Title: Ron Weasley and His Happy Little Bubble of Denial

Disclaimer: J. K. Rowling and her associates own these characters. I am writing this story for fun and not profit.

Pairings: Harry/Draco, Ron/Hermione, others implied

Rating: R/M

Word Count: ~4300

Warnings: Crack!fic. Profanity, AU (ignores DH), references to slash, het, and femmeslash sex, Ron POV.

Summary: Ron is a chess-master and a war strategist, gifted at seeing larger patterns that other people ignore. Therefore, he knows that Harry is not really dating Draco Malfoy. There are other explanations that make so much more sense.

Author's Notes: This is a prequel to my fic "Ron Weasley and the Adventure of the Dastardly Bastard," and thus begins a new series I've decided to call the Hapless Ron Series. However, either fic can be read independently.

Ron Weasley and His Happy Little Bubble of Denial

"Hmm, who do you think Harry's new girlfriend is, anyway?"

Ron considered the question a perfectly reasonable one, an idle question for a sunny day. He and Hermione were under a tree near the edge of the Hogwarts lake, his back leaning on the tree and her head lying on his shoulder. All right, so it was a bit uncomfortable because Hermione had her face twisted to the side so that she could read, but it was sure better than another day in the library.

There was no reason that question should have made Hermione lift her head and gape at him. A line of drool began to roll from her chin down to the book. Ron, concerned, reached out and tilted her jaw shut.

"What?" he asked. "Harry's been a bit secretive about her, that's all. Do you think he's dating Ginny? I

know they think I'd hurt him if they were together, but that's not true." He would only require that Harry sign a document in his own blood stating that he would never hurt Ginny, and then take an Unbreakable Vow stating the same thing. Hermione had solemnly agreed that those were reasonable precautions when Ron explained them to her.

"Ron, I really can't believe you." Hermione stood up, shaking her head, and began to walk back towards the castle.

"What?" Ron called after her, baffled. Harry's love life had the power to disturb a completely peaceful study session with his girlfriend; how was that fair? "I haven't insulted her. How could I? I don't know anything about her!"

"You know perfectly well who Harry is dating." Hermione paused as she was about to walk out of earshot, her brow furrowed in that way she used when she was trying to figure out how Ron could have scored negative points on a Transfiguration exam. "You've known for weeks. They've been open enough about it after the first few days, when Harry was embarrassed. It doesn't do any good for you to pretend you don't know."

And she walked away before Ron could protest that he really didn't know. Ron slumped back against the tree and scowled thoughtfully at the lake. He had no idea what Hermione was talking about. Harry had done everything normally in the past months, once he began to get over the enormous relief that his killing Voldemort had been for all of them. He played Quidditch, he slept too late in the mornings, he put off his homework as long as he possibly could, he ate almost as much as Ron, and he went to the Owlery to visit Hedwig.

Finally, though, Ron remembered Lavender Brown making some smart remark last week, and Harry blushing. He chuckled. No wonder Harry didn't want to remind Ron and Hermione of who he was dating. He was probably remembering Ron's embarrassing tangle with Lavender last year, and assumed his friend would be resentful. Or maybe he had the sense to realize this wasn't true love.

"Lavender's pretty, but she doesn't have the brainpower to capture someone like Harry forever," Ron announced to the bees buzzing around the rosebush near him. "I reckon Harry went out of his way to pick a girlfriend as different from Hermione as he could get, to show he wasn't pining for her. I'll need to tell him that he doesn't need to do that. I know he and Hermione didn't ever want each other."

Well, he amended conscientiously as he got up and wandered back to the castle, there was that other night when Hermione gasped out Harry's name, but then she said, "Oh, no!", so she was probably dreaming that he didn't turn in his homework on time.

I'll have to congratulate Harry when I see him.

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"Hey, mate, you know you don't have to hide anything from me, right?" Ron sat down next to Harry at breakfast the next morning, grinning at him.

Harry swallowed a mouthful of sausages and blinked as if baffled. "Er, I know," he said. "You've been great about accepting him."

Who? Ron almost asked, but then realized his ears were still crusted with sleep, and he must have mistaken Harry saying "her" for "him." He nodded cheerfully. "Well, I wish you and Lavender the greatest happiness," he said. He leaned nearer and lowered his voice, after a glance around to make sure neither Hermione nor Lavender were nearby. "You know, she really is good in bed. Just don't let her stick her tongue down your throat."

Harry stared at him with lips parted a moment. Ron felt magnanimous as he helped himself to a piece of toast. Harry was no doubt wondering what he would do without a friend like Ron to give him that piece of advice.

"I'm not dating Lavender, Ron." Harry said it with a terrible gentleness, and looked away, a bright flush on his cheeks.

"Harry, I told you, you don't need to hide anything from me." Ron squeezed his shoulder. "I'm completely over her!" I need someone who can row with me, he admitted to himself, and Lavender only ever

wanted to argue about the makeup she was wearing.

“I’m not dating Lavender,” Harry repeated, standing up. A bright flush mottled the corners of his cheeks. “And I thought you’d accepted it, but I reckon you haven’t.” And he stomped off, leaving Ron to blink at his back.

He tried to share his surprise with Hermione when she came down to breakfast, but she only gave him a scornful glance, an, “Honestly, Ron,” and a cold shoulder whilst she finished the book she’d been reading under the tree yesterday.

Ron gazed absently at the entrance to the Great Hall, where Harry and Malfoy were standing with their hands resting on each other’s shoulders. It was heroic of Harry to want to hold his rival up when they were about to punch each other out, it really was.

And then the answer came to Ron. No wonder Hermione was exasperated with him. Harry would never date a girl like Lavender. No, he was a hero, and there was only one girl he’d ever been a hero for.

Smiling, Ron set out to find her.

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It had taken him most of the day to catch up with Ginny; she was taking far too many subjects, as if she intended to compete with Percy in numbers of NEWTS, and she barely even came to the Great Hall for lunch, preferring to snatch it in the kitchens where there was less chance of a food fight among the Gryffindor boys coating her book with crumbs and stains. But Ron ran into her as she came in for dinner, and she had a small, relaxed smile on her face. Ron nodded wisely. She just spent time with Harry, I bet.

“Congratulations, Gin,” he said.

Ginny blinked at him and tossed her hair over one shoulder. She had taken to wearing it in a flowing

braid that Ron didn't entirely approve of lately. But then, he reminded himself sternly, it wasn't his duty to approve. His little sister could date whoever she wanted, and he had to stand aside and stop playing the protective older brother. Everything would be fine as soon as he talked to Harry about that blood magic document and the Unbreakable Vow.

"Thanks, Ron," she said. "But how did you hear that I'd got the highest score in the class on my Charms exam? I only just found out myself."

"I meant about your dating Harry." Ron hugged her, whilst Ginny stood stiff in his embrace. She probably still expected him to make threats of punching Harry, Ron thought comfortably. He had to show her that ordinary magical precautions against hurting her were enough for him. "He's the right sort of man for you. Always your hero, wasn't he, since he saved you in the Chamber of Secrets?"

"Ron," Ginny said, and shoved him away so hard that he reeled, "where did you hear this ridiculous rumor about my dating Harry?" Her eyes had sparked, and her hands rested on her hips. Ron stared at her in uneasy fascination. He knew she'd been spending more time with Hermione since she'd started studying more, but had she really picked up that many of Hermione's mannerisms? "If that Parvati started it again, then—"

"No, I figured it out," said Ron. "I thought he was dating Lavender, but I was wrong. He's a hero, and you're his heroine, so he has to be dating you."

Ginny gave a great sigh and shook her head. "The sooner you get over this stupid blindness you have, Ron, the better for all of us," she said.

Ron stared at her again. "You're not dating?" Well, at least that means I don't have to go get the nightshade and look up that Dark magic for the blood document.

"Of course not." Ginny gave him a calculating look. "It must have occurred to you by now that Harry prefers the male sex."

“Er, yes, I know,” said Ron. “So do I.”

Ginny began to laugh so hard she choked. “That will be news to Hermione,” she said at last, leaning against the wall whilst her knees trembled.

“I mean, all my friends are blokes,” Ron explained, wondering how in the world Ginny could have misunderstood him, and what exactly she thought he was referring to. “Hermione’s my girlfriend. She understands the difference. She always has.”

Ginny raised a brow. “I mean that Harry prefers the male sex in all ways possible.”

Ron scratched his head. “You mean, for Quidditch and chess and drinking with? So do I.” He’d thought it would be fun trying to get drunk with Hermione, but she turned too demanding for his taste, wanting two orgasms for every one she gave him.

“I give up,” said Ginny. “Not least because it’ll be so entertaining when you finally do see the truth.” She shook her head and went in to dinner, a snicker breaking out of her that Ron didn’t understand.

Ron stared after her. He had to admit that a direct denial made it unlikely Ginny and Harry were dating, but that didn’t clear up the mystery of who Harry was dating.

Suddenly the truth occurred to him, and he could have smacked himself in the forehead for being so stupid. When Ginny said Harry preferred the male sex in all ways possible, that meant that he didn’t have a girlfriend to do boyfriend-girlfriend things with. He must be sensitive about it, which would account for the way he snapped at Ron at breakfast.

Ron nodded determinedly and walked in to the Gryffindor table, passing Malfoy and Harry on the way. Harry was thrusting his mouth towards Malfoy’s, obviously either biting him or checking on the number of teeth he had knocked out this morning. Ron would have to remember to tell him what a good show of rivalry he was putting on, but also to spend more time with him. Harry must be lonely. For him to spend this much time chasing Malfoy around was obviously a cry for help.

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“There you are, Harry!”

Harry stiffened, and there was a brief scuffle at his feet, as he tucked the Invisibility Cloak over something. Ron chuckled indulgently. Harry had sneaked into the Forbidden Forest and stolen illegal Potions ingredients, and he thought Ron would disapprove because he was a prefect. Time to show him that Ron valued their friendship above any petty stupid rules.

“Come on, Harry.” Ron bounced the broom he held over his shoulder invitingly. “What do you say we go flying?”

Harry cleared his throat and leaned back against the tree on the outskirts of the Forest that Ron had spotted him by five minutes ago. He looked flushed and rumpled, his hair standing out in several directions. Of course, if he’d just run madly through the Forest to escape a centaur or an Acromantula—Ron shuddered—then that was easily explained. Ron was proud of himself for thinking up such a reasonable theory, after his wrong guesses of the last few days. He was a chess-master and a war strategist. Of course he would arrive at the right idea where most other people would still be floundering.

Harry twitched his robes around the front of his body. Ron looked down. For a moment he thought he caught a glimpse of a naked leg, but the Invisibility Cloak covered it again quickly. He nodded wisely. Harry’d had his robes torn in his escapade, and of course there was no way that one bloke would ever show his cock to another.

“I—I don’t have my broom, Ron.” Harry muttered the words, turning his flushed face away.

“Well, you can Summon it, the way you did in fourth year.” Ron grinned; the tactic Harry had used against the Hungarian Horntail in the Tri-wizard Tournament was one of his favorite memories, and had been since the moment when he’d realized that Harry had survived and he didn’t have to worry about his best friend dying by dragonfire. From the wand of a Dark wizard or Malfoy’s blows or Snape’s essays,

of course, but not by dragonfire. “Come on, Harry, do it? For me?”

“I really can’t,” Harry whispered, and then coughed sharply. His hips arched forwards a little. Ron wondered if he’d got stung or bitten by something in the Forest, and was feeling the pain of it now.

“Why not, mate?” Ron glanced back at the castle, wondering for a moment if Hermione had followed him outside, but no, she would be in the library studying by now. Still, it was no trouble for Ron to go to the library if Harry really needed a special potion brewed. “Want me to go get you a healing potion?”

“Yes!” Harry almost shouted the words in relief. “Yes, Ron, I’m really not feeling good, and—“ He sagged forwards suddenly, gasping, his hands clasped in front of himself. Ron winced. He must have got bitten on the arse or something. Not fun. Ron had had a spider bite—he shuddered—there himself.

“All right, then.” Ron pretended to salute with the broom, and then mounted it and zoomed into the sky. He knew Hermione kept several healing potions around the head of her bed, a habit she’d picked up during the war and hadn’t ever discontinued. He would have just Summoned one, but he was afraid the vial would hit a wall or windowsill on the way and break. It wouldn’t take long to fly to Gryffindor Tower, find Hermione’s window, and pluck one of the potions away.

Looking down, Ron made out a strange flash of pale hair, and blinked. Malfoy was crouched in front of Harry. Ron thought about dropping back down and helping his friend defeat the smarmy git, but then he realized Malfoy was actually on his knees. Ron began to grin. Maybe Harry had got over the behavior he’d exhibited since the war, when he was so perfectly good that he wouldn’t even hex the Slytherins, and had applied a touch of Imperius to the pure-blood prat.

Well, Ron wouldn’t ruin his friend’s fun. He could take some time about getting the healing potion, in fact. Obviously Harry wasn’t sick; he just didn’t know how Ron would take his sudden epiphany that the only good Slytherin was a sobbing Slytherin. Ron swirled his broom lazily in the air and rose cheerily towards the sun.

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“But Harry’s alone, so I want to take some time to reassure him,” Ron explained patiently to Hermione for the fiftieth time. Hermione had just taken the History of Magic written NEWT and had tried to seduce him in his bedroom in an excess of nervous energy, which Ron appreciated, but getting drunk with Harry sounded like more fun right now.

“Ron!” Hermione snarled at him, and Ron backed away a bit. The only time she was more frightening was when she started getting teary-eyed about house-elves. “For the last time, Harry is dating Draco Malfoy. Clearly he’s not alone!”

Ron laughed triumphantly. “That’s a good joke, Hermione, but you can’t get me to fall for it. I saw him get Malfoy on his knees the other day. He’s finally got over this strange prejudice he had during the war about hurting Slytherins, and—“

“He doesn’t want to hurt Slytherins because his boyfriend is one.” Hermione’s voice was low and dangerous, and she advanced towards him like an enraged Veela. Ron dodged cautiously. It was too bad Hermione wasn’t as pretty as a Veela when she was calm, he thought, and instead adopted the appearance of a transformed one, with the way her fingers hooked and her voice grew shrill. “He’s been spending time with Malfoy every week since the start of the term. He snogs him in the corridors. He changed his mind about Malfoy during the war and he talked about it at every opportunity, even before they started dating. How can you be so oblivious? Although I suppose you’ve always had trouble telling the difference between make-believe and reality,” she added, with a little sniff.

Ron had no idea what she meant with that last crack, and so decided to ignore it for now. “He’s not dating Malfoy,” he insisted. “Blokes can’t date blokes.”

Hermione gave him a glance that was far too slow and incredulous for his liking. “You’ve shared a room with Seamus and Dean for seven years, and you still think that?” she asked.

“Seamus and Dean like to wrestle and give each other massages a lot,” Ron said, beginning to feel uncomfortable. “Really, Hermione, I didn’t think you’d judge them for that.”

Hermione put her head in her hands. “Go find Harry, then, and you’ll see what I mean,” she said.

“Fine! I will!” Ron whirled and stomped out of the room, angry that this was necessary at all. Someone might have started a rumor about Harry and Malfoy, but that was no reason for Hermione to believe it. He heard her sniff behind him again, and start putting on her clothes.

He felt a small stab of regret, but the more important thing right now was proving that Harry was his best friend, and therefore Ron knew him best. Harry would have told him that he was dating Draco Malfoy. He would have shown him. Ron would have seen. He couldn’t possibly be as mistaken about this as Hermione thought he was.

Ron held out his wand and said authoritatively, “Point Me Harry Potter.” The wand spun around twice on his palm and then aimed him towards the seventh floor. Ron nodded in satisfaction. Harry was in the Room of Requirement, probably communing with the Mirror of Erised or something like it. Ron knew how much he missed his parents and Sirius, and how badly he needed to see their memories from time to time—though in a less dangerous fashion than the Mirror of Erised offered.

The door of the Room of Requirement was visible, a heavy iron thing with a design of serpents and lions entwined. Ron shrugged when he saw it. So what? Harry had survived a war, destroyed Voldemort’s Horcruxes, and killed the Dark Lord inside a few months. He was entitled to have strange designs on his doors if he wanted. Besides, Harry had confessed to Ron one wintry night during the war that he’d almost been put in Slytherin. Ron had accepted the news with a minimum of yelling, which showed what true friends they were.

So did the easy way the door opened under his hand, instead of staying shut and locked as it would have against an intruder.

Ron opened the door, and looked confidently inside.

*

Ron was a chess-master and a war strategist, gifted at seeing larger patterns that other people ignored. That had helped them again and again when they were fighting Voldemort. Ron had divined two of the

hiding places of the Horcruxes just based on the information Harry told them about Voldemort's past and the tactics of the Death Eaters during the previous war with You-Know-Who.

His mind was tough and flexible. He sat up in bed for long hours that night, trying to come up with an explanation of the things he had seen in the Room of Requirement beyond the horrible, obvious one.

If it had been Harry thrusting into Malfoy who crouched on all fours in the center of a green and silver bed, groaning sinfully, then Ron could have accepted that Harry meant it merely as a plot to humiliate the ferret, and could have found the evidence. But no, it just had to be Malfoy thrusting into Harry, who was not only on all fours, but throwing his head back and crying aloud, as if he enjoyed—

Ron cut the thought off. There were some things too disgusting to think about.

He could have decided that Harry was only with Malfoy out of compassion for his numerous problems, but he couldn't get far in that line of thought, either. Harry had smiled too often in the last few months. He spent too much time away from his friends and with Malfoy; surely he would have complained at least once and sought to avoid Malfoy some of the time if it was only a pity fuck. Besides, they had learned during the war that Malfoy's parents loved him desperately when Lucius Malfoy killed Bellatrix Lestrange to save his son, so Ron didn't think Malfoy had endured some secret life of abuse.

He thought about Imperius, but Harry could resist that. He thought about a potion, but Hermione had reassured him wearily that she had already tested for the presence of every love potion and mind-controlling potion she knew in Harry's bloodstream, and that he'd let her. None of them were present.

Ron could trust Hermione, he knew, even if he would have a hard time trusting Harry anymore.

Towards morning, Ron finally found the explanation. Malfoy was more cunning than they had ever known; he was a Slytherin, after all. He had put up such a convincing impersonation of regret that Harry had fallen in love with his façade and wouldn't hear a word against him. And of course Malfoy would decide the status gained by staying with the Savior of the Wizarding World made up for anything distasteful he had to do to keep that status.

That meant Malfoy would reveal his real colors someday. Just because he was cunning didn't make him endlessly patient. And someday he would probably find someone he thought could give him more prestige, because Harry was so shy of all the attention his heroics had gained him. Then Ron would be there to comfort the heartbroken Harry and punish Malfoy.

Ron nodded grimly. He could do this. Harry and maybe even Hermione would never believe him if he tried to denounce Malfoy now, but if Malfoy could wait for the day when he would have his real revenge, so could Ron.

And then, when Harry no longer cared about him, Ron would break every bone in Malfoy's body.

Everyone would win.

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Ron caught Harry's eye at breakfast the next morning. There was a large bruise on Harry's neck and a happy shine in his eyes. Ron sighed noisily to himself. He couldn't pretend to ignore this any longer.

"I know you're dating Malfoy, Harry," he said stiffly. "I'm happy for you."

Harry stared at him for a moment, lips parted, and then smiled. "Thanks, Ron," he said. "That means a lot to me."

Ron nodded graciously, decided that he could ignore the way Harry shifted on the bench as if he found sitting down uncomfortable, and looked away as he began to eat his bacon.

His eye fell on Ginny, standing by the entrance to the Great Hall and looking wistfully about. Ron smiled. He understood, now, why she was studying so hard. She must have realized Harry was lost to her—at

least for the moment; Ron was laying odds that, on the day the ferret finally betrayed Harry, Harry would need someone who understood him like Ginny did—and taken to books as a substitute. Hermione had done the same thing when she thought Ron would never wake up to her love for him, so it was a coping mechanism Ron was familiar with.

Well, he'd reassure Gin about Harry, and in the meantime maybe try and find a nice boy for her.

Suddenly Ginny's face brightened, and she practically skipped forwards. Ron's eyebrows rose when he watched Luna Lovegood come into the Great Hall and reach out to take Ginny's hand. Huh. Well, they must have become closer friends than he realized during the days of the war when they shared Grimmauld Place as junior members of the Order of the Phoenix, not allowed to fight.

And Luna must have fascinating shampoo, too, from the way Ginny was leaning over to sniff at her hair. She was sniffing her ear, even. Maybe an expensive perfume?

Ron vowed to find out the names of the shampoo and perfume soon, and give them to Ginny for her birthday. That, he thought as he crunched through a mouthful of eggs, should give her a greater chance to catch a bloke.

Even if he was going to be an oblivious best friend, he thought as he watched Ginny and Luna sit down at the Ravenclaw table together and practice making kissing motions at each other for when they finally did start dating boys, he didn't plan on being an oblivious big brother.

End.

Title: Ron Weasley and the Adventure of the Dastardly Bastard

Author: [info]lomonaaeren

Disclaimer: J. K. Rowling and associates own these characters. I am writing this for fun and not profit.

Rating: PG-13

Warnings: Profanity, crack, brief violence, and Ron POV.

Word Count: ~ 3900.

Challenge:

Recipient: [info]enchanted_jae

Keywords: icing, raspberry, smirk

Dialogue: Happy birthday, sweetheart.

Summary: After Harry collapses at his birthday party, Ron just knows that Draco poisoned him. And he's going to find out how.

Author's Notes: This is a pinch-hit for [info]enchanted_jae's request for June, and potentially the first in a series called 'the Hapless Ron Series.' Hope you enjoy!

Ron Weasley and the Adventure of the Dastardly Bastard

"Happy birthday, sweetheart."

That was the first clue Ron received. Even at the time, before he knew the horrible happenings that would follow, it made him sit up and take notice. After all, Draco Malfoy didn't say that kind of thing to people. It was self-evident. He leaned forwards, eyes narrowed, and watched as Malfoy carefully placed the cake on the table in front of Harry.

This could be the moment I've waited for since they started dating, he thought, as Harry turned to smile up at Malfoy, and Malfoy answered with a smirk. The moment when everything finally comes crashing down and Malfoy reveals the real reason he wanted to date Harry.

Of course, Harry saw nothing wrong. He even patted Malfoy's cheek before he turned and cut delicately into the thick chocolate cake, covered with glistening chocolate icing. He didn't seem to notice when Malfoy's hand fell on his shoulder and squeezed, either.

Harry had always been oblivious and had always needed someone to protect him from himself. But there was no reason for Hermione to sit smiling and nodding at Ron's side, even clapping a little when Malfoy whispered that he'd baked the cake himself. She'd made a truce with Malfoy when Harry started dating him for the sake of peace. To take it into friendship was too much. Ron gave her a stern glare, reminding her that they were Gryffindors and had to present a united front against the enemy, but she was too busy staring hungrily at the cake to notice him.

I need to protect two people, then. Ron drew his wand and held it beneath the table so he would be ready when Malfoy made his inevitable move.

"The first piece is only for my darling," Malfoy breathed into Harry's ear. Ron rolled his eyes and resisted the temptation to point out that everyone could hear him.

Harry bit into the cake, smearing the icing across his lips, and sighed. "This is delicious, Draco." Ron sulked for a moment. He would have preferred it if Harry had gone on calling Malfoy by his last name, because then he could have pretended it was just a pity fuck. He'd tried that for a while, right after he'd tried his hardest to believe that Harry was dating someone else. Of course Ron wouldn't attack Malfoy because he wouldn't stand in the way of his best friend's happiness, but he didn't have to like it, either.

Then Harry gasped and grabbed at his throat, his fingers flying frantically over his skin.

"Harry!" Malfoy reached out for him, probably to choke him and finish the job. Ron made a heroic flying leap over the table and knocked Harry to the floor, which prevented Malfoy from touching Harry. It was just too bad that he "accidentally" knocked over the cake on the way and it splattered in a wash of chocolate and evil against the far wall of the flat.

"Mate, can you hear me?" Harry went on making gasping noises as he fought for air, so Ron aimed his wand and cast a useful charm that he'd learned from George. George had had to intervene when Ron had insisted that Ginny go back to dating Harry, and Ginny had got tired of Ron's insistence and cast the Breathless Charm on him. Ron was hopeful that the countercharm would work now, because it wasn't well-known and could probably get around the evil git's poison.

It did work. Harry stopped gasping, smiled in exhaustion up at Ron, and then shut his eyes and passed

into sleep.

“Get out of the way, Weasley, I’ll take him.”

Ron just gaped for a moment, which almost let Malfoy get past him and snatch Harry, to carry him off to certain death in the bedroom. The dastardly bastard!

His wand dug into Malfoy’s throat with satisfying viciousness, forcing his head back. Malfoy gaped at him, and didn’t manage to find his tongue before Ron said, his voice full of steel he was secretly rather proud of, “And you believe that I’m just going to let you take him, when you tried to poison him? Sod off, Malfoy.”

“Ron!” Hermione was at his side, yanking at his arm. Her face was a brilliant red, her eyes rimmed with red. Ron felt a moment’s surprise that she’d given in to tears so easily, but then reflected it wasn’t every day that you saw one of your best friends almost die in front of you. “For fuck’s sake, that wasn’t Draco’s fault.”

“Oh, really?” Ron never took his eyes away from Malfoy and the way he swallowed, the suspicious way he swallowed. “Who baked the cake? Who made the icing? He pointed that out to us how many times this evening, Hermione?”

“It was something else,” said Hermione firmly. “You know that Harry doesn’t eat chocolate often, he’s so worried about staying fit to be an Auror.” Her voice had already resumed its steadiness, which Ron was glad to hear, but it had tones of steel like his own under the surface, and they were directed at him. He definitely wasn’t glad to hear that. “Maybe he has some allergies that we never knew about, or that have developed in the last year. Allergies can start at any time, Ron, you know that.”

And good God, she was about to start lecturing him. Ron loved her, he really did, but she spent too much time blaming him and not enough time apologizing when she did make a mistake. Sometimes he wondered if she had married him so as to go on rowing with him more conveniently.

“I know that I cast a spell that restored Harry’s breathing, and he felt better immediately,” he said.

Malfoy blinked, and Ron narrowed his eyes. “That means his poisoning has to be magical in nature. That’s something you didn’t count on anyone figuring out, eh, Malfoy?”

“I was just thinking that you managed to save his life,” said Malfoy evenly. “Now I owe you for that as well as for putting up with my presence in Harry’s life the past few years.” He sighed. “I realized when I started dating Harry that I would be constantly surrounded by a pack of Weasleys, but I never expected it to be this bad,” he muttered.

“You think this is bad?” Ron grinned at him, because he grinned when he was outraged. “Wait until you see Azkaban for trying to kill the Savior of the Wizarding World. On the other hand, he’s my best friend before he’s the Savior of the Wizarding World, so maybe I ought to give you justice myself—“

Abruptly, his wand was pulled away from Malfoy’s throat. Ron struggled madly, but there were no arms to struggle against. It seemed that Hermione had become tired of listening to him talk and simply cast a spell that yanked him backwards.

“For the last time,” she said, stepping up to him and looking as fierce and dangerous and beautiful as a Valkyrie, “Draco did not poison Harry. It was an allergic reaction, and we should focus on isolating the cause and making sure Harry doesn’t eat it again.”

She turned away and helped Draco levitate Harry into the bedroom they shared. Ron opened his mouth to protest, and then realized that the spell Hermione had cast also stopped his voice. He had to settle for glaring after them instead.

He would be the one to solve this mystery, then, since Hermione didn’t realize what kind of snake Harry had taken into his home. He would get a copy of the recipe Malfoy had used for the cake and figure out the poison he’d have to add to those ingredients to produce the effect of stopping Harry’s breathing.

And, of course, a few tracking charms and so on on Harry couldn’t hurt, just so Malfoy didn’t smother him with a pillow whilst Ron was investigating.

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Ron stared dubiously up at the shop in front of him, one near the end of Diagon Alley that he'd never entered. The windows were filled with haunting sights, ones he felt less comfortable seeing than he would have with many of the wares displayed in windows in Knockturn Alley. Now and then someone opened the door and a gush of smells came to him. Women moved through the shop as casually as though they came there every day. Ron shuddered.

Needs must. He shoved the door open and entered Madame Barringer's Kitchen Supplies.

He kept his eyes as much as possible away from the ladles, books of household charms, pots, rolling pans, and skillets on display. It felt indecent, looking at all the tools that were used to assemble food in the mysterious world of kitchens, as though he were looking at the parts of a dismembered body. Ron knew that his mother could cook, and therefore she must use things like this, but he was perfectly happy to remain ignorant of how she did it.

A large witch with a long horsey face came to meet him, nodding as though she saw the intrusion of men into her private domain every day. Her hair was long and a brilliant orange, which made Ron wonder if she was a distant cousin. But her eyes were black, like Professor Snape's had been, so he discounted the notion. Her voice was cold and precise when she asked, "Can I help you?"

"Uh, yeah." Ron scrubbed a hand over his face and took a long breath. He could do this, he told himself. It was for Harry, who had awakened yesterday before Ron and Hermione left but had only a scratchy voice and no appetite. And who smiled at Draco entirely too much. "I need to know what sort of ingredients would be needed to bake a—a—"

"Yes?" The witch leaned forwards, dusting her floury hands off on the apron she wore. Her lips were parted slightly, as though she suspected that Ron was about to say something intensely interesting.

"A chocolate cake," Ron finished in a rush. "With chocolate icing."

The witch rocked back on her heels and sighed, and Ron had the feeling he'd disappointed her. "That's

simple enough," she muttered, and led him over to a corner where bound books of recipes waited. Ron gave the books a suspicious glance. He thought he could hear them silently snickering at him. Try to use us, they said, and you'll never produce a cake as perfect as the one Malfoy made for Harry.

Ron stuck his nose in the air and ignored them. He had plenty of other things he could do, and most of them involved his wand, which was worth more than having skill with all the things scattered about him. Besides, Malfoy had poisoned Harry, hadn't he? Not such a perfect cake after all.

"Here." The tall witch seized a book and tossed it at him. Ron barely got his hand up to catch it in time. When he stopped fumbling and looked up, the witch had already glided away, presumably to find a patron who wanted to make some dangerous and secret confection.

This is dangerous enough for me, Ron thought, and left, clutching the recipe book tightly, full of newfound determination to make Malfoy pay for this.

Then he had to go back because he'd forgotten to pay for the book and the wards on the shop shrilled an alarm when he tried to pass through the front door, but it was the thought that counted.

*

Ron glared at the book and slammed it shut with a riffling of its small pages. Hermione, bent over yet another new book on the implications of the Great House-Elf Question, looked up at him with a wrinkled brow.

"What's the matter, Ron?"

"I can't figure out what Malfoy would have used to poison Harry," Ron said, and flopped back so that his head leaned on the back of the couch and he was staring at the ceiling. "All the ingredients in that chocolate cake recipe seem to be perfectly common ones. He was wicked and sly and cunning to poison Harry like that, but I don't know what he actually did."

“Ron,” Hermione began, and there was an edge to her voice that made Ron stare at her in wonder, “you’re being ridiculous. Malfoy didn’t poison him. He admitted there were crushed raspberries in the middle of the cake, and Harry figured out that he hasn’t eaten raspberries before. That has to be it.”

“I’ve watched Harry eat raspberries at Hogwarts!” Ron argued, a clear memory springing to mind of Harry laughing over a pile of the glistening fruit. “He only said that because he loves Malfoy, God knows why—“

“I’m glad you can recognize that much, at least,” Hermione muttered, and rolled her eyes before she looked down at the book again.

“And he wants to protect him from going to Azkaban,” Ron finished, determined. “But I won’t let him endanger his life like that. I’m going to find out how Malfoy used the raspberries or the chocolate to poison Harry if it’s the last thing I do!”

Hermione said something like, “Merlin help us,” but Ron knew it couldn’t have been that, really, because she knew the truth about Malfoy as much as he did. She’d probably said, “Merlin help Malfoy,” and that was an instance of just how compassionate she was and why he loved her.

*

Ron tiptoed down Knockturn Alley, his breathing shallow so he wouldn’t flutter the Invisibility Cloak. Harry hadn’t even asked why he wanted to borrow it, which Ron thought was a sign of a true friend, and maybe a silent cry for help. Harry knew Malfoy was up to no good, but he couldn’t say that in front of Malfoy. So he had to plead for help with his eyes and his gestures, and his smiles were false, but Ron was the only one who could see that. Sometimes Hermione was too compassionate. She hadn’t yet realized that Malfoy could be evil even if she felt sorry for him.

He reached the front window of the Bat’s Belfry, the Dark apothecary, and peered through it for a moment. No one was in sight; the customers in Knockturn Alley during the day usually left as night began to drop, and the tougher crowd who were responsible for many of Ron’s headaches as an Auror hadn’t

arrived yet. The owner was probably in the back. Ron studied the wards hung around the windows and smiled. They were simple for someone with Auror training.

A few passes of his wand and a few murmured words, and the wards had been disrupted. Ron stepped confidently onto the threshold.

Alarms exploded from every direction. Ron swore in startlement and jumped straight through the door, which suddenly contained a swinging line of light that almost decapitated him. He scrambled under it and into a far corner of the shop behind a cabinet filled with restlessly moving shapes, his heart pounding.

The owner of the Bat's Belfry, a huge hag with a hideous lump on the side of her face, came out swiftly and looked around. But she didn't think to look behind the cabinets, which Ron thought was a little stupid of her. She seemed satisfied when she realized no one was on the doorstep anymore, and she carefully shut the door and repaired the wards.

It occurred to Ron that that could present a bit of a problem when he wanted to leave. But he decided he would worry about it later. Right now, he wanted to concentrate on the knowledge he'd come for. If any place knew evil uses for raspberries, it was this one.

He crawled carefully from corner to corner, avoiding the gaze of the hag each time; she was more interested in talking to a large toad squatting on the counter anyway, which sometimes inflated its throat as if answering her. Ron passed tubs of scarab beetles that wouldn't have been out of place in the Apothecary in Diagon Alley, a barrel of jerking spider legs, and a stinking tank containing half a dismembered owl. The owl was brilliant white. Ron frowned. Harry had lost a white owl, and the one Malfoy had bought him to replace Hedwig was tawny. Ron couldn't help but think this dead bird was a bad omen.

Finally he found what he was looking for, a large chest with pictures of succulent yet wretched-looking fruit carved on it; Ron was sure he saw large drops of poison falling from the berries. He quietly cast a Privacy Charm around himself and got to work unlocking the trunk.

He suppressed the impulse to cheer when the lid swung open and the very first thing he saw was a large

raspberry with blue leaves and silken skin. Tempting to eat, he knew, but surely deadliest poison. He scooped it out of its bed with a chuckle and enchanted it so that it would stay unbruised as he carried it home. Wait until he showed this to Hermione! She would have to admit that he'd been right, and that Malfoy had poisoned Harry for his own selfish reasons.

Ron shut the trunk again—the locking spells protecting it engaged at once—and then stood up and crept towards the door. The hag hadn't looked up from a dish of water she was placing in front of the toad. Ron reached the door and grinned to himself as he once again went through it, this time without triggering the wards. Really, getting in and out of the Bat's Belfry was dead easy. It was a wonder the hag didn't have thieves crawling out of the woodwork.

"Oh, dearie," said a cracked voice from behind him, followed by an even more cracked laugh. "I let you do it because I have a weakness for redheads, always have. I don't begrudge you one little berry to tempt the lucky man or woman who has you. But don't come back again soon. I've always fancied a little red-haired terrier."

Ron did not bolt, because that would be silly. He walked manfully away from the shop and didn't Apparate until at least a hundred feet from the door.

*

Ron was very loud when he Flooed into Harry and Malfoy's flat. He coughed, knocked soot out of his robes, pounded on the walls with one fist, and called, "Hello! Is anyone here?"

He had learned to be loud ever since the time when he'd come in quietly during the night, hoping to catch Harry awake and Malfoy sleeping so he could talk to Harry without the ferret overhearing, and caught Harry in the middle of…something else instead. Ron shuddered and shook his head. He had never thought of bananas the same way again.

"Ron? Is that you?"

Harry came out of the bedroom, his smile bright and his hand extended. Ron shook it, and then took the

raspberry out of the protective case he'd conjured for it and showed it solemnly to Harry. Harry blinked and looked back and forth from him to the fruit with no sign of recognition.

"Yes, what is it?" he asked, when several moments had passed and Ron hadn't said anything.

Ron sighed. Sometimes he thought Harry's getting regular sex had lowered his intelligence. Or maybe Malfoy had cast a spell that made Harry fitter but dumber. That would be like him. "This is the raspberry that Malfoy put into your birthday cake, the one that made you choke," he said. "I'm certain of it. I found it in the apothecary in Knockturn Alley, and I've talked to a few people who saw him going down the alley last week. So—"

"Yes, he's explained all that," said Harry, with a slight, impatient shrug. "The raspberries made me choke, but he apologized, and he certainly didn't know they would. I'm allergic to them, so I just won't eat them in the future."

"But you've eaten raspberries before!" Ron insisted. "And why would this come from a Dark apothecary unless it was evil, Harry? So we ought to arrest Malfoy. If he really intended to just make you a cake, why wouldn't he use ordinary raspberries?"

Harry sighed and put his head in his hands. Ron nodded triumphantly. "You see? You have to admit he's sneaky and underhanded, Harry."

"Yes, I have to admit that," Harry muttered, and then raised his head and called, "Do you want to tell him, Draco, or should I?"

Malfoy stuck his head out the bedroom door. His hair hung in messy clumps around his face, which wore an expression of dazed satisfaction. His lips were puffy and far too red, and he looked as though someone had punched him several times. Or slammed into him in other ways. Ron averted his gaze, his own face flaming.

"Oh? Yes," said Malfoy breathlessly. "I bought those raspberries because Harry and I have had several

arguments lately, Weasel—“

“Draco.”

Malfoy actually flinched under the lash of Harry’s voice, though he didn’t apologize. “And that led to no sex because Harry was sleeping on the couch. I can’t survive with no sex. So I chose those raspberries because they’re a known aphrodisiac to heighten pleasure. I thought Harry would eat them and have a bout of wild, passionate sex with me before he knew what he was doing.” He was definitely enjoying watching Ron flinch when he said the word sex, if the vicious smile on his face was any indication. “But he turned out to be allergic to them. So we fought again and I apologized for almost killing him, and then we had sex.”

“And you put up with this?” Ron spun to face Harry. “You’re not upset that he was planning to drug and rape you?” He became aware he’d squeezed the raspberry, and the juice was dripping down his fingers now.

Harry shook his head. “I’ve had to make some allowances for dating someone who never learned what right and wrong mean,” he said calmly. Malfoy opened his mouth, but Harry lifted a hand without looking at him. “No, Draco, blood politics have nothing to do with right and wrong. They have to do with crazy.”

“Why do you do this?” Ron muttered. He was unhappy; he’d been right about what a dastardly bastard Malfoy was, but Harry planned to go right ahead and date him anyway. “Isn’t there any line he could cross that would make you leave him?”

“Oh, of course,” said Harry. “But it’s my choice what I forgive, and he hasn’t crossed that line instead.” He put an arm around Ron’s shoulders and leaned near enough to whisper into Ron’s ear. “And the sex is really good.”

Ron put his hands over his ears and ran out the front door of the flat. The door shut behind him, but not before he heard Malfoy laughing. And then he was standing in the middle of the road outside Harry’s building with humiliation flushing his cheeks and smashed raspberry dripping down his ear.

Ron took a deep, determined breath and looked back at the flat with a nod. Someday, Malfoy would make a mistake that even Harry and Hermione couldn't forgive, and then Ron would pounce on him like a hawk and deliver him to justice.

In the meantime, he would go home, take a long shower, and hope to scrub several sights and sounds from his mind permanently. He needed those brain cells free for the next time Malfoy tried anything.

Title: Ron Weasley and the Entropy of the Situation

Disclaimer: J. K. Rowling and associates own these characters. I am writing this for fun and not profit.

Warnings: Crack, AU, profanity, mentions of sex.

Pairings: Ron/Hermione, Harry/Draco

Rating: PG-13

Wordcount: 4500

Summary: Ron has learned a great deal about Muggle physics, and that in turn has opened his eyes to certain facts about Harry's relationship with Malfoy. It's inevitable that it will fall apart and Harry be returned to sanity!

Author's Notes: This is part of my 'Hapless Ron' series, but you don't have to have read the other fics to understand this one, as they all stand alone. Also, this was written in fulfillment of a request from a reviewer called Jolene who gave me "physics" as a prompt.

Ron Weasley and the Entropy of the Situation

Ron picked up the physics book because he was bored.

Hermione was in St. Mungo's interviewing yet another man who claimed to have been ambushed by free-roaming house-elves—a common occurrence since Hermione had started putting pressure on the Ministry to treat house-elves more fairly. Ron didn't want to go to bed, because they're been interrupted

in the middle of a deep and thorough snog when the firecall came, and he still hoped that Hermione would return in time to let them resume. And he didn't want to wank because, well, his wife tended to get a bit short about that when she came home with the need for some close attention and found Ron asleep and snoring.

But she couldn't complain about him picking up one of the Muggle "science" books she was always telling him to read. In fact, she should be pleased that he was educating himself some more by reading every tenth word on the pages or so. Besides, a heavy book was excellent to make some blood flow elsewhere in his body rather than to his erection.

Ron turned slowly through the pages, pausing to stare at some of the illustrations and shake his head. Muggles sure had strange ideas about the way the world worked. This one seemed to spend a lot of time worrying about "forces" in a way that made Ron snort. Magical backlash was a minor danger compared to Dark wizards.

Then he saw a word that he knew he had heard Hermione mention more than once.

Entropy.

Ron settled down, because this was something Hermione could ask him about and he could tell her he really had learned, and read.

And read.

And read.

And didn't even pause to think about how virtuous he was being more than three times.

That was because it was interesting. He was learning something. And he was learning that entropy applied to everything. No one could take an action that wouldn't in some way lead to entropy. There was

no way to get outside it. There was no way to escape it.

Ron later had blurred memories of Hermione coming home and shaking him awake, asking him in amazement what he was doing asleep on the couch with a physics book clutched to his chest. Ron shook his head, murmured that she was increasing the entropy of his psyche, and went back to sleep.

He did give her the book so she could put it away on the shelves—Hermione was particular about that—but only just.

*

“Er, mate,” Harry said, “is something wrong? You’ve been staring at me and grinning for most of the meal. Did George turn my hair green again?” He reached up and felt anxiously along his scalp.

Ron laughed. That was a reasonable fear when they’d spent an hour with his brothers at Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes, but in this case, the twins had concentrated their efforts on him instead of on Harry. “No,” he said. “But you wouldn’t believe me if I told you what was making me laugh.”

“Er, all right,” Harry said, with another stare, before he promptly turned back to wolfing down the shepherd’s pie.

Ron sat back and smiled at him. Yes, he could smile, now that he knew Harry’s love affair with the horrible, prejudiced, anti-Muggle, anti-Weasley, far too blond Draco Malfoy was coming to an end.

The physics book had explained it all to him. Nothing could escape entropy. That meant that Harry and Malfoy’s relationship had to suffer from entropy, too. It would fall slowly apart, and collapse into little tiny particles, and Ron would have his best friend back again without the necessity to think about him shagging Malfoy.

It was simple, brilliant, and, best of all, perfectly natural. No one could accuse him of being anti-Malfoy

himself or trying to hasten things along unfairly. After all, it wasn't as though he'd do anything. He was only watching the laws of the universe in action.

Sometimes Ron was so clever that he really wondered how Hermione dealt with being cast into the shade by him.

Harry finished the shepherd's pie and leaned back in his chair. Ron cleared his throat. "So, Harry, are you going to come over to the Burrow for the party next week?" Mum and Dad were holding a sort of general, all-purpose party to celebrate the birth of Dominique, Bill and Fleur's newest daughter, the continuing success of Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes, and the fact that Percy had finally found a girl who'd tolerate him.

"Can't," Harry said, at least sounding properly regretful. "I promised Draco that we'd go on holiday this year, you know, and this was the weekend he picked for it."

Ron scowled. "On accident, I'm sure," he said sarcastically. Malfoy was always doing things like that. Last year, he'd managed to make Harry miss Ron's birthday, the celebration for the success of one of Hermione's major court cases, and the triumphant release of one of Ginny's articles. The excuses were always for these holidays, or, once, because his mum was in hospital. Ron had believed a lot of bad things about the Malfoys in his time, but slipping one of your parents poison just so that you could cling to your lover like a girl was something Ron thought was pretty bloody low.

(It had to be poison, because Mrs. Malfoy had recovered far too fast the moment her son went home from hospital for the day, to be "comforted" by Harry).

But Harry seemed resolved not to argue with him tonight, because he just rolled his eyes and said, "Yes, Ron, on accident. If anything, I should be the one keeping track of these things, because I'm the only one who cares about both your lives and Draco's life enough to match up the dates." He ducked his head, watching Ron from under his fringe. Ron thought that was unfair. It made him look like the Harry Potter Ron had known in Hogwarts, and that made him think about how they had been inseparable, and that softened him from being angry with Harry the way he should be now.

Everything suffers entropy, even my anger, Ron had to remind himself. "All right," he said. "But you owe

us next weekend. We'll go somewhere without the git and then come back to the Burrow and have a big dinner with my family."

Harry smiled at him. "Agreed." Then he looked up and over Ron's shoulder, and his expression froze into a mixture of shyness and pleasure.

Ron didn't bother turning around. There was only one person Harry ever looked like that for. And sure enough, a moment later, Malfoy had stepped around Ron and was dropping a hand on Harry's shoulder, smiling lazily down at him.

"Ready to leave?" he murmured.

"Yes," Harry said, and stood up, kissing Malfoy on the cheek.

Ron caught his breath. There was the entropy, right in front of him! Harry had always kissed Malfoy on the mouth before when he was trying to soothe him or trying to show Ron that he valued his boyfriend. It was new to have just a cheek kiss. It was probably a sign that he was becoming more bored, less affectionate.

"See you next weekend," Harry said, and then paused, looking at him strangely. "Are you all right, Ron?"

Ron shook his head and managed to smooth his expression back into something like normality. "Of course. Fine." He should try not to show that he knew, he told himself sternly. Otherwise, Harry might feel defensive and self-conscious and try to go back to Malfoy for a while, struggling against his impulses, telling himself that he really was happy. He would lose, because nothing could reverse entropy, but at the same time, Ron didn't want his friend to suffer.

"All right," Harry said, though he still looked a little puzzled, and then he and Malfoy left the Leaky Cauldron.

Ron picked a weathered spot on the wall and toasted it, because it seemed like the right thing to do, to make a toast of some kind to entropy.

*

“And then she said—” Ginny bubbled, waving her arms. She was engaged in telling some story of Luna Lovegood, the way she often was.

Ron rolled his eyes indulgently. Ginny and Luna had shared a flat since the war. They both worked at the Quibbler and spent most of their free time together. Ron was willing to wait until his sister got a boyfriend, since there was no chance that she could pick someone as unsuitable as Malfoy (with Malfoy being already taken, and all), but he did wonder sometimes why she’d waited so long.

He looked around the Burrow, content. Bill and Fleur had been able to come again this weekend, and now Molly was fussing over them and over Victoire, who was almost five. George had dropped by and was chuckling in a corner with Dad over something.

Best of all, Harry had spent the entire day with him and Hermione, hunting down little shops in the alleys off Diagon and going to a Muggle cinema, and now he was smiling down at Dominique, who was in his lap. He hadn’t shown any sign that he missed the blond git at all.

That’s another sign, Ron thought. Another sign of the entropy, I mean. If he’s happy with us, if he doesn’t want Malfoy, sooner or later he’ll have to start thinking about why that is. And then he’ll come back to us, his best friends.

Harry raised his head, as if he could feel Ron’s eyes, and smiled at him across the room. Ron waved back, not trying to get through the cluster of bodies that surrounded his friend. It would only annoy people right now.

I’ll be supportive when the relationship falls apart, Ron told himself. I’ll tell him all sorts of things about how Malfoy wasn’t good enough for him anyway. I’ll even offer to help him find another boyfriend.

Then Ron frowned thoughtfully. Should he do that? After all, if entropy was at work, then that relationship with only fall apart, and Harry would only be left more miserable, because it would make him more unhappy to lose a decent bloke than a prat like Malfoy.

Once you know about entropy, the world's harder, Ron thought, and wandered outside the Burrow to stare at the stars and ponder eternity and think about whether maybe it was better for Ginny to have a stable friendship with Luna after all than a boyfriend who would only break her heart.

*

Harry ducked through the door of Ron and Hermione's house. Ron looked up, and then froze, heart banging, when he saw the dark shape on Harry's cheek.

"What is it, mate?" he whispered. He was grateful for the whisper. Harry would have acted all defensive if he'd shouted, but, as it was, he just gave Ron a sheepish look and sat down in a chair next to his.

"A fight with Draco." Harry picked up the mug of Firewhisky that Ron had automatically handed him and swallowed several gulps of it before he talked again. "It's nothing."

"If he punched you, it's not nothing," Ron started, and then stopped.

He knew that sparkle in Harry's eye, the way he turned his chair around as if he was just waiting for Ron to oppose him.

He was hoping for a row. Anything that would take his mind off the fight with Malfoy and convince him that it wasn't such a big deal after all. Then he could decide that it was right to go back to the abusive bastard (how long had he been abusing Harry? Why hadn't Harry ever said anything?) and pretend nothing was wrong.

Ron calmed his temper down by drowning it, and reminded himself forcefully that entropy didn't need any help. It was a natural process. But since fighting against it was futile too, because it would inevitably happen, Ron shouldn't give Harry what he wanted by making his crumbling relationship with Malfoy seem desirable, either.

Slightly breathless from the breadth of that thought, Ron held a hand up and shook his head. "It's nothing, mate, if you say it is," he agreed. "Did you take a pain potion or anything?"

"No," Harry muttered, his eyes fixed on Ron's face as if he thought he had entered a different universe. "It didn't hurt enough to."

Ron shrugged, and then started talking about whether the new Ministerial candidate had any chance in the next election. Meanwhile, Harry sipped his Firewhisky and continued to look stunned.

And then thoughtful.

That's right, mate, Ron thought hopefully. Brood over it. Magnify it in your mind, and then, even if it really was "nothing," it will seem much bigger, and Malfoy's faults that much more unforgivable.

By the end of the evening, Harry had acquired a firm jaw and some of the courage that he often found in Firewhisky, and he stepped out of the house with a promise to have a "talk" with Malfoy. Ron watched him go with a small smile.

I'm going to have my best friend back again. It's really going to happen.

*

"Weasley."

Ron blinked and turned around. He hadn't expected to hear that voice, choked with hate, behind him while he was walking through the middle of Diagon Alley. He firmed up his grip on Hermione's birthday gift, a book on Potions signed by the Potions master who'd written it, in case Malfoy tried to destroy it.

Malfoy stalked towards him and halted less than an inch away, which gave Ron a disturbing look he had never wanted at the flecks of color around the pupil of his eyes. He was snorting like a maddened bull. Ron sheltered the book behind his left arm and got ready to draw his wand.

"I want to know what the fuck you've done to my boyfriend," Malfoy said. "He came home the other night from your house and scolded me for hitting him in a fight where he gave as good as he got." Despite his saying that, Ron noted, he didn't have any bruises on his face. "What are you doing? Encouraging him to break up with me?"

"How could I do that?" Ron said, and complimented himself, because he sounded surprised instead of gleeful. "Every time I tried to warn him against you, it only sent him fleeing back into your loving arms. You know that."

Malfoy chewed on his lip and glared at him a lot, which Ron thought made his life worthwhile for the afternoon. Then he said, "You know nothing about what's going on with Harry and me. We're making some big decisions. The fight was about one of those decisions, not because I just wanted to beat him up."

"I'm certainly glad you're not abusing him," Ron chirped, and felt fully rewarded by some of the glances that came their way. "But you're right, I know nothing about the fight or what you're deciding right now. Harry didn't say."

That got him a glance from head to foot, with the usual wince at his hair. Ron smirked at him. Do whatever you think you need to. It still won't keep Harry with you now that the entropy's begun.

"There's nothing that you can do or say to take Harry away from me," Malfoy said, but he sounded wobbly.

“Then why come up and ask me about it?” Ron said, and did a perfect little eyebrow lift of the kind that Hermione had been trying to teach him for years.

Malfoy whirled around and stalked off. Ron did a private celebration dance in his head, and then Apparated home so that he could do an actual dance in private.

*

“Where’s Hermione?” Harry asked, sitting down at the table and glancing around.

“That’s a puzzler, I have to admit,” Ron said, bringing over the plate of spaghetti that he’d found made and ready on the counter, under a warming spell. “She’s been spending a lot of her evenings out of the house. I think she’s trying to prove that this man who claims he was attacked by house-elves doesn’t have a case.”

“Of course he doesn’t have a case,” Harry said, and attacked the food in front of him so hungrily that Ron had to duck the flying fragments. “If he did, then others would also claim they’d been attacked by house-elves. In fact, someone would have done it before now. But the elves who want freedom also want to work, they just want to be paid. So…”

And on and on Harry went about house-elves, normally a subject that he never paid attention to, while Ron stared at him in amazement and pity.

He’s so desperate to take his mind off Malfoy that he chose house-elves. That’s horrible or a miracle, I’m not sure which. Can you have horrible miracles?

“And that’s why the whole thing is a sack of nonsense,” Harry said, finishing his tirade at the same moment he finished his meal. He sucked up one last noodle and leaned back with a satisfied nod. Ron eyed him, more than a little surprised that he’d escaped from any possible fleck of spaghetti sauce. Harry abruptly let his face fall and gave Ron a searching glance. “Ron, can I talk to you about something

important?”

“Of course,” Ron said, casually, while his excitement did a jig off the inside of his head. Yes! The entropy worked! He’s going to tell me that he and Malfoy are ready to break up. Thank you, entropy!

It was too bad that Ron had no idea how to actually thank entropy. He’d read the physics book more than once, but it didn’t say anything about entropy liking biscuits, the way that some of the books about magical creatures did.

“Draco asked me a question the other day,” Harry said in a low voice, running his fingers along the edge of his plate. Then he had to pause to spell the spaghetti sauce off them. Ron waited patiently, and Harry went on, his voice even softer. “I wasn’t ready for it. I yelled at him. That was when we got into the fight.”

Ron frowned. So far, this didn’t sound promising for entropy to do its work. “Yeah? And?”

“He asked me the question again,” Harry said, and raised his eyes to Ron’s face. Ron stared. He looked happy, or sort of. He almost looked as though he wished he could be happy, but wouldn’t dare. Or maybe as if he were about to get indigestion. “I walked out the door without answering, because I was already late for dinner with you. But I know that he’ll ask me at least once more. I want to know what you think I should reply.”

“How can I say that without knowing what the question is?” Ron asked, and then congratulated himself for being sensible.

“In this case, you’ll have to.” Harry was smiling at him, but his fingers had gone back to their restless rubbing. “You can know it’s important to Draco, and to me. Important enough to start a fight over. Important enough that I risked walking away tonight because I didn’t want to give the wrong answer, or the right one at the wrong moment.”

Ron frowned at him. “I thought you came without answering because you were already late for dinner

with me. You said."

Harry sighed. He muttered something that sounded like, "I don't know how Hermione puts up with you," but it couldn't be, because Harry was his friend and wouldn't talk that way. Then he said, "This is really—this is life-changing. What do you think I should do?"

Ron thought hard. He wished he could say the thing that would most increase the entropy in Harry and Malfoy's relationship, but there was no way he could do that for sure without knowing the question. And Harry had the look on his face right now that Ron privately called his "mule" look. If Ron pressed further, then he would end up with Harry walking out the door for a different reason than the one Malfoy had had.

So it had to be something that would serve his goals and at the same time not make Harry think that he was trying to force him away from Malfoy. Something wise and mysterious should just about do the trick, Ron decided.

"I think you should do whatever soothes your heart the most," Ron said. "And soothes your soul at the same time. And makes sense to your mind. If this is life-changing, then you shouldn't leave any part of yourself out of the change, you know?"

Harry sat up and looked at him with sharp respect. "That sounds real, Ron. Did you get that out of a book?"

Ron scowled. For someone who was supposed to be his best friend, Harry thought far too little of Ron's mental abilities. "I'll forget you said that," he said.

"So you didn't, then?" Harry continued, entirely unabashed.

"No," Ron said. "I made it up just now, because it sounded like the right thing to say."

Harry gave him a small, sweet smile, and nodded. “I think I understand you,” he said. “And I’m grateful, Ron. I have to make the decision that will make me happy, whether or not it makes Draco happy.”

Ron couldn’t help smiling back. That sounded promising. Before, Harry had always spoken as though his happiness and Malfoy’s happiness were the same thing. But now, they were two separate things. Entropy had already broken them apart that far.

Thank you, entropy, Ron thought. Maybe I’ll smash a wineglass in your honor.

“I came here wanting help, and I got it,” Harry said happily, standing up. “Thanks again, Ron.” He shook his hand and ran out the door, his smile so bright that you could have lit some of the twins’ fireworks from it.

A job well done, Ron decided, and then looked around the room.

Hermione came home late at night, and the first thing she wanted to know was why one of her best wineglasses lay in sparkling shards on the floor.

*

Malfoy was leaning against the wall outside their door when Ron got home that night. Ron rolled his eyes, but walked forwards fearlessly. He reckoned he knew what Malfoy had come about, and he could say honestly that he didn’t know what their fight was about and had just given the best advice he could.

“Harry was beaming when he came back from dinner last night,” Malfoy said, “but he wouldn’t tell me what about.”

Ron unlocked the front door and then stuck out his foot so that Malfoy tripped over it when he tried to follow Ron into the house. When he turned around, though, he realized the bastard was still there. “What do you want?” he demanded, baffled. Malfoy never spent more time than he had to in Ron’s

company, and especially not after an insult like the tripping.

“I want to know what you told him,” Malfoy said, and folded his arms. Maybe that was supposed to impress Ron.

“What am I, your spy on Harry now?” Ron sneered, while inwardly he rejoiced. Harry didn’t tell him. He’s thinking about breaking up with him, I know he is!

“You’re the one who has tried to break my relationship with Harry, and never wished me good.” Malfoy stepped threateningly towards him, which Ron thought was stupid, with all the wards he could raise around the house just by closing the door. “So you’ll tell me what you’re doing now.”

“And when have I told you my plans for breaking you and Harry up?” Ron laughed in his face. “I won’t tell you this one, either—if there even is a plan, which there isn’t, but if there was, you couldn’t do anything about it, because I’m just encouraging Harry to follow his natural inclinations.”

Malfoy studied him instead of storming off in the temper tantrum that Ron had meant to provoke in him. “What inclinations?” he asked at last. “Are you still thinking that he’ll be happy with a woman?”

Ron shook his head. “I want him to be happy. I told him so.”

Malfoy chuckled. “He didn’t tell you what the question I asked him was, did he?”

Ron frowned. What do I do that’s so obvious and easy to read? We all know that Malfoy’s not a great judge of character. “That’s for me to know and you to find out,” he said, but Malfoy was already walking away with a smile on his face.

Ron shut the door. Work as fast as you can, entropy. Or that git will spoil it all.

He spent the evening feverishly rereading Hermione's Muggle science book, looking for indications that entropy was too powerful a natural process to be stopped by the likes of one blond ferret. He failed to convince himself.

*

Someone knocked on their door at the unholy hour of six in the morning. Ron groaned pitifully, and burrowed into the blankets. It was Hermione's job to answer the door if someone knocked before seven.

But she didn't get up, and in fact kicked him so hard when he whined that Ron's foot slid out of its comfortable position and into a horrible patch of cold air. After that, Ron knew, entropy would win, so he stood up and shambled to the door, yawning and trying to cover his nakedness up with a tattered robe that Hermione kept trying to throw away and Ron kept rescuing.

He opened the door—

And Harry leaped at him and wrapped his arms around him, laughing and whooping.

"I've found what will make me happy!" he bellowed, right in Ron's ear.

Ron blinked. "I'm flattered, mate, but I'm married," was all he could think of to say.

Harry laughed, and jumped back, and then began to dance in place, his red robes whipping around him like flames. He looked like he'd been awake all night, and also like he was more alert than Ron. "Not that!" he said. "You told me to listen to what I really wanted, and I did, and I've answered Draco's question, and it's official!" He paused only once to grin at Ron before he started dancing again, as if he couldn't do both at the same time.

"What's official?" Ron scratched behind his ear, and yawned. Yes, entropy was in the room, because both

his mood and his ability to go back to bed were steadily deteriorating.

Harry halted again and grinned at him. “Draco and I are getting married!”

Harry, and Hermione, whom he called on to help, could understand why Ron fainted, but not why he woke up screaming curses at entropy and finally collapsing in tears, with a wail that it had promised to help him more than this.

The End.

Title: Ron Weasley and the Wedding That Is Not Going to Happen

Disclaimer: J. K. Rowling and associates own these characters. I am writing this story for fun and not profit.

Pairings: Harry/Draco, Ron/Hermione, Ginny/Luna

Rating: R

Wordcount: 6800

Warnings: Crackfic. Sex, profanity.

Summary: Ron may accidentally have caused Malfoy to propose to Harry, but he knows he has to stop the wedding. After all, Malfoy is a murderous git who will kill Harry in his sleep. If Harry would only see that.

Author’s Notes: This is the fourth in my “Hapless Ron” series, and the sequel to “Ron Weasley and the Entropy of the Situation,” though I think this stands alone well enough that you don’t need to read the others.

Ron Weasley and the Wedding That Is Not Going to Happen

Ron sat on the table with his arms folded, scowling into space. The longer he waited there, the more determined he became, and the half-empty glass of Firewhisky on the table had nothing to do with it.

Ron made sure to think that thought with extra force, because he knew Hermione would say the Firewhisky had a lot to do with it.

He had got Harry into this situation. If he had been a little wiser, a little smarter, then Malfoy wouldn't have had the chance to propose to Harry in the first place. Harry had been on the verge of breaking up with the bastard.

Ron picked up his glass and took a drink.

But the proposal had happened, and the wedding was happening at the end of the month. Apparently Malfoy didn't want to wait.

Probably afraid that Harry will come to his senses and leave him, Ron thought, though why Malfoy should be afraid of that when Harry had dated him for five years without seeing the light, Ron didn't know.

He took another drink.

But part of the blame had to be his, Ron would admit. Which meant that he had to do whatever he could to stop the wedding and give Harry the chance to live a long and fulfilling life.

He took another drink.

And that was when the plan popped into his head, so perfect and satisfying that Ron almost dropped his glass. He sat up straight and smiled at the wall. If Harry didn't abandon Malfoy after this, he wasn't human.

When he went to bed, Hermione pulled a pillow over her head and complained about his cheerful whistling. Ron thought about telling her that she hadn't done anything as wonderful for Harry lately, but

then didn’t. She never had believed him that Malfoy was bad news.

But he was, and in the morning, Ron would rewrite that news.

*

Ron was squinting against the brightness of the sun and the pain of a hangover the next morning, but he still sat up when Harry picked up the brilliantly wrapped package from the pile of presents and shook it next to his ear.

“I wonder what this is?” Harry asked in a teasing drawl, smiling at Malfoy, who sprawled on the couch next to him. They were holding the celebration, a combination of an early birthday for Harry and an excuse for more wedding presents, in the drawing room of Harry and Malfoy’s home.

They’ve shared a house, Ron thought. I put up with that. Why did the git have to make it more formal?

He told himself to stop complaining. Harry was about to leave Malfoy forever, once he saw what was inside the neatly labeled package, so Ron didn’t have to ask questions like that anymore.

Malfoy tossed a lazy smile in Harry’s direction, and then parted his lips and waggled his tongue in a suggestive manner. Hermione, sitting next to Ron, laughed. Several Slytherins on the other side of the room, all of whom were drunk, said, “Oooooh!” simultaneously. Ron sneered. What sort of childish idiots did that?

But he said “Oooooh!” himself, because it would look suspicious if he didn’t, and he didn’t want Harry getting angry at him. He would need the comfort of his best friend after he found out what a prat Malfoy was.

Harry tore into the package without looking away from Malfoy. He wore a smile of goofy adoration. Ron tightened his fingers on the couch. He had got into the package earlier, of course, thrown away the large

pink thing inside—it looked as though Malfoy had thought of a novel way of poisoning Harry—and filled it with his own “special” present, and it had cost him a lot of time and trouble.

But that didn’t mean he wanted Harry leaving his fingers too close to the—

“What?” Harry asked, staring blankly at the box in his lap.

Ron relaxed. The tarantula had stayed inside the cage where he’d placed it, madly waving its horrible legs and clenching its terrible fangs down. He’d nearly fainted when he bought it, never mind when he had to grab it and stuff it in, but he’d accomplished what he meant to accomplish. Harry couldn’t doubt Malfoy’s bad intentions when Malfoy had given him (or so he would think Malfoy had given him) the “gift” of a poisonous spider.

Harry turned the cage over. Malfoy’s mouth gaped, but he shut it quickly. Ron clenched his right hand into a secret fist of triumph. It was happening the way he’d thought it would. Malfoy was so proud he would pretend that he’d meant to give this to Harry all along, and so he would take the blame.

Harry looked up at Malfoy with wide eyes. “How did you know?” he whispered.

Malfoy gave a little shrug and a coy smile. Ron leaned forwards. This was the point where Harry would explode at Malfoy.

“How did you know I wanted a tarantula?” Harry said, and then launched himself at Malfoy, kissing him squarely on the mouth.

Ron stared in disgust, while Hermione cooed, along with someone Ron thought was Pansy bloody Parkinson, who should have been on his side, about how cute it all was. Harry was babbling about how they would name the tarantula Draco, Jr., and sleep with it all the time. Ron stared at the tarantula in its cage and shook his head.

How in the world could someone want a spider?

He looked up and saw Malfoy's eyes fastened on him, lazy and heavy-lidded though they were, and tight though his arms were around Harry. He suspected Ron of having substituted the tarantula for his pink thing, Ron thought.

Sweat broke out under his arms, but he gave Malfoy a calm, bland look and turned away.

Two things were clear: He would have to take stronger measures, and Harry was stranger than he'd ever dreamed.

*

"I know what you're doing, Weasley."

Ron was able to turn around with a smile. Malfoy hadn't opened the door a minute earlier, which meant he had missed the preparations Ron was making. And what right did he think he had to open any door in his and Harry's house, anyway, when there were guests over? Someone could be naked in here.

Then again, the pervert would probably like that, Ron thought, remembering the pink thing he had tossed away from Malfoy's package and shuddering.

"What do you mean?" Ron gave Malfoy the very best innocent look he could manage. It never worked on Hermione, but Hermione was smart enough not to be evil. "I don't know what you mean."

"I mean that you substituted that tarantula for my gift." Malfoy folded his arms and leaned against the door. "I'm not going to tell Harry, because I don't want to cause him any distress by telling him his best friend is an idiot." He went on so fast and smoothly that Ron didn't have time to respond to the insult. "But I'll tell you something, instead."

Ron sighed. “For the last time, Malfoy, I’m not interested in the details of how you plan to poison Harry. I’ll find out and stop you anyway.” He was proud of himself for coming up with such a clever retort. Now Malfoy, who couldn’t stand to be ignored, would confess the secret. Hermione had told him that was called reverse psychology.

“I’m not poisoning Harry,” Malfoy said. Ron frowned. His technique had failed, and he didn’t know why. Unless maybe Hermione meant reverse psychology in the sense of kicking his arse. “But we’re going to take lots of potions on the wedding night.”

“Oh, that’s when you plan to poison him,” Ron said, already making up a sufficient warning letter to Harry in his head.

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Do you know what kind of potions a male couple could take on their wedding night?” he asked. “Or has your education been lacking in that department?”

“Your education doesn’t even have a department,” said Ron, and again Malfoy only rolled his eyes. Ron wondered why none of his insults, which he knew were clever, were having an effect. Maybe Malfoy was bleeding on the inside and just didn’t want to show it. That was probably right. Ron knew pure-bloods like Malfoy’s family got their house-elves to have emotions for them.

“We’re drinking the potions because we want to have children,” Malfoy said. “With their magic, we can.”

Ron froze, staring at him. Then he said the first thing that came to mind. “Harry wouldn’t want to be pregnant.”

“Oh, I don’t mind carrying the children, if it comes to that.” Malfoy examined his fingernails. “But if you hurt me, you’re not only hurting someone Harry cares about, you’re also hurting his future children. I thought you might like to know.”

He slipped out of the room, leaving Ron to stare in horror at the wall and think about a pregnant Malfoy.

And then he made the mistake of thinking about how Malfoy would get pregnant.

Luckily, there was a basin in the corner of the room.

*

Ron sighed in relief as a large black owl came winging through the window and alighted on the table in front of Harry. They were having a dinner that was supposed to be practice for the wedding or something, though Ron didn't see how you could practice for that. They would still have to eat food on the wedding night all the same.

But because of what he knew, he could see this as a good joke. After all, none of the people around him realized this practice would have to substitute for the real thing, because when Harry saw what the black owl carried, the wedding would be off.

Harry, who had a plate of tiny sandwiches in front of him that Malfoy had been feeding him one by one, didn't look pleased when the owl's arrival scattered them, but Ron dismissed that. He would look pleased later, when he recognized his near escape and thanked Ron for arranging it.

For the moment, it was enough that he had opened the letter and stared into it. Ron held his breath.

Then Harry snorted and took the photograph out, holding it up so that other people could look at it. "This is a bad joke," he said. "And not even done with the right kind of spells. You'd think someone who wanted to cast doubt on Draco would do a better job, don't you?"

Ron blinked. What was going on? He had hired a wizard he met in a pub to create the photograph for him by altering a picture of Malfoy he'd found in a newspaper. And the pub wasn't even the Leaky Cauldron or the Hog's Head, but some nameless little place that Ron had stumbled into on a night when

he'd already been drinking for hours. That ought to make the wizard more trustworthy, if anything.

When the picture was passed around, Ron still didn't see what the problem was. Malfoy now had a sneaky, evil grin on his face—wait, no, that was probably part of the original photo—and a folded paper in his hands. You couldn't see the whole paper, but at the top, in clear black letters, was printed SECRET CONTRACT WITH VOLDEMORT. His left sleeve was folded back to show his Dark Mark. And there was a photograph of Harry on the wall behind him, with multiple knives through it.

Maybe the paper, the Dark Mark, and the photo of Harry were a bit blurred compared to the rest of the photograph, but it wasn't like anyone could really tell the difference. Ron shook his head and handed the picture to Hermione, hoping she would support him. "It looks real to me," he said.

Hermione took one look at it and laughed. "No, Harry, you're right," she said. "They've used elementary Dimming Charms to darken the background so that we can't recognize the original as easily, and then added the paper, your picture, and even that Dark Mark with Doodling Charms. It's the equivalent of scratching on a great piece of art with a crayon."

She passed the picture on, and everyone else chuckled and laughed at it, as though they knew what Dimming Charms and Doodling Charms were. Ron folded his arms and sulked.

Harry shook his head and went back to letting Malfoy feed him, facing him with a dreamy expression and parted lips. Malfoy picked up a tiny sandwich between delicate fingers and handed it to him with an adoring expression.

But before he did, he looked at Ron. He smirked. He moved his free hand in a quick, curving gesture around his belly, as though tracing a rounded outline.

Hermione was not understanding at having to clean vomit off her dress, even though, the way Ron saw it, he was practicing for the wedding. Just in a different way.

*

Ron shook his head. He was more than nauseated now. Malfoy had sent him a taunting letter indicating that he was going to have Harry's children because they would help him inherit all of Harry's money. That was a horrible idea, and so Ron was going to the one person he knew was better-suited to Harry than Malfoy was.

Well, really, he knew lots of people who were better-suited to Harry than Malfoy. There were centaurs who would make Harry better spouses. But this was the only person who had a chance of turning Harry away from the stupid wedding idea.

He knocked, and then knocked again when there was no response. He knew he had the right house. Ginny had moved here recently, but not yesterday. He finally used the key she'd given him for emergencies and went in.

The entrance hall was empty, and the spare bedroom, and the drawing room. Ron opened the door of the kitchen, though he wondered why she would be there. Ginny hated cooking, and Luna, her housemate, wasn't much better.

There was a flurry of shrieks when he stepped in, and Ron blinked. He caught a brief, confused flash of Ginny tugging her skirt down. She was lying on the kitchen table, and her skirt had been pulled up around her hips. Luna was standing up from between her legs, wiping at something on her face. Ron caught a glimpse of glistening wetness before her fingers eradicated it.

"Ron," Ginny said, breathless. "When will you learn to knock?" She sat up fully now and smoothed her long hair back. Ron stared at her. She was panting as if she'd run a mile, but he didn't understand what was scary or exciting about letting Luna clean something up from her lap where it had spilled. Unless Luna had been cleaning up the remains of a deadly pastry spell or something.

"I did knock," Ron said. "You just didn't hear me." He paused, then asked, because he had to know, "What are you doing?"

"Ah," said Ginny, and flushed.

“Oh, we can tell him,” Luna said, in her gentle, dreamy voice. “We’re together, Ron. You know that.”

Ron waited, and then waited some more, because it seemed to him there should be more to it than that. “Yes?” he asked. “I know that you and Ginny had always been friends and housemates since Hogwarts.”

Luna gave Ginny a tender glance, though Ron couldn’t tell why. He did wonder sometimes whether Ginny ought to move away from Luna, who was probably inhibiting her ability to meet men, but she seemed perfectly content, and Ron had a problem with weddings in general right now, so he hadn’t suggested it.

“Oh, all right,” Ginny said. She sighed. “I cast a spell that was meant to trim all the hair off my legs. But it liquefied the hair instead. Luna was just cleaning it for me.”

Ron nodded. He should have figured that out. And it was useless to ask why Luna had decided to lick up the hair instead of just spelling it away or having Ginny do it. This was Luna, after all, the woman who thought that Wrackspurts were more than just figments of her imagination. “I have a favor to ask.”

Ginny muttered something that sounded like, “Of course, why else do you ever come here?” But Ron could ignore that, tolerantly. After all, this time he was going to do her a service. When she got together with Harry, she would see that she would never want anyone else, and she could make Harry never want anyone else. And she could give him children if Harry really wanted to have them. So it was a winning situation all around.

“Ask away,” she said instead. Her hair was lying flat by now, and she folded her arms and gave him her full attention. Luna moved behind her and leaned her head on Ginny’s shoulder. Ron rolled his eyes. Luna had some very strange ideas. It was probably a good thing that Ginny was willing to live with her; otherwise, no one would, and then Luna would probably die in a freak magical accident involving a toilet and Snorkack kittens.

“I want you to go to Harry and woo him so he doesn’t marry Malfoy,” Ron said.

It was simple enough, he thought later, both the words and the concept. There was no reason for Ginny to stare at him like he'd grown a second head.

Luna, on the other hand, looked excited. She clapped her hands. "A lesbian seducing a gay man!" she exclaimed. "It would be like seeing a metaphysical contradiction enacted in front of us, and my father says that metaphysical contradictions—"

"What lesbian?" Ron asked, so bewildered that he felt as if he were wandering in a maze. "I don't see one." Is Luna seeing invisible lesbians along with all the other weird creatures?

For some reason, Ginny buried her head in her arms. Ron reckoned she was thinking about how much she wanted Harry and all the barriers in the way, so he hastened to reassure her. "It'll be really simple, when you get down to it. Harry's never dated a woman, so he can't know how good it feels to be with one. And Malfoy wants to kill him. Someone who doesn't want to kill Harry would be a great advantage! He has to see that, if he just spends enough time with normal people. Malfoy has warped his way of thinking, until he thinks the oddest things."

"Like some other people I know," Ginny whispered, but shook her head when Ron asked what she meant. "I refuse, Ron."

"What?" Ron stared at her. "But you're Harry's last hope!" And my last hope if I'm going to make up for my mistake in getting Malfoy to propose to him in the first place, he thought but didn't say. People just needed to know that he was atoning, not necessarily for which crime.

"Harry is perfectly happy on his own," Ginny said, in a loud, slow voice Ron resented. It sounded like she was explaining things to someone particularly stupid. "Malfoy doesn't want to kill him."

"He does!" Ron insisted. "He has to."

"Why?" Ginny asked, propping her chin on her hands and staring at him with what looked like honest interest, which meant Ron had to explain, even though it was obvious.

“Because he’s evil,” Ron said. “And that’s what evil people do. And he’s too much of a coward to kill Harry in direct combat.”

Luna started to say something about Weirgamons, but Ginny interrupted. “He’s happy, Ron, so happy that he starts smiling if someone else mentions Malfoy. Leave him alone. That’s the last time I’m going to say it.”

“Then you really won’t help?” Ron whispered, appalled.

“There’s nothing to help. Leave him alone.” Ginny turned her back and waved her hand in the way that she did when she wanted Ron out of her house. She did that all the time, and the only time it had been justified—a little bit justified—was that time Ron flooded her house with elephant snot.

Ron left, head hanging as he considered what he should do next, while a part of his brain still wondered about Luna and the invisible lesbians.

*

“And I know that you’ll join me in drinking a toast to Harry and Draco!”

Ron rolled his eyes and tugged at his robe collar. He was at yet another party before the wedding, this time a party thrown by Malfoy’s friends. Luckily, it was at least in Harry and Malfoy’s house, and that meant Ron’s plan could work.

Harry rose to his feet, beaming, and tapped his full glass of champagne—and when had he started drinking that? It was yet another sign of how Malfoy had corrupted him—against Blaise Zabini’s. Zabini sat down, beaming back in some kind of complicated happiness code, and Harry reached out to draw Malfoy to his feet.

Harry started saying something soppy about eternal love and the happiness that he and “Draco” were going to have as soon as possible. Ron knew he must be gagging internally every time he said the name, and sent waves of silent support to his best friend. He would free him from having to talk about “Draco” soon enough.

At the same moment, a large cake was wheeled into the room from the kitchen. Three house-elves pushed it. The cake was an enormous thing with blue icing in the shape of Hogwarts, and everyone whistled and clapped when they saw it.

Well, everyone except Harry, who was beaming again, or pretending to—Ron knew a cry for help when he saw it—and Malfoy, who looked bored. Ron hugged himself with vicious glee and predicted that the bored expression would change in a second.

It had taken all afternoon to persuade the house-elves that they had to leave the kitchen for a few minutes because Harry had requested special canapés, but it had been worth it.

The cake was a glamour. The moment Harry reached down towards it with a knife, the glamour split apart in sparks, which made half the room scream in shock. Not Harry, though, and Ron took that as an even better sign than the beaming. Harry did want to be rescued. He was going to do the heroic thing and sacrifice himself to please Malfoy, because Malfoy had asked, but he would snatch any offered hand. It was up to Ron, as the only one who understood what he was facing and was willing to do something about it, to toss him that hand.

Where the cake had been, in the middle of the wheeled platform, stood a young blonde witch with tearful eyes. She had flowing but threadbare blue robes and the marks of hunger on her face.

She was also, very obviously, pregnant.

“How could you, Harry!” she wailed, and fell to her knees, sobbing noisily. “I can’t believe you would—I can’t believe that you—”

And then there was no sound but her sobs and the fleshy wringing of her hands. Ron hid his smirk behind his hand and pretend to act as surprised and concerned as anyone else. The actress he had hired from Master Hamato's Circus of Traveling Wonders was every bit as good as he'd been promised.

He knew Harry would be embarrassed for a while, not least about being thrown out by Malfoy, who would be convinced that the child was Harry's. But he would be so much happier in the end. There was just no comparison. And maybe Ron could convince him to get together with Ginny for at least an evening, since he was such a mastermind.

Sure enough, Malfoy had a face like thunder. He was drawing his wand. Ron braced himself to jump to his best friend's defense, but then hesitated. It would be better if Malfoy publically attacked Harry, so everyone could see, once and for all, what kind of murderer he really was.

Instead, though, Malfoy pointed his wand at the actress and said flatly, "Finite Incantatem."

Ron gaped. It wasn't fair! He wasn't supposed to do that!

The glamour around the actress disappeared, and her tears and her pregnant belly disappeared with it. She was still blonde, but younger than she had looked, flat-bellied, and dressed in fine robes. She stopped sobbing at once and touched her stomach, face bewildered.

"This is yet another attempt," Malfoy said, in a voice full of suppressed rage, "in a very, very long line of them, to blackmail my fiancé and pretend that he's sired children which aren't his, or slept with people whose entire existence he's unaware of. I'm tired of it. And now that I'm going to be his husband, I'm granted certain rights under the law." He bared his teeth at the girl. "Do you know what those are?"

The girl shook her head, eyes wide, while Ron frantically started rifling through his memories. What were these rights? Had he ever heard of them? Could Malfoy be lying?

Malfoy leaned forwards until he was almost in the actress's face. "The right to defend him," he said. "The

right to defend him preemptively, even, if I think that he might be in legitimate danger. The right to care for his body and the children of his body. Those are all enshrined in wizarding law. And while I can't kill someone else in his defense, I can and will place limbs in inappropriate places, or close orifices permanently, or make sure that your hair gets similarly misplaced." He paused. "Do you understand me?"

The girl seemed to, from the way she scrambled off the platform and raced out of the room. The one good part of that, Ron thought, mind still numb, was that no one could question her and find out that Ron had hired her.

Malfoy stood back up, arm around Harry's shoulders, and scanned the room with a vigilant gaze. When he looked at Ron, he gave a crooked, vicious smile, and flipped one finger at him in a beckoning gesture.

Ron recoiled. I'm faithful to Hermione! he mouthed, hoping the prat was practiced at lip-reading.

Malfoy looked revolted. "We need to talk," he mouthed back.

Oh. He had figured out Ron was behind the actress's appearance.

Ron suspected he should still have been a little worried, but really, compared to the thought of sleeping with Malfoy, a private talk was easy. At least the private talk wouldn't cause Ron's penis to try and disappear inside his body.

Ron paused.

Maybe. It would depend on how close Malfoy was standing.

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“You don’t realize a single thing about him anymore, and I for one am getting tired of it.”

Ron was indignant. How dare Malfoy say that sort of thing to him, even if it was in a low voice and in a back room of Harry and Malfoy’s house where they stored disused heirlooms and clothes? He folded his arms. “I’ve been his best friend for a lot longer than you’ve been his lover,” he retorted.

“Yes,” Malfoy said, his voice becoming a drawl. Ron was glad of that, because it was a telltale sign that nothing Malfoy said in it was true. “And that makes you proficient in being a source of misery to him.”

Ron shook his head. “You’re his misery,” he said. “You alienate him from all his friends. You try to poison him. You’re talking about having his children just to make sure that you get your hands on the Potter fortune. You can’t be content with the Malfoy fortune, can you?”

Malfoy covered his eyes with one hand. That’s right, Ron thought. It’s hard for him to look at the truth, isn’t it?

“I never tried to do any of those things,” Malfoy said.

“You said—” Ron began.

“The bit about the children was just to fuck with you.” Malfoy dropped his hand and leaned closer. Ron felt a squirming sensation below his belt as his penis tried to retreat inside his body, just as he’d predicted. “I love Harry. I would never do anything to hurt him intentionally, while you’re trying to prevent him from marrying someone who will make him happy.”

“I’m not,” Ron said. “I’m trying to keep him from the greatest mistake of his life.”

“Did you see his face when you brought that woman in?” Malfoy countered. “He was upset, embarrassed. He was miserable. He’s had enough of his life being invaded by people he doesn’t know who consider him their public property. You did something that you know he hates, just because you

think that I'm going to hurt him—despite more than five years of being together."

Ron shivered. He hated the thought of how long Harry and Malfoy had been together, because he hated the thought of how much sex they might have had during that time.

"I wasn't looking at him," he said. "I was looking at you."

Malfoy's face hardened. "I've been keeping the knowledge of your exploits from him so far," he said, "because I know it would hurt him to think one of his best friends was capable of this nonsense. But I'm getting to the point that I'm simply going to tell him, and let the consequences fall where they will. You're pushing him to the point where he's going to have to make the choice between us, and I know he's not going to forsake me."

Ron paused. Was there the faintest chance that Malfoy was telling the truth, and that Harry would be happier married to him than apart from him?

But Ron caught sight of the way Malfoy's hands twisted, and knew that his fingers were crossed behind his back.

Besides. This was Malfoy, who lied like he breathed.

But he had Ron at a disadvantage right now. Harry would be upset if Malfoy told him about Ron's attempts to protect him, and Malfoy would come out smelling like roses. (Though Ron, who hated the smell of roses, had never been convinced that was a good thing to smell like, it was better than stinking like dung, as Malfoy would try to make him stink like to Harry).

So Ron would back down and find another place, a better place, to attack.

He had to be careful, though. If Malfoy thought he was unwatched, he would make an attack on Harry that succeeded, because there was no one else who was so cautious around him as Ron was. Knowing

him, it would probably be poison in the wedding cake.

And then Ron had an idea. A brilliant idea. An idea that would never occur to Malfoy, because he wasn't smart like that.

"Fine," he muttered, as if beaten, and looked away resentfully. "You win this time, Malfoy."

When Malfoy had strutted out, with some more words about happiness and Harry that Ron didn't listen to—why should he listen to someone who thought Harry was happy being fucked by a man?—Ron left. He needed to go and buy the vital ingredients before Hermione started looking for him.

Hermione would never understand. Ron, who was proud of his wife's brilliance, had nevertheless resigned himself to the gaps there were in it.

*

"Ron?" Harry eyed Ron and then the cake in his hands as if he thought his best friend had gone crazy. That hurt Ron's feelings. Just because he'd never baked a cake for Harry before and had only baked this one to stop his wedding didn't mean that his cakes were horrible. "Are you all right?"

"Never better," Ron said briskly, because it was the kind of thing Hermione would say, and pushed into the house. "Is Malfoy about?"

"Draco went to the market to pick up fresher flowers for the ceremony." Harry went all wistful and dreamy the way he tended to when discussing the man who had him under a version of the Imperius Curse that actually worked. "He wasn't pleased with the ones that we had, because—"

Ron nodded and made encouraging noises so that Harry would continue talking, while he eyed his cake with some pride. The surface was a bit rough, but that was all right, because it made things more interesting. The chocolate icing was thick, and entirely hid all trace of the raspberries that the thing

contained.

Harry was allergic to raspberries. Malfoy knew that. In fact, he had given Harry a birthday cake with raspberries once before, and Harry had almost died from eating it.

Ron was going to use that to his advantage. Malfoy wouldn't get the chance to really poison Harry. There was going to be a fake poisoning instead.

"Why did you bring the cake?" Harry sounded apprehensive. Well, he probably feels a little differently about his food since he started living with Malfoy, Ron thought charitably. Part of him must sense something wrong with all the potions in his food, even if he doesn't know it.

"Malfoy told me that I should bake it according to this 'special recipe.'" Ron rolled his eyes. "He was insistent that I had to do it exactly according to his instructions, and not change one single thing." There. That ought to throw suspicion firmly on Malfoy, and since he knew about Harry's allergy, that would make him a murderer. "He said he didn't have time to do it himself."

Harry laughed. "That sounds like Draco," he agreed.

And nothing strikes you as wrong about that? Ron thought, but kept his mouth clamped shut on the words, because he was trying to make it seem as if he was getting along with Malfoy now.

In fact, Harry was studying him thoughtfully, in a way that seemed to argue he was about to ask that. Ron anticipated him by sighing and staring at his hands.

"I know I haven't always been supportive, mate," he muttered. "But if you're happy with the git…well, fine, I reckon."

"Ron."

Harry's voice was hushed, and he moved forwards and embraced Ron without a warning. Ron squirmed a little in his grasp—blokes shouldn't hug each other, it wasn't manly—and then gave in and hugged back. It was all right, he thought. He was only doing it because he was going to free Harry.

By poisoning him?

Ron ignored the voice. It sounded like Hermione's, and Hermione's voice never said anything good to him about Harry and Malfoy's relationship.

Harry turned to the cake, his eyes bright and his cheeks a little flushed. "Well!" he said. "I think I should wait for Draco to get back before I eat this."

"Oh, he didn't want you to," Ron said hastily. "A sort of—special cake," he added lamely, when Harry blinked at him. "There were things in the ingredients I didn't recognize. It was for a celebration or something?" He hoped that he sounded convincing. He hadn't paid attention to most of the details of Harry's wedding, so he didn't know if there was room for a special celebration cake or not.

If you had paid attention, then you could probably have stopped the wedding without resorting to this, Hermione's voice said acidly in his head.

Ron ignored that, because what did Hermione's voice know? And Harry was slowly nodding, as though he knew exactly what Ron was talking about.

"Oh, fine," Harry said, with a blush like a schoolboy's. He reached out and snapped his fingers, and a plate and knife appeared in his hand, like that, with a fork coming a minute later. Ron flinched. He tried not to jump when Harry did wandless magic, but he also tried hard not to think about what it was used for in Harry's frequent encounters with Malfoy. That left him unused to it in general.

Harry cut a thick piece, which Ron knew would be filled with enough raspberries to kill an allergic nundu, and set it on the plate. For a minute, he looked at it, and Ron wondered what he was thinking. Then he

plunged his fork into the thick chocolate and lifted it to his mouth.

Ron held his breath. Just one bite, and then I'll stop him from eating more, stabilize him, and act like I discovered the raspberries myself. And then I can point out that Malfoy tried to kill him—

The door burst open.

"Harry!" Malfoy shouted, springing towards them, waving his wand. He shouted, "Accio cake!" and the piece on the plate as well as the bite on Harry's fork flew towards him, followed by the whole cake. Ron managed to dodge, because he didn't want to be covered with chocolate the way he was covered with failure.

Malfoy lit the cake on fire, but caught the cut piece on a plate he just happened to have with him, Ron thought, furious. That meant he had to have been spying on Ron. Who did he think he was?

"What the fuck—" Harry said, gaping at the burning chocolate.

"It had raspberries in it," Malfoy said shortly. "I had wards up just in case someone brought in wedding food that had raspberries. Not everyone knows." He spun on one heel to face Ron.

Ron winced. He had always dreaded direct confrontations, because he was afraid that Harry would choose Malfoy over him, and he knew he couldn't convince Harry the clever bastard was lying. But he would just have to tell the truth now, and hope that Harry trusted him.

"Mate—" he started.

"No."

Ron shut up. Merlin himself would have shut up when Harry sounded like that. He had talked to Snape

like that after the war, and Snape was silent for the rest of the day, and for the next four only talked about watercress.

“I don’t care what excuse you had,” Harry said, voice low and thick and filled with gathering power. “It doesn’t matter. What matters is that you tried to hurt me with an allergy you knew I had, and then lied about it.”

“Mate—” Ron said again, appalled. He had always imagined that Harry wouldn’t believe him, but he hadn’t ever thought he wouldn’t even get to defend himself.

“You won’t be attending the wedding,” Harry said, and then lifted his wand and snapped out a single clear word, which Ron didn’t understand.

An enormous wind seemed to seize him and blow him backwards. When Ron could see again, he stood outside the locked door of Harry and Malfoy’s house, and no matter how he knocked on it or rattled it or blasted it or tried to get through the wards, neither they nor the door would open to admit him.

*

Ron was smiling the day the wedding happened, even though he had to stand at such a distance he could only see the blaze of white on Harry’s and Malfoy’s robes. Hermione asked him why he was smiling and went away in a huff when he didn’t explain it to her. (Well, he tried, but she didn’t believe that Malfoy was imprisoning Harry, and she also didn’t believe that he was sorry for what he had done, so that was her loss).

Ron had thought of something else he could do, something that would be so much better than stopping the wedding. Harry would have to believe him when this happened.

The spell Harry had cast kept Ron at a distance from him at all times, and that distance increased when Harry was feeling angry. But it didn’t keep Ron away from Malfoy.

Ron was going to expose Malfoy for the ferret he was. It would take some investigating and planning to coordinate it, but it would work, because Ron was determined that it would.

He had tried several times in the past few years to protect his best friend. He had always failed, because he wasn't serious enough about it.

But now Ron would be serious and dedicate himself to this.

This plain was fool-proof, and fail-proof.

Go ahead and marry him and then try to have his children and murder him for the money, bastard, Ron thought at Malfoy. I'm going to show you how much smarter I am than you are.

The End.