"Sex On Fire"

Fire is the test of gold; adversity, of strong men.

-Seneca

Harry's shoulder was numb.

Actually, the numbness seemed to have spread out from his shoulder, all the way down his left arm and to part of his chest and back. It was extremely unpleasant.

He opened his eyes.

His vision was blurry, but he could see enough to know he wasn't at home. Where were his glasses? Where was he?

Oh, God. The fire. Ron - the little girl -

Harry made a panicked noise.

"Relax," said a voice at his right. "You're in St. Mungo's. Here."

His glasses were placed in his right hand. Harry pushed them onto his face awkwardly. "There was a fire, I…Malfoy?"

They must have given him way too much pain potion, because that could not possibly be Draco Malfoy standing next to his bed in lime green Healer's robes. Harry struggled to sit up, even though he couldn't

feel half his upper body.

The Malfoy-hallucination pushed him back down gently. "Don't try to sit up. You've been very badly burned." Then, under his breath, he added, "Idiot."

Harry decided to play along with the hallucination for the time being; he had bigger concerns. "Did everyone get out okay? The kids?"

"The children and their mother are all fine."

Thank God. "Ron?"

"He's the one who brought you in. He was suffering from some smoke inhalation, but a quick Lung-Clearing Potion set him to rights." Malfoy paused. "You shouldn't have gone back into that house, Potter."

"There was a little girl trapped inside."

"Weasley said it was literally falling down around you."

"She would have died!"

"And you very nearly did."

Harry shook his head in frustration. "I really don't need to be lectured by my own subconscious, thanks."

Malfoy blinked. Then he leaned over and took Harry's glasses off with one hand, using the other hand to

pull Harry's eyelid up as he peered into Harry's eye. Harry jerked away.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Checking for a head injury. Are you experiencing any dizziness or headaches?"

"No."

"What year is it?"

"2007."

"Who's the Minster for Magic?"

"Kingsley Shacklebolt. My head is fine, Malfoy."

Malfoy handed him back his glasses, looking unconvinced. "Then explain that comment you made about your subconscious."

"It's just the pain potions, making me see things," Harry said.

"What kinds of things?"

"You! You're obviously not real." A fatal flaw in Harry's logic occurred to him. If Malfoy was really a hallucination, than Harry couldn't trust anything he'd said about the fire. What if the little girl hadn't survived, after all? Harry glanced down at the simple leather band he wore on his right wrist - a gift from George Weasley upon becoming an Auror. Ron had a matching one; they were charmed to let each

partner know when the other was in mortal danger. The band lay quiescent, neither hot nor cold, so Harry was sure that Ron, at least, really was okay.

"Potter, you're not on nearly enough pain potion to make you hallucinate," Malfoy said. "Why do you think I can't be real?"

"You're wearing Healer's robes."

"I'm a Healer."

"Since when?" Harry hadn't seen Malfoy since…just after the end of the war, actually. If Malfoy had been working in St. Mungo's all that time, Harry would certainly have seen him at some point. God knew was here often enough.

Malfoy made a disgusted noise. "I've been living in France, Potter. I only moved back here three months ago. You must have heard that my mother is getting remarried."

Oh, right. It had been in the Prophet - Narcissa Black, who had gone back to her maiden name after the divorce, was engaged to some important wizard in the Wizengamot. Harry had actually been invited to the wedding, although he hadn't responded yet.

Still…"That doesn't prove anything."

"Fine," Malfoy said. "Let's try a different tack. Why would you be hallucinating at all? People's minds don't make up elaborate and life-like hallucinations for no reason."

"I told you, it's the pain potions." Harry sighed. "And maybe I needed someone to be here when I woke up. To reassure me about the fire."

Malfoy nodded thoughtfully. "Reassurance. That could be a valid explanation. But if that's the case, then why would you hallucinate me?"

Harry opened his mouth, then closed it without saying anything. Malfoy was right, of course. If Harry had really needed to be reassured, he would have hallucinated Hermione, or Molly, or even Neville. Malfoy was just about the last person his subconscious would have provided him with.

"Fuck," he said.

Malfoy sat on a stool next to Harry's bed. "Now that we've gotten your nervous breakdown out of the way, can we talk about your real injuries?"

"You're really here. And you're my Healer."

"I'm the Healer-in-Charge of the Burn Ward, yes."

"Lime green's not really your color."

"Potter!" Malfoy snapped. "Focus. Part of the house fell on you just as you got the girl out. You received extensive burns over the left side of your body, and your left lung collapsed. Your shoulder, arm, and ribs were all broken, and you narrowly avoided having your heart crushed."

A horrible thought occurred to Harry. "Is that why I can't feel my side? Am I paralyzed?"

"No. I induced the temporary paralysis myself to keep you from moving the injured areas. Your heart is working fine, and we were able to repair your lung and broken bones with no problems."

When Malfoy hesitated, Harry prompted him with an apprehensive, "But…"

"The burns were bad, Potter," said Malfoy. "I was able to grow back the skin - repair the surface damage. But there's severe damage to the tissues underneath that's much harder to heal, and the fact that your muscles were damaged by the blunt trauma as well as the burns just complicates things."

Harry swallowed. "How long will it take?"

"With a course of several potions and regular physical rehabilitation…about a month."

"A month? You've got to be kidding."

"You're lucky to be alive, Potter," Malfoy said, giving him a stern look. "What you did was incredibly stupid."

"I saved a little girl from a burning building!"

"At unacceptable risk to your own life."

"Please, Malfoy. You wouldn't even be here if I wasn't the type of bloke to pull someone out of a fire."

Malfoy's face went white, and Harry immediately regretted his words.

"I'm sorry, that was a stupid thing to say -"

"Forget it," Malfoy said. He stood up, holding himself stiffly. "I'm not going to lie to you, Potter. The rehabilitation process will difficult, and it will be painful. But if you ever want to have full use of your left side again, you're going to have to trust me to help you."

"All right," Harry said quietly.

"I have to inform the MLE you're awake, and then I have other patients to attend. I'll be back in the afternoon."

"Okay."

Malfoy left the room. Harry stared up at the ceiling, wondering if he really could trust Malfoy and knowing that he had no other choice.

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Harry dozed on and off for about an hour before Ron and Hermione came to see him. They sat on either side of his bed, both dressed in their work robes. Harry noted idly that lime green didn't look any better on Hermione than it did on Malfoy, and wondered what had possessed the person who had decided that it was a desirable color for Healers to wear.

"Gave us quite a scare, mate," Ron said, clapping Harry gently on his uninjured shoulder.

"You need to be more careful," Hermione scolded.

Ron glared at her. "What was he supposed to do, let that little girl burn to death?"

"She's really all right, then?" Harry interrupted, not wanting to be caught in the middle of yet another marital spat.

"She's fine," Hermione assured him. "So are her mother and the other two children."

"And Myers?"

Ron's expression darkened. "He got away."

Harry had expected that, but it was still disappointing to hear. Aldon Myers was wanted for three homicides. Last night, Harry and Ron had tracked him to his ex-wife's house, where he'd been holding the woman and their three children hostage. Myers had set the house ablaze before making his escape, knowing that Harry and Ron would prioritize the innocent lives over his capture.

"Well, I'm afraid I won't be any help tracking the bastard down. Malfoy says I'll be out of commission for a month."

"I can't believe they let that git become a Healer, after everything he did," Ron said with a scowl.

"He was acquitted by the Wizengamot," said Hermione.

"He's still an arsehole!"

"His personality has nothing to do with his skill." Hermione turned to Harry. "Malfoy happens to be an incredible Healer. The breakthroughs he's made in burn treatment are revolutionary."

"He said he's been here for three months," Harry said. "You never mentioned him."

Hermione shrugged. "I didn't think you'd care."

That made Harry blink a little. Why did he care?

"I can't believe you're going to be out of the field for a month," Ron said. "You know they're going to stick me with some idiot rookie."

"Yes, Ron," said Hermione, "you're the one who's suffering here."

"I'm just saying."

Hermione waved him off. "Look at the bright side, Harry. You'll be better in time for the Beltane Ball."

The Beltane Ball was a tradition that had fallen by the wayside the first time Voldemort had risen to power, and it had been revived the year after the Battle of Hogwarts in celebration. The Ministry sponsored the Ball, the highlight of which was an enormous bonfire. More often than not, it degenerated into a no-holds-barred bacchanalia.

Harry smiled. "You're right. There is that."

Ron and Hermione kept him company for another hour, and for what seemed like the eight thousandth time, Harry thought about how grateful he was to have such good friends.

Even if their bickering did drive him mad sometimes.

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True to his word, Malfoy returned mid-afternoon to explain the intricacies of the recovery process to Harry. He'd written out the potions schedule on parchment, and it was so complex that Harry's head hurt just looking at it.

"You'll be taking four different potions. They all need to be taken in different amounts and at different times, so it's extremely important that you stick to the schedule. Keep it somewhere you can see it, and make sure that all the potions are clearly labeled. I also suggest that you keep a record of your doses so you know you haven't missed any."

"Er…okay," Harry said, feeling slightly dazed. Malfoy was a fast talker.

"I'm going to show you the exercises you'll need to do to restore the lost muscle tone and improve your freedom of movement. They have to be done twice a day - morning and night, no matter how much you may not want to do them."

Harry was starting to get a little irritated with Malfoy's condescending tone. "I'm not a child, Malfoy. I'll do the exercises."

Malfoy just raised an eyebrow. "We'll see. You'll need to come back here once a week so that I can check your progress. Do you have any questions?"

"No."

"Good." Malfoy set the parchment aside and pulled back Harry's blanket. "You need to sit up before I remove the bandages and the paralysis spells."

Harry nodded, a little embarrassed that Malfoy was seeing him this way - in just thin cotton hospital trousers and no shirt. But it was ridiculous to be embarrassed. Malfoy was a Healer, and Harry had never felt self-conscious in front of a Healer before. The human body was their job, after all.

Of course, Malfoy wasn't just a Healer; he was Malfoy, and this entire situation was all kinds of wrong.

"Put your good arm around my shoulders," Malfoy said, leaning over Harry's right side and sliding his arm under Harry's back. "I know it feels strange, but don't think about it too much or it'll upset your balance."

"I think I can handle having my arm around you without swooning," Harry said as Malfoy helped him sit up slowly.

Malfoy gave him an odd look. "I meant the fact that you can't feel your left side."

"Oh," Harry said, mortified.

Thankfully, Malfoy didn't say anything else as he got Harry upright and turned him so he was sitting on the edge of the bed. He uncorked a vial and handed it to Harry.

"Pain-Away?" Harry asked, reading the label. "Is that really necessary?" Pain-Away was one of the strongest pain potions that was actually legal.

"Believe me, you'll want it when I remove the spells." Malfoy's mouth twitched. "It's just enough to take the edge off. It won't make you hallucinate, if that's what you're worried about."

Harry rolled his eyes and downed the potion, which tasted faintly of mint. Malfoy started stripping away his bandages.

It was strange, not being able to feel his left side. Harry's entire center of balance felt off, but the more he concentrated on keeping himself centered, the more he started to list to the left, until Malfoy finally righted him with an annoyed huff.

"I told you not to think about it. Your body knows what to do. Don't let your brain interfere." Malfoy peeled off another strip of bandaging and muttered, "I can't believe I'm telling you, of all people, not to overthink something."

To distract himself from his physical disorientation, Harry watched Malfoy's quick, skilled hands. The skin being revealed was a little pink and shiny, but that was the only sign that it had been covered in third-degree burns less than twenty-four hours ago. Harry was reluctantly impressed.

"Aren't you a little young to be Healer-in-Charge of a whole ward?"

"The youngest in quite some time, yes."

"You must be good."

"I'm the best," Malfoy said matter-of-factly.

Harry couldn't really argue that; he'd never seen burns heal so quickly. It was hard to believe that there was still damage lurking beneath the skin.

"All right," said Malfoy as he Banished the last of the bandages. "I'm going to remove the spells now. It'll hurt, but with the potion, the pain shouldn't be unmanageable. Are you ready?"

"You don't have to mollycoddle me, Malfoy. I'm used to pain. Just do it."

"Finite Incantatem."

Despite Malfoy's warning, it hurt more than Harry had expected it to - a dull, throbbing ache that spread through his entire left shoulder and arm, radiating all the way down to his fingers, over the pectoral

muscle, and through his left shoulderblade. But Harry had experienced far worse.

Malfoy spelled a quill to take notes. "Rate the pain on a scale of zero to ten, with zero being no pain at all and ten being the Cruciatus curse."

"About a four, I guess." It was really more like a five.

"Good. You're on an appropriate dose of Pain-Away, then. Turn your arm palm-up and flex your hand open as much as you can."

Harry did so, and was dismayed to find that he could hardly extend his fingers at all. It wasn't the pain that stopped him - it was more like his muscles were just too weak to move.

"Now make a fist."

Once again, Harry could barely move his fingers from their natural half-curved position. As Malfoy continued to test his strength and mobility, Harry grew increasingly frustrated. His arm was practically useless; he couldn't even shrug his shoulder.

"Relax, Potter. You're doing fine."

"Fine? My arm might as well still be paralyzed for all I can do with it!"

"It'll improve with time and treatment." Malfoy skimmed through the notes the quill had taken, checking them for accuracy. "Maybe instead of whinging about how bad you have it, you should consider how fortunate you are that it was your left side that was affected. At least you can still use your wand."

Okay, that was a good point.

Harry paid close attention as Malfoy led him through the series of physical rehabilitation exercises he'd have to do, determined not to give Malfoy another reason to accuse him of whinging. It bothered him how calm and businesslike Malfoy was being about all this, when Harry himself felt horribly awkward. If Malfoy could manage to put aside their personal history, then Harry should be able to do the same.

Malfoy had never beaten him at anything before. Harry wasn't about to let that change.

"Granger said she was going to bring you some clothes."

"She did."

"You won't be able to dress yourself normally for a while. Do you know the spells for dressing and undressing?"

Jesus, did Malfoy treat all his patients like two-year-olds? "Yes," Harry snapped.

"It was just a question, Potter. No need to get so worked up." But there was a slight smirk to Malfoy's lips, a look in his eyes that Harry recognized from their Hogwarts days. Oddly, the knowledge that Malfoy was intentionally trying to push his buttons put Harry much more at ease. Maybe things hadn't changed that much, after all.

Malfoy stepped away, picking up a simple cotton sling from the counter and handing it to Harry.

"Wear this as often as you can. You can take it off to sleep, shower, and do your exercises, but other than that, you should keep it on. It'll be easier for your muscles to heal if they're not being jostled around. Try to sleep on your back, and absolutely no Floo or Portkey travel. Apparition should be fine."

"Got it. Anything else?"

"No. Come back in one week so I can check your progress. You can make an appointment in my suite - it's just down the hall, at the end of the ward. That's where we'll do the checkups, as well." Malfoy dropped a few pieces of parchment next to Harry, on top of the potions schedule. "You can get your prescriptions filled at any apothecary. I don't recommend using the hospital's; they overcharge."

Harry nodded, wondering if that was an honest tip or if Malfoy was just hoping to make him go out of his way. "Thanks."

As Malfoy headed for the door, Harry rifled through the prescription parchments. He picked up the third one and frowned. "Malfoy, wait a second."

Malfoy turned, visibly annoyed. "What?"

"I don't need a prescription for Pain-Away."

"Yes, you do. An apothecary won't sell it to you without one."

"No, I mean I don't need Pain-Away at all. I have Pain-Ease at home."

Malfoy shook his head. "That won't be strong enough."

"It'll be fine," Harry said. "I'm not going to take Pain-Away for a whole month. That stuff fucks with your head. It's addictive."

"You'd be taking a highly regulated, gradually decreasing dose under the direct supervision of a Healer." Malfoy was even more annoyed now, which gave Harry a perverse kind of pleasure.

"I don't need it."

"Oh, spare me your cocky Gryffindor ridiculousness," Malfoy said, glaring. "Burns are one of the most painful injuries the human body can sustain, and you do need strong pain relief. Without it, you won't be able to function. You won't be able to sleep, or exercise, or do anything but think about how much pain you're in. You'll get worse instead of better. Don't be an idiot."

Harry glared right back. "I've had every painful curse and hex in the book thrown at me over the past decade, and I've never needed anything stronger than Pain-Ease. I think I can handle a burn."

Malfoy snorted. "Whatever, Potter. It's your decision." He left in what could only be described as a flounce.

Harry scowled. Even though he'd technically won, Malfoy had still gotten the last word, and he hated that. The irritation remained as he dressed, gathered his things - pointedly leaving the Pain-Away prescription on the bed - and made his way down the hall to Malfoy's suite.

How did Malfoy do it, get under his skin like this? Harry hadn't seen the man in almost ten years, and he liked to think that he'd matured in that time, but something about Malfoy made him feel like a moody, unstable teenager again.

Malfoy's secretary was a surprisingly lovely young woman named Angela. How such a sweet girl could stand working for that git was beyond Harry, but as he made his appointment for next week, he could feel his irritation fading almost against his will. It was impossible to stay in a bad mood around her; it would have been like kicking a puppy.

By the time Harry left St. Mungo's, he had put Malfoy almost completely out of his mind.

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After stopping by Diagon Alley to get his potions, Harry headed to the Burrow for what was essentially a "we're-glad-you're-still-alive" dinner. The whole family was there, and Harry was glad for the opportunity to take his mind off the accident and the difficult month of recovery he had in front of him. There was no better distraction than an energetic crowd of Weasley children.

Ginny brought along her new boyfriend, one of her Falcons teammates, and the poor bloke was so nervous meeting Harry that Harry felt a little sorry for him. It had been years since Harry and Ginny had realized they were more in love with the idea of each other than anything else. They had parted amicably and remained friends, without any of the usual drama that had accompanied the ends of all Harry's other relationships.

Still, Harry was a little jealous - not because he wanted Ginny, but because he wanted what Ginny had. Since their breakup, Harry had jumped from relationship to relationship, with both women and men. None had lasted more than a few months, and all had ended badly. Harry missed that feeling of being in love, and it didn't help that pretty much all of his friends had been able to find it.

But as he filled himself with Molly's excellent cooking and played with the kids he considered his nieces and nephews, surrounded by people who loved him as one of their own, he knew he was luckier than most.

After a few hours, the Pain-Away began to wear off. Harry had grown somewhat accustomed to the dull throbbing and had managed to push it to the back of his mind, but the new sharp pains shooting through his arm couldn't be ignored. Not wanting to worry anyone, especially the kids, Harry excused himself to the bathroom and took a good strong dose of Pain-Ease.

It didn't help. Pain-Ease was supposed to take effect within five minutes, but five minutes later, Harry actually felt worse. It became more and more difficult to follow the conversation, as he had to use all of his concentration to keep the pain from showing on his face. It wasn't long before he gave up and got to his feet.

"I should get going."

"Are you feeling all right?" Molly asked, immediately concerned. "You look a little pale."

"I'm fine. Just tired." Harry attempted a smile, knowing that it came out as more of a grimace.

Molly didn't seem convinced, but Harry quickly said his goodbyes and Apparated to Grimmauld Place. The pain was awful now, like he was being stabbed with white-hot knives all over his left side. Harry took a double dose of Pain-Ease and fell into bed. It wasn't as bad as the Cruciatus, but it was getting damn close.

He lay on his back and took the sling off, gritting his teeth against the pain of unbending his elbow. Then he stared at the ceiling and tried to stay as still as possible, forcing himself to take deep, even breaths.

God, he was supposed to do his physical therapy exercises. But there was no way he could, not like this. He could barely keep himself from whimpering.

He couldn't live like this. In the morning, he'd have to swallow his pride, go back to St. Mungo's, and get another prescription from Malfoy. And that was almost as painful as the injuries themselves - the knowledge that Malfoy had been right, after all.

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Harry barely slept, and what little sleep he did manage was broken and restless. He woke early and Apparated to St. Mungo's as soon as he thought Malfoy might be in.

He headed for Malfoy's office suite, grimly anticipating the groveling Malfoy would doubtlessly require and cursing his own stubbornness. What had possessed him to think that he knew better than a Healer? Of course, if his Healer had been anyone else, Harry probably would have accepted the necessity of the Pain-Away. He wouldn't have liked it, but he would have accepted it. He had let his need to best Malfoy

get the better of him.

When Harry stepped into the suite, Angela looked up with a big smile. "Good morning, Auror Potter. Healer Malfoy said you'd be in today."

Harry stopped short. "He did?"

"Yes, of course." She held out a piece of paper. "Here's that prescription you forgot yesterday."

Harry took it with his good hand, slightly bewildered. "Thanks."

"You poor thing, you must be in terrible pain," Angela said, her eyes sympathetic. She picked up a small vial from the desk. "Healer Malfoy left enough Pain-Away for a single dose. Shall I open it for you?"

Thank God. "Yes, please," Harry said immediately. He folded the prescription awkwardly with one hand and shoved it into his pocket, then took the open vial from Angela and downed the contents.

"I'll see you next week, then?" Angela asked as she took the empty vial back.

"Yeah. Thank you." Harry turned towards the door, then hesitated and turned back. "Er… tell Healer Malfoy I said thanks, too."

"Of course, love."

What the hell was that about? Harry wondered as he made his way back to the lobby. Malfoy had obviously known that the pain would be bad enough to drive Harry back today - yet he hadn't stuck around to gloat. That was not the Malfoy Harry knew. Now he felt even worse about his juvenile behaviour yesterday.

Goddamn that pointy blond git.

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Harry stared glumly down at the papers covering his desk. He hadn't needed to come to work today; the severity of his injuries could have excused him for the rest of the week. But the thought of lazing about at home with nothing to do hadn't appealed to him.

He hadn't taken into account the fact that he was going to be relegated to his desk for the next month.

Ron had been assigned a temporary partner, a fresh-faced Hufflepuff straight out of the training programme. The two of them were back on Myers' trail, while Harry was stuck here in the office, facing down weeks of tedious paperwork.

Harry sighed. It was going to be a long fucking month.

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By the time next Wednesday rolled around, Harry was going out of his mind with boredom, and he was ridiculously grateful to be able to use the excuse of his Healer's appointment to get out of the Ministry. In fact, he was so eager to leave that he ended up taking off too early, and he arrived at St. Mungo's a good twenty minutes before his scheduled appointment.

"Auror Potter!" Angela greeted him with some surprise. "You do know your appointment isn't until three?"

"Yeah, sorry. I was a little too keen to get away from work. Is it okay if I wait here?"

"Oh, that's probably not necessary," Angela said, waving her hand. "Healer Malfoy isn't with a patient right now. He's just in his office - that door over there. You can knock, if you like. I'm sure he won't mind seeing you a little early."

"Thanks." Harry crossed the room and knocked on the door she'd pointed out.

"Come in!" Malfoy said from the other side.

Harry opened the door but remained in the doorway. He'd expected the office to be as neat and well-put-together as Malfoy himself. Instead, the place was an absolute mess. Books, papers, and file folders covered every available inch of surface space, and Malfoy's Healer's robes were thrown carelessly over a chair. Malfoy stood behind the desk, dressed only in a button-front shirt and trousers, rummaging through the clutter and muttering to himself. He barely glanced up at Harry.

"Potter. You're early."

"Angela said you might be able to see me anyway."

"Sure, just give me a minute. I'm looking for your file." Malfoy rifled through a stack of folders. "Damn."

Harry fidgeted in the doorway, not sure if he should stay where he was or go back to the waiting room. "Why don't you just Summon it?"

"And risk having the all the papers fall out and scatter across the room? No, thank you." Malfoy opened the top drawer on the side of the desk, sifted through the contents, and slammed it shut with a noise of frustration. He bent over to open the bottom drawer, and the movement pulled his trousers tight against

his rather shapely arse. Harry looked away.

A moment later, Malfoy straightened back up, holding a folder and looking triumphant.

"Found it," he said. "Just a second." Malfoy grabbed his robes off the chair and shrugged into them. "I hate these things."

Harry privately agreed, but at least the robes kept Malfoy's body hidden. The last thing Harry needed right now was to start lusting after his own Healer. Especially when that Healer happened to be Draco Malfoy.

Malfoy ushered Harry into the small examination room next to his office, gesturing for him to take a seat on the table. "Take off your shirt."

Harry slipped off the sling and used his wand to remove his shirt. Malfoy tapped Harry's shoulder with his own wand, casting some sort of spell that created a bright swirl of colors an inch or so above the skin - mostly blue, with a few streaks of red here and there.

"Have you been wearing the sling regularly?"

"Yes."

"Any problems with the rehabilitation exercises?"

"No."

Malfoy moved the spell down to Harry's upper arm, then over his elbow. "How's the pain?"

Harry tensed. "About the same."

"Have you been taking your potions?"

"Yes. Why don't you just say it?"

"Say what?" Malfoy asked, without looking up from the spell cloud hovering over Harry's hand.

"I was wrong and you were right. I needed the Pain-Away."

Now Malfoy looked up, his eyebrows lifting in amusement. "I know I was right, Potter. I don't need you to validate me."

"That's a first."

Malfoy narrowed his eyes and cast the spell on Harry's chest, smacking the injured skin with much more force than was necessary.

"Ouch!" Harry yelped. "Christ, Malfoy, aren't you supposed to do no harm or something?"

"That's Muggles, idiot."

"I'm pretty sure you're not supposed to insult your patients, either."

"I'll stop insulting you when you stop giving me reasons to."

Harry blew out a frustrated breath. He just couldn't seem to win with Malfoy, and it infuriated him.

Malfoy moved around behind him to check his back, and the silence quickly became uncomfortable - for Harry, at least. He cast about desperately for some non-incendiary topic of conversation and came up empty.

"There's definitely been progress," Malfoy said, coming back around the table. "Have you noticed any improvement in your mobility while exercising?"

"A little."

"Good, let's see. Palm up."

Harry turned his arm, attempting to flex his palm and then make a fist as he had done last week. He could move his fingers more now, although not nearly all the way.

Malfoy hummed in approval. "Lift your arm straight in front of you, as high as you can."

The routine was familiar, and Harry found himself concentrating on Malfoy even as Malfoy concentrated on his arm. "So, you're a burn specialist."

"You're really not helping with the whole 'no-insult' thing."

"I just - I was wondering if it had something to do with…what happened that night. You know."

For a long moment, Malfoy was completely motionless, staring down at his hands on Harry's arm. Then

he cleared his throat and said, "Lift your arm to the side."

Harry obeyed. He wasn't sure why he had asked; it wasn't like Malfoy was going to tell him anything, not about this -

"I was having nightmares," Malfoy said quietly, not looking at him.

Harry kept his mouth shut. If he interrupted, Malfoy might stop talking, and Harry really did want to know.

"At first they were just about what had happened to Vince," Malfoy continued. "Then about what would have happened to me and Greg if you hadn't come back. Before long, I was dreaming about everyone I knew being burned alive. Every night. Lift your arm behind you."

Harry did the best he could, wincing. Malfoy didn't seem to notice.

"I would wake up in the middle of the night, thinking I was on fire. I couldn't eat meat because it smelled too much like burnt flesh. Eventually I couldn't even stand to be in the same room as a lit candle. Bend your elbow."

It was creepy how calm Malfoy's voice was, as if he was describing something that had happened to someone else.

"I ran away. I went to France, thinking that if I could get away from where it happened -"

Malfoy shook his head. "But we're not Muggles. We can't run from fire the way they can; it's too much a part of who we are. Roll your shoulder."

Apparently satisfied with Harry's progress, Malfoy stepped away to the counter and ended the spell on his quill, glancing at the notes it had taken.

"I decided that if I couldn't run from fire, I could at least learn how to beat it." Malfoy looked up at Harry, making eye contact for the first time since he'd started speaking, and Harry took a quick breath at the intensity of his gaze. "So yes, Potter, what happened that night has something to do with it." Malfoy picked up the folder and headed for the door. "Keep wearing your sling. See you next week."

Then he was gone and Harry was alone, feeling like he'd just been gutted.

***

Harry spent the next week going over Malfoy's story in his head again and again. He'd barely given that episode in the Room of Requirement a thought over the past nine years; what had happened afterwards had been so much more important, so life-changing, that the Fiendfyre had paled in comparison. And now, even though he knew it was stupid, he felt guilty about that - because for Malfoy, the fire obviously had been life-changing, in ways Harry couldn't even imagine.

He went to his next appointment determined not to mention anything Malfoy had told him. For one thing, he still wasn't sure why Malfoy had told him. It hadn't been a bid for pity or sympathy; Harry was sure of that. But he couldn't think of any other reason Malfoy would have admitted such a weakness, and he half-expected Malfoy to have regretted his confession so much that he would refuse to see Harry again.

He didn't, of course. He also didn't bring up last week's conversation, so Harry assumed that he wanted to pretend it had never happened. That was fine with Harry.

"You're doing much better," Malfoy said after he'd scanned Harry's injuries. "Have you noticed an improvement in the pain?"

"Yeah. I'd say it's about a three now."

"Good. We can start tapering off the dose of Pain-Away, then. And you can start leaving the sling off a bit. Try using your arm for everyday activities. You probably still won't be able to do much with it, but it needs to start getting used to movement again. Don't overdo it, though - you don't want to set your recovery back."

"I won't." And he wouldn't, not after what had happened the last time he'd ignored Malfoy's advice.

Malfoy rolled his eyes, unconvinced. "Any problems with the potions?"

"No. Well, actually, I've got a rash on the right side of my neck, but I think it's just from the sling."

"Let me see." Malfoy stepped over to Harry's right side and leaned in close, his fingers lightly touching the edge of the rash. Harry's brain chose that moment to register the fact that Malfoy smelled really, really good. He didn't know if it was cologne, aftershave, or shampoo, but it was woody and delicious and unfortunately went straight to his cock. Unbidden, Harry's mind flashed back to the sight of Malfoy's firm arse as he'd bent over last week.

Harry stiffened in dismay. Why had he told Malfoy about the rash? It wasn't even important.

"Am I hurting you?" Malfoy asked, misinterpreting Harry's sudden rigidity.

"No, it just, er…itches a bit."

Malfoy, mercifully, stepped back. "Well, you're half-right. The nerve-restructuring potion you're taking can make your skin more sensitive, and the strap of the sling caused some irritation. I'll give you an ointment -"

He was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in," he said.

Angela poked her head in. "Sorry to bother you, Healer Malfoy, but he sent flowers again."

He?

"Get rid of them," Malfoy said tightly.

"This is the fourth time today -"

"For Merlin's sake, Angela!" Malfoy snapped. "I don't care what you do with them. Send them up to Pediatrics, take them home yourself, transfigure them into bloody quills if you like. Just get rid of them."

"All right," said Angela, seemingly unperturbed by Malfoy's tone. She shut the door.

"Relationship problems?" Harry asked as Malfoy turned back to him.

"None of your business," Malfoy answered, although not harshly.

After the usual check of Harry's freedom of movement - now much-improved - Malfoy walked out to the waiting room with him. He stopped dead when he saw the man standing there.

The man was quite good-looking, tall and dark-haired. Harry didn't recognize him, but Malfoy did, and he wasn't happy about it.

"What the hell are you doing here, Edward?"

"I came to apologize," the man said.

Harry shifted away from Malfoy, not wanting to get caught in the middle of what was clearly a lovers' spat. He met Angela's eyes across the room; she looked just as uncomfortable as he felt.

Malfoy's voice was icy. "And you think harassing me at work is going to make me more agreeable?"

"If you'd just let me explain -"

"I'm not interested in your explanations. Get out."

Edward took a few steps towards Malfoy. "Please, Draco, I swear I didn't hear you use your safeword -"

Malfoy's eyes widened and his cheeks flushed in mortification. Harry decided it was time to intervene, because otherwise there was a good chance this Edward idiot was going to lose his bollocks. Not that it would be such a great loss.

"Hey," Harry said sharply, drawing his wand. "He asked you to leave. So leave."

"Piss off, you -" Edward looked at Harry for the first time, then did a double-take. He shut his mouth.

Sometimes being Harry Potter had its perks.

There was a long, tense moment in which Edward looked back and forth between Harry and Malfoy, torn between his pride and his survival instinct. Finally, Edward drew his wand with a small sneer.

Harry's grip tightened on his own wand, ready to cast a Shield Charm. But instead of pointing his wand at Malfoy or Harry, Edward pointed it at the small wastebasket by Angela's desk.

"Incendio."

There were only a few bits of parchment in the bin, so the resulting fire was small and non-threatening. From the way Malfoy yelped and sprang back against the wall, though, one would have thought that Edward had set off a blazing inferno.

Angela extinguished the fire immediately, but not before Edward shot a nasty smirk at Malfoy and stalked out of the suite. Harry considered going after him, but one look at Malfoy changed his mind.

Malfoy was bone-white and shaking, his wide eyes fixed on where the fire had been. His breaths were quick and panicky, approaching hyperventilation.

Harry sheathed his wand and started towards Malfoy, knowing he'd pass out if he kept breathing like that. "Malfoy, you -"

Malfoy's eyes jerked to him, seemingly startled, as if he'd forgotten Harry was there. He took a deep, shuddering breath. "I'm fine. I…Excuse me."

He disappeared into his office. Harry stared at the shut door for a second before turning to Angela. "Will he be okay?"

She nodded. "He doesn't like for people to seem him upset, that's all. I'll check on him after he's had time to recover from the shock a bit."

Angela knew about Malfoy's pyrophobia, then. Harry was fairly certain Malfoy wasn't the type to blab his

dark secrets to anyone he didn't trust - his odd confession to Harry aside - so he must trust her. That wasn't surprising. What was surprising was that Malfoy had apparently trusted his lover enough to tell him, too. Edward had set that fire purposely because he'd known how much it would distress Malfoy - not exactly the behaviour of someone worthy of trust. Harry scowled.

"Who was that bloke?"

"Edward Moreland," Angela said, her expression uncharacteristically dark. "Healer Malfoy's boyfriend - ex-boyfriend now, I hope."

"You don't like him?"

She shook her head fiercely. "Healer Malfoy's well-shot of him. Mr. Moreland treated him horribly; I've no idea why Healer Malfoy put up with it as long as he did."

Neither did Harry. As he confirmed his next appointment and headed back to the Ministry, his mind was preoccupied with thoughts of Malfoy. Why had he gotten into a relationship with a prick like Moreland? What did he need a safeword for?

But most importantly, why had he implied to Harry that he'd conquered his fear of fire when he very clearly hadn't?

***

When Harry showed up for his appointment the next week, Malfoy had conveniently been called away on an "emergency", and Harry's checkup had to be conducted by another Healer. Harry wasn't the least bit surprised. Malfoy was very proud, and he'd been humiliated in front of someone he still considered a rival, if not an enemy. However much he'd changed, it seemed Malfoy was still more likely to run from a problem than to face it head-on.

Still, Harry was unsettled to find that he was actually disappointed. Malfoy annoyed the hell out of him, but Harry couldn't deny that he found the challenge invigorating. It was probably because he was so bored at work. Once he was out in the field again, he'd go back to forgetting Malfoy even existed.

His arm was nearly healed, and he was finally able to stop taking the Pain-Away - a great improvement, in his opinion. He'd never been able to get comfortable taking such a potent pain reliever. It might have been his imagination, but he could swear his head felt clearer now. Until a Healer gave him a clean bill of health, though, he couldn't go back into the field, which meant he was on desk duty for at least another week.

Three days after Malfoy avoided his appointment, Harry was preparing to leave work when Ron came racing over to his desk, trainee partner trailing behind.

"We got him. We got the bastard."

"Myers? Where?"

"A hunting cabin his cousin owns. The scout just came back, says Myers is definitely there. Jones and I are leaving to bring him in now."

Ah, so that was the trainee's name. Harry frowned. "Just the two of you? Shouldn't you have backup?"

Ron snorted dismissively. "He has no idea we're coming. We've got the drop on him; we can handle it."

"That's what you and I thought last time, and look what happened."

"This is different," Ron said. "No civilians this time. We'll get him, Harry."

Harry nodded. Ron was a great Auror, and Jones…well, he looked timid, but he'd made it through the training programme in one piece. That alone said a lot for his skill. "All right. Just watch your back."

"Always do," Ron said with a grin.

Harry watched Ron and Jones set off with no small amount of wistfulness. He was glad Myers had been found, of course, but there was a tiny, selfish part of him that wished the man had been found just a few days later. He really hated being left behind like this.

Not much longer, Harry reminded himself as he Flooed home to Grimmauld Place. Kreacher had prepared an excellent dinner, as usual, and Harry settled down at the kitchen table with a report to read as he ate. The MLE had gotten a few leads on a potions-smuggling ring operating in London, and Robards had hinted to Harry that he and Ron would be put on the case next week, once Harry's recovery was complete.

He was so engrossed in the report that he didn't notice the gradual warming of the charmed band on his wrist until it suddenly flared white-hot, searing the skin and making him drop his fork in shock and pain. The band settled down to a less intense but constant, throbbing heat, and Harry forgot all about the pain as he realized what that heat meant.

Ron was in trouble. Big trouble.

Without hesitation, Harry drew his wand and activated the Portkey embedded in the band, hoping that Ron and Jones had already managed to take down any wards Myers had up. A few seconds later, he made a stumbling landing in a small wooden cabin.

Harry's heart leapt into his throat when he spotted Ron lying on the floor a few feet away, unconscious and bleeding from a wound in his stomach. On the other side of the cabin, Jones and Myers were engaged in a fierce duel, and although Jones was putting up a good fight, he was clearly fading fast.

Myers sensed the same thing. He hit Jones with a vicious Stinging Hex that sent the Auror to his knees, then raised his wand to deliver the killing blow.

"Expelliarmus!" Harry shouted.

Myers' wand was wrenched from his hand and rocketed back towards Harry. As Myers whirled around in surprise, Jones had just enough time to regain his equilibrium and cast a Stunner from behind, sending Myers crashing to the floor.

Harry rushed over to Ron and dropped to his knees, trusting Jones to deal with restraining Myers. Ron was lying on his side, and the pool of blood spreading outward from his body seemed ominously large. Harry gently turned him to his back.

"Is he okay?" Jones asked, sounding much more composed than Harry would have expected.

"I don't know. I have to get him to St. Mungo's." Harry glanced over to see that Jones had Myers properly trussed up with an Incarcerous. "Can you get Myers back to the MLE yourself?"

"Yes."

"Thanks," Harry said, reassured by the confidence in Jones' voice. He turned back to Ron, casting a quick first aid spell that would stabilize him enough for transport. "Make sure you let Robards know what happened right away."

"I will. Good luck."

Harry lifted Ron into his arms. It was somewhat awkward considering how much taller Ron was, but given Ron's stomach injury, a fireman's carry was out of the question. Harry Apparated them straight into the casualty ward at St. Mungo's.

"I need help here!" Harry called out. He set Ron on the nearest bank of chairs and turned to the mediwitch who was hurrying over. "Please, you need to page Healer -"

He paused, feeling helpless. Hermione wasn't on duty tonight; she was at home with the kids.

"What happened?" the mediwitch asked.

"I don't know. I wasn't there when he was attacked. It may have been some sort of Slicing -"

"Potter?"

Harry turned around to see Malfoy regarding him with a frown. He'd never been so glad to see anyone in his entire life.

"Malfoy! Oh, thank God. Ron was attacked; he's lost a lot of blood."

"Let me see."

Harry and the mediwitch stepped aside to let Malfoy bend over Ron's body. Malfoy drew his wand, examining the wound. His brow furrowed.

"Take him to Treatment Room C and have Healer Moore meet us there," he said to the mediwitch. "Quickly."

The mediwitch nodded and conjured a stretcher, lifting Ron onto it and carting him away with brisk efficiency. Malfoy started after her, but Harry caught his sleeve and held him back.

"What's going on? Is he going to be okay?"

"I don't know," Malfoy said. "The wound is hexed not to close, and I'm no good with spell damage. That's why I asked for Healer Moore; she's as good with hexes as I am with burns. If anyone can help Weasley, she can."

Harry gripped his arm tightly. "Please don't let him die. Please."

"I'll do my best," said Malfoy, gently removing Harry's hand from his arm. "Just wait here. I'm sure the mediwitches will have plenty of paperwork for you."

Harry slumped into a chair as Malfoy hurried away. The band on his wrist was still uncomfortably hot, which was actually a relief - if Ron was dead, the band would be ice-cold.

A mediwitch did indeed present him with a thick sheaf of forms to fill out, but Harry could only stare down at them blankly. He couldn't bear to lose Ron; his entire being recoiled from the thought of life without his best mate. Harry took a deep breath, trying to rein in his emotions. It wouldn't do for an Auror to lose it in the middle of St. Mungo's casualty.

Gradually, the heat in the band began to subside, which sent Harry into a panic at first. What if he was feeling Ron's life ebb away? He clenched the parchments in his lap so forcefully that they tore a little, and he had to physically force himself to remain seated, fighting his urge to jump up and do something. It was out of his hands now.

Soon the band stabilized at its normal temperature, but he couldn't be sure, not until someone told him…

There. Malfoy was walking towards him. Harry leapt to his feet, scattering the parchments heedlessly. Malfoy didn't have much of an expression, but that was a good thing, wasn't it? Even Malfoy would look

upset if he was about to tell someone their best friend was dead.

"He's going to be fine," Malfoy said once he'd reached Harry.

Harry let out a painful gasp of relief and, without thinking, flung his arms around Malfoy.

Malfoy stiffened but didn't push him away, and Harry was too happy to feel awkward. Still, Malfoy was obviously uncomfortable, so Harry released him after a few seconds and stepped back.

"Sorry," he said, a bit too cheerfully to be convincing.

Malfoy smoothed his robes out. "It happens. Occupational hazard."

Harry laughed as he imagined throngs of relieved relatives assaulting Malfoy with hugs. He felt a little giddy. "Hermione! I've got to tell Hermione. I'm surprised she isn't here yet." He was going to kill Jones if he hadn't told Robards.

"Granger? She is here. She's with Weasley right now."

"But I didn't see her come in -"

"Well, she wouldn't come through casualty, would she? She Flooed straight to the Healers' lounge. Much faster."

"Right. Of course." Harry took a deep breath and looked Malfoy in the eye. "Thank you. For everything."

"I didn't really do anything," Malfoy said.

"Yes, you did. And I'm grateful." Harry held his hand out. It seemed a little silly to be offering a handshake when he'd been hugging Malfoy just a minute earlier, but it felt like the right thing to do.

After a moment's hesitation, Malfoy took Harry's hand and clasped it firmly. "You're welcome." Then he looked down, his eyebrows rising. "What happened to your wrist?"

Harry looked down as well; he'd forgotten all about the burn. "Oh, the band - it's how I knew Ron was in danger. It looks worse than it is."

"I'll be the judge of that," Malfoy said, releasing Harry's hand. "Sit down. This, at least, I can do something about."

Harry sat back in his chair. Malfoy sat next to him, holding Harry's injured wrist in one hand and pushing the band out of the way with the other. He drew his wand.

"Have you ever considered a warning system that doesn't give you first-degree burns?" Malfoy asked.

"It only burned me to get my attention," Harry said. He watched as Malfoy tapped the burn with his wand, murmuring under his breath. "If I hadn't been distracted, I would have noticed it getting warmer, and it never would have gotten to that point. Maybe I would have reached Ron sooner -"

"Just stop right there," Malfoy said, still intent on the rapidly fading burn. "I can sense the impending self-flagellation, and I'm telling you right now I won't stand for it. So don't even bother."

Harry fought a smile. "Okay."

Malfoy turned Harry's hand and healed the underside of his wrist, then let go. "Good as new."

The skin was as clear as if it had never been burned. "Thanks."

"How's your other arm?"

"It's fine," Harry said, realizing that his injuries hadn't given him a single twinge all night, not even when he'd carried Ron. "I think I'm ready to go back into the field."

"Not until your next appointment, you're not. I'll decide then if you're really as recovered as you think you are."

"Oh, so are you going to actually show up for that appointment, then?" Harry teased.

Malfoy regarded him with narrowed eyes, as if he was trying to decide whether the teasing was good-natured or not. Finally, he said, "I'll be there."

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"Make a fist and lift your arm straight out in front of you."

Harry obeyed, noting with pleasure that his left side remained completely pain-free.

"I'm going to put pressure on your arm," Malfoy said. "Resist it as much as you can, and tell me if it hurts."

Malfoy put his hand on Harry's bicep and pushed down - gently at first, then with more force. Harry had

no trouble keeping his arm up. Malfoy repeated the test a couple of times, pushing against Harry's elbow and then his hand, but Harry's arm remained firm. Not even a single moment of weakness.

"Told you I was healed," Harry said.

Malfoy rolled his eyes and removed his hand. "Well, I'm sure you'll forgive me for not taking you at your word, Mr. Self-Sacrifice. Give me your papers so I can sign them. It won't do you much good, though, with Weasley still convalescing."

Grinning, Harry pulled the folded parchment from his pocket and handed it to Malfoy. "They said he'll be ready in a few days."

"Mm-hmm." Malfoy smoothed the parchment out next to Harry on the examination table and leaned over to sign it. Unfortunately for Harry, Malfoy hadn't found it necessary to put his Healer's robes on for the appointment, and his arse hadn't gotten any less appealing since the last time Harry had caught a glimpse of it. "And are the two of you planning to continue taking turns sustaining life-threatening injuries? Should I expect to see you back in here next week?"

Harry jerked his eyes away from Malfoy's arse and tried to refocus. "God, I hope not," he said. Realizing how that might be interpreted, he hastily added, "I mean, because I like being in the field. Not because I don't want to see you. Because I don't. Er, that is, I don't not want to see you. I mean, I - I wouldn't mind seeing you…" He trailed off. "You're about to check me for a head injury again, aren't you?"

Malfoy's lips quirked. "I think that by now I'm familiar with the difference between the results of a head injury and simple inane Potter rambling - not that there's much to distinguish the two."

Harry couldn't stop a chuckle at that. A month ago, such a comment would have made him want to punch Malfoy in the face, but now he could tell Malfoy didn't mean it maliciously. Well, not completely maliciously.

"Thanks for this," Harry said, as Malfoy gave him back the signed parchment. "And thanks for getting me

better in time for the Beltane Ball."

"You actually go to that?" Malfoy asked, taken aback. "It doesn't seem like something you would approve of."

"Hey, everybody deserves a chance to let loose once a year. Are you going?"

"I don't know. My mother wants me to."

Harry hesitated, then said, "You do know that the whole thing revolves around a big huge bonfire, right?"

"So?"

"You're still afraid of fire."

Instead of getting huffy at the insinuation that he was anything less than perfect, Malfoy just sighed. "It's better than it used to be."

If nearly having a panic attack over a tiny wastebasket fire was better than it used to be, Harry didn't want to know how bad it had been.

"That's why my mother wants me to go," Malfoy said. "She thinks it'll cure my phobia - sort of an immersion thing."

"Could it?"

"Maybe." Malfoy leaned back against the counter. "It could also make it a million times worse."

Harry hopped off the exam table. "Want to know what I think?"

"Not particularly."

"I think you should go."

"Harry Potter, condoning risk-taking? I'm shocked."

"Listen, Malfoy," Harry said, stepping closer to him. "The war is over. It's been over for a long time. You don't have to live in fear anymore. You shouldn't. Every time you let your life be dictated by this fear, you're letting him win. Is that really what you want?"

Malfoy stared at him, speechless. Harry reached out and squeezed his shoulder briefly, then left before Malfoy could gather his wits.

And before he could wonder why he cared so much.

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As always, the Beltane Ball was a resounding success. Years ago, Hermione had suggested adding a fundraising component to the Ball in order to raise money for the rebuilding effort. Now the Ball generated thousands of Galleons every year for relief organizations.

An unintentional side effect of the fundraising was that people felt even more entitled to go absolutely mad. The normal restrictions on hallucinogenic potions were lifted for one night. Sex flowed as freely as alcohol; full-scale orgies weren't uncommon.

The Ball was always held in a wide-open field in the middle of nowhere - Harry was pretty sure it was the same place that had hosted the Quidditch World cup back when he was a teenager. The enormous, two-story bonfire took the place of honor at the center, surrounded by concentric rings of tents. Some were large, open pavilions with music, food, and drinks; others were smaller, closed tents that could be reserved by groups for private parties. Still others were simple one-room affairs that were rentable by the hour like Muggle motel rooms. Giddy witches and wizards thronged the grassy areas in between, moving from tent to tent with shouts of laughter and squeals of excitement.

Harry had been enjoying himself greatly at Seamus Finnegan's annual open-house - open-tent, more appropriately - but as the night wore on and the lust in the air grew more intense, he'd realized that he was the only person not coupled up. Accordingly, once Ron and Hermione left to make use of the rentable tents, Harry left as well. Beltane was the one night a year he didn't feel guilty or ashamed about having a one-night-stand, and he intended to take full advantage of that fact. He was in the mood for a blond tonight.

He'd only had a few drinks, since he wanted to actually be able to perform, and his blood hummed pleasantly as he strolled through the field in the general direction of the bonfire. A few likely-looking prospects caught his eye, but none inspired the mind-clouding lust he was craving, so he kept walking.

Before long, Harry reached the edge of the wards that kept the fire from accidentally spreading and drunken partygoers from trying to get close to it. He walked along the circle, enjoying the warmth and the way the flames bathed everything around them in a flattering golden light.

As he rounded the curve, Harry caught sight of a man standing by the fire. He was too far away for Harry to see him in any detail, but he could definitely see the gleam of the man's blond hair. Harry immediately chastised himself for the odd leaping sensation in his chest. He had no business getting excited at the prospect of seeing Malfoy, and there was no reason to think that the man was Malfoy, anyway. If Malfoy had come here at all, which was doubtful, he certainly wouldn't be standing so close to the bonfire.

Except, Harry saw as he drew closer, it was Malfoy.

Malfoy's skin was paler than usual and his body was stiff as a board. He looked like he was going to either bolt or pass out any second; he didn't even glance to the side when Harry stood next to him.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Malfoy said, his voice tight with stress.

"It's just that you look like you're about to be sick."

"I suppose that wouldn't be as bad as running away screaming, which is the course of action I'm currently considering."

"Why'd you come?"

Malfoy just shook his head. He still hadn't looked away from the fire, as if it were a dangerous beast that would attack if he took his eyes off it for even an instant.

"Hey," Harry said, gingerly resting his hand on Malfoy's shoulder. "These wards are ridiculously strong, you know. I helped put them up myself. Nothing short of an atomic blast is going to bring them down until the fire goes out."

"I don't know what that means."

"It doesn't matter. The important thing is that you're safe." Harry tugged his shoulder. After a few seconds of resistance, Malfoy gave in and turned to face him, and Harry let his hand drop. "Why'd you come?" he repeated.

"Because you were right."

Harry raised his eyebrows. "Can I get that in writing?"

"Don't hold your breath." Seemingly unable to help himself, Malfoy looked back over at the fire. "I never feel safe anymore. I haven't felt safe in…a long time." He looked at Harry then. "And I am so fucking tired of being afraid."

Malfoy was more angry than scared, now, and it was a good look on him. Some of the colour had returned to his cheeks, his eyes were fierce with determination, and the firelight flickering over his features gave him an otherworldly air.

Harry kissed him.

Malfoy made a startled squeak and lifted his hands to Harry's shoulders as if to push him away, but instead he fisted his hands in Harry's robe and kissed him back. Harry pulled him close and Malfoy pressed up against him, winding his arms around Harry's neck.

Harry groaned against Malfoy's mouth. He wanted to throw the man down on the grass and have him right here, but he had enough presence of mind left to know that Malfoy probably wouldn't appreciate that. He broke the kiss reluctantly and took Malfoy's hand.

"Come with me."

Malfoy followed him without a word, looking a little dazed. His lips were already swollen from the forcefulness with which Harry had kissed him.

Harry headed to the nearest unoccupied rental tent and tossed a few Galleons into the slot. The flap twitched open and Harry pulled Malfoy inside, barely pausing to close the tent back up before yanking Malfoy to him and picking up the kiss where it had left off.

Malfoy tasted as good as he smelled. Harry jerked the fastenings of Malfoy's robe open before pushing it

off his shoulders, moving his mouth to Malfoy's neck. He couldn't keep his hands and lips from moving constantly, desperately - he wanted to taste Malfoy everywhere, feel every part of him at once.

"Do you have any idea how much I've wanted this?" Harry growled as Malfoy helped him shrug his own robe off.

"I didn't until just now," Malfoy said, gasping when Harry ripped a few buttons off his shirt in his haste to get rid of it.

Malfoy let the ruined shirt drop to the floor, and Harry ran possessive hands over his warm, bare chest, rubbing his thumbs roughly over the nipples. "Last time, when you bent over to sign those forms…I wanted to take you right there over the table."

"That would have been very inappropriate." Malfoy's voice was flatteringly breathless.

Harry pulled his jumper over his head and tossed it aside, grabbing Malfoy by the hips and pushing his thigh between Malfoy's legs. "You're not my Healer anymore," he said. "And I, for one, plan to celebrate my recovery by fucking you until your eyes cross. Any objections?"

Malfoy answered him with a rough kiss that had just as much teeth in it as tongue. They stumbled further into the tent until Malfoy bumped against the back of a sofa, and Harry figured that was just as good a place as any. He gave Malfoy one final kiss before turning him around and pushing him forward to lean over the couch.

Not wanting to waste time fumbling with clothes anymore, Harry Summoned his wand from his fallen robe and cast a divestment spell on Malfoy - the same one that had served him so well while he hadn't been able to use his arm. The rest of Malfoy's clothes disappeared from his body, landing in a heap not far away.

"Potter!" Malfoy yelped. "A little warning would have been nice."

Harry ignored him, distracted by the splendour of his naked body. He ran his hands down Malfoy's back to the delicious arse that had tormented him for weeks. Without thought, Harry dropped to his knees, spread Malfoy's cheeks, and pressed a hungry kiss against his hole.

"Potter! What did I just say about warning - oh, fuck -"

Usually, Harry liked to draw this kind of thing out, teasing his lovers with little nibbles and licks, but he was too desperate for the taste of Malfoy to play around. He gave Malfoy's hole one pass with the flat of his tongue before pushing inside, loving the way Malfoy immediately moaned and spread his legs for more.

Harry obliged, fucking Malfoy with his tongue so hard that his jaw quickly started to ache. He barely noticed; the only thing he cared about was getting as deep as he could and making Malfoy shake with pleasure.

"Merlin, stop, stop, I want you to fuck me before I come…"

Harry drew back, unable to resist giving Malfoy's arse a sharp nip before rising to his feet. He pulled a small tube of lubricant from his pocket and pushed his trousers and pants down around his thighs, eager to get some relief for his aching cock. Quickly slicking himself, he dropped the tube, holding Malfoy's hip to steady him as he slid inside.

He'd meant to go slowly, give Malfoy some time to adjust, but the second the head of his cock breached Malfoy's hole, he was lost. Harry groaned and slammed his hips forward, filling Malfoy completely with one stroke. Malfoy gasped and arched his back, more in approval than in protest.

It seemed Malfoy wanted it as rough as Harry did, so Harry didn't hold back. He tightened his grip on Malfoy's hips and gave it to him hard, his hipbones knocking bruisingly against Malfoy's arse, and Malfoy rocked back against him in encouragement.

It wasn't enough. Malfoy's breath was coming in sharp staccato pants, and every now and then he'd let out a soft moan, but Harry wanted to hear him scream. He lifted Malfoy's hips up a little, changing the angle, and was rewarded with a small cry.

"There?" he asked.

Malfoy's response was completely incoherent, which Harry supposed was answer enough. He kept thrusting, trying to hit the same spot over and over, and Malfoy made a desperate sobbing noise as he clawed at the back of the couch.

Harry only stopped himself from coming at that through iron force of will, and he wouldn't be able to delay it much longer. He picked up the pace, snapping his hips so forcefully that he lifted Malfoy up on his toes with every thrust. A part of him thought that he should probably reach around and give Malfoy some assistance, but he couldn't bring himself to let go.

Besides, Harry realized, Malfoy was taking care of that himself - he'd braced himself against the couch with one hand while he wanked himself with the other. His constant, frantic cries made Harry's stomach clench with impossible lust.

Without warning, Malfoy came violently, his entire body shuddering as his arse clamped down around Harry's cock. Harry shouted and gave one final, brutal thrust, spilling himself deep inside.

Malfoy slumped over the back of the couch and Harry slumped over him. Neither of them made a move to uncouple themselves.

After a minute or so, when they had started to catch their breath, Malfoy said, "I can't believe you fucked me here when there's a bed not three metres away."

Harry laughed and kissed the back of his neck. "Give me a few minutes, and I'll fuck you anywhere you want."

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Three Months Later

"Are you okay?"

"My mother's getting remarried, Potter," Draco said. "It's not exactly the end of the world - although of course I'd rather my parents had stayed together."

Actually, that hadn't been what Harry was referring to at all, but if Draco hadn't noticed the eight million candles Narcissa had strewn about the gardens of Fairfax Manor, Harry certainly wasn't going to draw attention to them.

"Well, try not to roll your eyes during the ceremony," he said.

Draco huffed in mock-offense. "I would never."

"Are you sure it's okay for me to sit in the front row?"

"Yes. Mother wants you there. I want you there. If I'm to stand beside her, I'll need somewhere to look besides that horribly insipid Fairfax."

"All right. As long as you're sure."

Draco took Harry's face in his hands, suddenly serious. "Harry. I'm sure."

Harry kissed him, then pulled him into a hug, breathing in the delicious scent that had turned out to be Draco's shampoo, after all. He stepped back before he could start getting excited; an erection was not appropriate at one's boyfriend's mother's wedding. "You should probably go and get your mum. I think they're ready to start."

Draco squeezed his hand and gave him one final kiss before heading back towards the house. Harry watched him walk for a few seconds, then took his seat in the front row of chairs set up on the lawn.

The ceremony was absolutely beautiful; Harry hadn't expected anything less from Narcissa Black. The light from the candles enhanced her happy glow, and Fairfax was obviously enchanted. But Harry only had eyes for Draco, who stood serenely next to his mother, as graceful and poised as ever.

And when a sudden gust of wind made the candle flames flare and leap up, Draco didn't even flinch.