where Draco is. He wants to destroy the Magical Cauldron. If he does, he dies.'

Luna gasped and continued to run with him.

Harry could hear the footsteps of his crew behind him, but all he cared about was reaching the clearing

and stopping Draco before he destroyed the cauldron. Before, he was resigned to Draco's fate, but now there was no way he was going to allow him to give up his own life!

Harry ran, and ran. Finally he reached the clearing. Voldemort's mangled body was lying in the corner, long ago forgotten.

The cauldron was bubbling. Draco was standing next to it, naked, his wand at his side.

He smiled as Harry approached, his eyes soft.

And then, he climbed over the side of the cauldron and sank underneath the boiling water.

Harry cried out, rushing towards the cauldron, but a blast of light sent him flying back.

Luna and Dean helped Harry up and held him back as the cauldron lifted into the air, spinning like a top, light bursting within and without. There was a high-pitched screeching that tore into Harry's ears.

He struggled to be free, but Luna and Dean held on tight.

Finally the cauldron fell on the ground, splitting into several pieces.

And in the middle of the broken cauldron was the lifeless, yet otherwise unharmed body of Draco Malfoy.

Harry fell knees first onto the ground, his eyes wide. Time stopped and his heart and lungs refused to work. His brain got fuzzy and he couldn't move.

Draco was dead. He had fulfilled his destiny and now he was dead.

Luna and Dean kept firm hands on his shoulders while Padma and Finn rushed toward Draco's body. They ran a wand over his body, but their disappointed looks were confirmation enough of what had happened.

Padma spoke a soft Mobilicorpus and moved Draco's body away from the shards of the cauldron. Once she did, the cauldron pieces disintegrated, turning into dust.

Then there was a sound. A sad, sweet calling that came from the west. The forlorn song that perfectly matched how Harry's heart was shattering.

It was Fawkes, flying toward them, his beautiful red and gold plumage a lovely contrast to the brown and greens of the forest floor.

Fawkes flew directly to Draco, landing on his chest. He raised his neck and sang out a call of anguish before bending over and dripping a single tear onto Draco's body.

The bird began to sing atop Draco. Padma, Finn, Luna and Dean all watched as the bird sang his mournful song.

But Harry continued to watch Draco, unable to lift his eyes away from him even for a moment.

A finger moved.

Harry closed his eyes and opened them again, sure he was imagining things.

The finger moved again.

Harry held his breath.

Another finger moved.

And then, another.

Suddenly there was a large groan and Draco began to shift underneath Fawkes, his head turning from side to side.

Harry rushed to him, lifting Draco off the ground and into his arms, feeling, touching, every part he could.

'Thank God you are all right. Oh, thank God.'

Harry kissed his head, his face, his nose, his eyes.

Draco chuckled and then groaned. 'Lay off, Potter. I nearly died. Be gentle.'

Harry shook his head. 'I refuse to be gentle with you precisely because you nearly died, you completely daft bugger.'

The crew gathered around Draco. Draco peered blearily at them. 'Er, hello. I'm a bit naked here, so would someone be a doll and find my clothes?'

Finn ran off, suspiciously wiping his eyes.

As if suddenly realizing Draco's lack of attire, Dean turned quickly and threw his hands over his eyes. 'Would someone mind telling me what is going on?'

'Later,' Harry replied, laying a firm wet kiss on Draco's lips, not caring that everyone was watching.

~*~

Harry lived a normal life. Every morning, like clockwork, Harry would awake to a mouthful of blond hair. Sometime during the night, Draco would always inevitably roll over Harry, using his chest as his own personal pillow. Draco would never admit it, but his hair was prone to static, and the constant rubbing against Harry would cause it to stick in mad directions, including Harry's open mouth.

Not quite awake, Harry would push the hairs out of his mouth and adjust Draco's body to fit more comfortably on top of him. This usually caused Draco to hold on tighter and mumble something incoherently at Harry, like 'pancakes' or 'buy me a lolly'.

For five minutes, Harry allowed himself to enjoy the morning cuddles before gently rolling out from underneath Draco and heading to the shower.

Fifteen minutes into his shower, Draco always invaded it, stealing Harry's soap straight from his hands, and pushing him out of the water spray so Draco could use it entirely. Harry would let him, mostly because while Draco was distracted with washing, Harry would take the opportunity to fondle all his favourite Draco bits.

After the long shower, which usually ended up being more than just a shower, the pair would dress, Harry in trousers and a cotton shirt, Draco in a wizarding robe, and exit their quarters, blinking up at the

bright sun.

Luna always greeted them first, waving enthusiastically. She would rise on her tiptoes and kiss Padma on the cheek before transforming into a bird and landing on Harry's shoulder. Fawkes would then drop on Draco's shoulders, trilling a happy song.

Next, Finn, who usually was doing anything but work, would salute Harry and go back to whatever scheme he had cooked up that day.

Harry and Draco would then make their way to the quarterdeck, Harry greeting Dean and his lover Sam, who had joined them after their last mission, before taking over the captain's wheel.

This was Harry's morning routine. It was normal. It was typical. It was the same as any other witch or wizard lucky enough to figure out what made him or her truly happy. He captained the Wave-Sweeper. He showered with Draco. He had a goldfinch on his shoulder.

As the Wave-Sweeper flew toward the horizon, Fawkes sat on Draco's shoulder, singing softly in his ear. Luna, resting comfortably on Harry's shoulder, attempted to sing back, but was only able to create an off-key whistle. Draco, with his now-short hair blowing in the wind, turned to Harry with a big smirk.

'My bird's bigger than yours.'

Harry hit him on the arm and smiled as the Wave-Sweeper cut through the clouds.

~The End~

1 - The Wave-Sweeper is one of Manánnan Mac Lir, god of the ocean's, magical possessions. The Wave-Sweeper was used by Brían and his brothers during their ill-fated journey to pay their eric fine placed on them for killing Cian, Lugh Lámhfada's father.

2 - Lugh Lámhfada is an Irish deity represented in mythological texts as a hero and High King of the distant past. He is known by the epithets Lámhfada ("long arm" or "long hand"), for his skill with a spear or sling.

3 - Brightwork -- varnished wood and/or polished metal.

4 - Zhar-Ptitsa is a Russian mythological bird said to be a magical glowing firebird from a faraway land that is both a blessing and bringer of doom to its captor.

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