HAPPY H/D HOLIDAYS, FIREFLAVORED!

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Title: Do Me a Favor, Don't Do Me No Favors

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

Summary: To get where he is now, Harry's had lots of help, for which he's always been grateful. But that's not what it looks like to everyone else. And what about this saving the day compulsion? Teddy, Andromeda, Charlie Weasley and Draco Malfoy don't have the answers, but they do help Harry ask the right questions.

Rating: NC17ish

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Warning(s): None

Epilogue compliant? Hell no.

Word Count: 12.5K

Author's Notes: I love the mods, my betas and my recipient more than life itself. Fire, I think I've got most of your prompt in here, but I couldn't find a way for them to share a cigarette – sorry! Instead, I've got them sharing sweeties, insults and body fluid - hope that's okay. Title (and its spelling) taken from the song "Thank You", by Jay-Z.

Despite his familiarity with the Hospital Wing at Hogwarts, Harry hadn't spent much time in St Mungo's, and he found the labyrinthine building somewhat difficult to navigate. Particularly when leading an errant six-year-old Teddy by the hand, who insisted in stopping to investigate any open doorway and talk to anyone passing them in the corridor.

Andromeda Tonks was housed in the Orthopaedic Ward; that term, at least, mirrored the Muggle equivalent, and Teddy "oohed" and "ahhed" whenever he spotted a nearby patient suspended in traction or sporting a cast. Harry had lost count of the number of times the boy had asked "Did it hurt?" of some unfortunate soul who was unable to move fast enough to evade them as they made their way to Andromeda's room.

Thankfully, most patients were accommodating, either to the little boy or the hero whose hand he held, and happily stopped their slow progress along the hall – usually in the company of a physiotherapist – to make small talk.

What seemed an eternity after they'd arrived, bought the boiled sweets and flowers in the gift shop, located Andromeda's ward and handed in Harry's wand at the Healer's station, the two arrived at her bedside.

Teddy exuberantly ran to his grandmother's side, tossing the bag of sweets on the bed as he did, but stopped short at Harry's curt warning not to jump into her lap, as her hip was still being repaired. Teddy became distracted by the curious-looking bottle of Skele-Gro on her night stand and quickly set about quizzing Andromeda about how the potion worked and if her new hip would be as good as the last one, seeing as that one hadn't worked well enough to keep her from tumbling down the stairs. Teddy reminded his grandmother that he was very familiar with tumbling down them, and sat enrapt as Andromeda explained the nature of aging and osteoporosis.

After the obligatory kiss on the cheek, Harry had backed away from Andromeda with the intention of sitting down and maybe catching up on the Quidditch scores if someone had been kind enough to bring in and leave that day's paper.

"Flowers for me? Potter, you shouldn't have," drawled a voice from behind Harry. He turned quickly, the hand still holding the colourful bouquet instinctively reaching up his other sleeve to extract the wand which, for the moment, wasn't there. Once he saw the smirking face of Draco Malfoy sitting in the room's only chair, Harry swiftly halted the movement and tried to cover it by folding his arms across his chest. This had the unfortunate effect of crushing the bright chrysanthemums, and their colourful petals rained down onto Harry's trainers.

"Perhaps not any more," Draco deadpanned, eyeing the near-destroyed bouquet.

"Just put those over here, dear," Andromeda called from the bed, indicating the night-stand. "I'll ask one of the nurses to put them in water for me."

“I picked them out!” Teddy enthusiastically informed them. “Oh, hi, Draco!” He crossed from the bedside to his cousin's chair. “Hug,” he ordered, holding out his arms. Harry was shocked to see Draco reach out long arms and surround the child with them.

“You’re getting so tall, Teddy,” Draco commented. “Pretty soon you’ll be wearing Pot – Harry’s clothes.” Draco looked directly at Harry as he spoke. Teddy didn’t see the smirk directed at Harry, his face buried in his cousin’s shoulder, but the expression didn’t go unnoticed by Harry. Or Andromeda.

“Draco,” she said, but she smiled through the warning.

“What are you doing here, Malfoy?” Harry asked, idly brushing blossoms off his chest and leaning in what he hoped was a casual manner against the opposite wall.

If Draco noted the intentional use of his surname, he maddeningly made no indication of it. “Same as you, visiting,” was the unhelpful reply.

“Narcissa has just nipped out to speak to one of the Healers, Harry dear. Draco was good enough to accompany her today,” Andromeda clarified. That made more sense to Harry, who’d been sceptical of the simple response he’d had from Draco.

“We got you something else, Nanna!” Teddy exclaimed, noticing again the sweetie bag he’d thrown aside so haphazardly when they’d first entered the room. Luckily it hadn’t fallen anywhere near Andromeda’s sheet-covered body, which therefore escaped being grabbed and yanked around. “These are my favourites!” he shouted. As if anyone in the room needed reminding. Teddy loved any kind of sweets, all of which became his “favourites” the instant he tried anything new. Harry tried to take the bag from him before the sweets went the way of the flower petals. “I can do it!” Teddy said loudly, and snatched the bag away from Harry's outstretched hand.

“Teddy…” warned the three adults in the room, and the little boy laughed and looked from face to face. Harry, Andromeda and Draco all smiled despite themselves, evidently united by scolding bad behaviour. Harry briefly wondered if Malfoy had ever had anyone scold him for

doing the same. As unlikely as it might have been – knowing what he did of Malfoy's upbringing – bad manners were bad manners in almost every household. Perhaps his mother had instilled in him a better appreciation of acceptable behaviour than his father.

Harry was startled out of this somewhat bizarre train of thought by Teddy thrusting a sweet under his nose. "Here, Harry – it's your favourite flavour, lemon!"

Harry bent down to get closer to Teddy's eye level. "Thank you very much, Teddy. But have you asked your grandmother if it's okay to share her sweets? She may have wanted them all to herself." Harry cast a sidelong glance at Draco as he spoke and saw him roll his eyes in disgust at Harry's words. Obviously the underlying message in the comment hadn't been lost on him.

"It's okay, Teddy. Please make sure everyone gets one," Andromeda said graciously.

Harry obligingly took the sweet from Teddy, who demanded the shiny foil paper be returned to him once Harry had opened it. "For my collection," he announced cryptically.

"Of course," Harry said, handing back the wrapper and popping the sweet into his mouth. Immediately he realised he'd done a very, very stupid thing. The sweet shot into his windpipe and he began coughing violently. His hands went to his throat and his eyes began to water.

"Hold on, Harry! Hold on!" Teddy shouted, sounding terrified but determined. The boy stood on his toes, his brown hair turning a sober yet determined shade of blue, and attempted to slap Harry on the back. Although slightly bent at the waist, Harry was still not positioned correctly for the little boy to reach him properly: it was clear that even if he had been able to slap Harry in the centre of his back, Teddy's little arms didn't have the strength necessary to dislodge the sweet from Harry's throat.

Through the tears, Harry could see Andromeda juggling the call-wand in an attempt to summon a nurse, but she fumbled it. Harry knew her own wand was locked away at the Healer's station, along with all the other patients' and those of their visitors.

His coughing changed to a high-pitched wheeze as his vision started to blur, his throat felt like fire and he began to feel increasingly light-headed. Bizarrely, Harry’s only clear thought in the midst of all the frenzied gasping and accompanying activity, was to envision what would no doubt be tomorrow's ignoble newspaper headline: Saviour of the Wizarding World Slain by Pear Drop.

Just before his vision completely greyed out, he saw Draco stand and then move slowly towards him as if walking under water. Stupidly, Harry once again tried to reach for his wand…

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Harry came to slumped in a chair. He coughed weakly, stomach and chest muscles taut and burning with pain.

"There we go, told you he'd be just fine in a tick. How do you feel, Harry?" Harry didn't recognise the female voice.

He reached up and scrubbed his eyes, vaguely aware that his glasses were missing. He tried to focus, but saw only colourful shapes. And his head hurt. "Like an idiot," he croaked finally. Someone handed him his glasses, and he shoved them onto his face. Narcissa Malfoy swam into focus and Harry was immediately wrong-footed. He turned and looked around wildly. “Teddy?”

“Draco has taken him out of the room. He’ll be all right,” Narcissa assured him in a calm voice. Harry wished he had her self-control. He was just about ready to jump out of the chair.

A green-clad Healer stepped into Harry’s field of vision and passed a wand over the upper part of Harry’s torso. “All better, Mr Potter? You’ve probably already noticed the amount of adrenalin flooding your system. Take it easy for a few minutes before getting up to let that settle. You’re also going to have a raging sore throat for a while – as ridiculous as this may sound, sucking on a cough sweet might help the pain.”

The Healer smiled at the incredulous look Harry shot her, then turned to smile at the Black

sisters before leaving the room. A moment later, Teddy returned, his little hand folded into Draco's. His other hand clutched a fistful of sweet wrappers. The boy's cheeks looked tear-stained and his eyes were puffy.

Draco glanced at Harry before releasing Teddy, who ran halfway to Harry's chair. The boy seemed reluctant to come any nearer, however, even though Harry was holding out a hand to him.

Teddy shrank back towards Draco and Harry scowled until Narcissa stepped forward and placed a hand on Teddy's shoulder. "It's all right, Teddy. Harry's fine. He just needed to sit down for a moment. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Teddy looked from Narcissa to Harry and then ran to the chair. Harry embraced the youngster, offering Narcissa a grateful expression.

Suddenly Teddy giggled and the tension in the room lifted. "Ha ha, Harry, you did the same thing you always tell me not to do! You coughed up your food! Did I help? I helped, didn't I, by pounding you on the back?" Teddy bounced on his heels and smiled as wide as he could.

"Yes, Teddy, you did help me." Harry gave the boy another hug.

"The phrase you're looking for, Potter, is thank you," Draco said from the other side of the room.

Harry's eyes shot towards him and he glared. It wasn't clear whether Draco had meant that Harry should be thanking Teddy or him, but Harry chose to interpret the comment in the more selfish context. Making sure he had Draco's complete attention, Harry looked back at the six-year-old and said "Thank you for helping me catch my breath, Teddy." He chanced a look back at Draco, who only rolled his eyes.

Narcissa wisely interpreted the exchange as her chance to make an exit. Stooping towards Teddy, she placed her hand on his shoulder again, mumbled something about his being a hero,

and then stood and bade farewell to both Harry and her sister. Draco gave Andromeda a curt goodbye and ruffled Teddy’s hair on his way out, pausing only long enough to smirk in Harry’s direction.

Harry and Teddy stayed long enough to ensure Harry was fully recovered. Andromeda told them that the Healer had assured her she wouldn’t be in hospital for too long and would soon be back on her feet, and they promised to visit again.

Harry left with Teddy in tow after the last, last, final hug and kiss goodbye, feeling slightly cross. It was a bizarre hard-to-identify feeling, as though he’d lost a duel with a ghost or a portrait or some other entity which couldn’t possibly have done him any harm.

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“Harry, have you said anything to Draco yet?” Andromeda asked. Harry was visiting her and Teddy at their house two weeks later, following her release from St Mungo's.

Harry chose to ignore her, busying himself by filling the tea pot.

Teddy came in and tugged at his jumper. “Biscuits?”

Harry smiled down at the boy and handed him a packet of Digestives he found next to the tea things. Teddy scampered away with them.

“Did you hear me, Harry?” Andromeda called again from the dining room.

Harry joined her and placed two steaming mugs onto the table. “Yes, I heard you and no, I haven’t spoken to Malfoy.” He covered his irritation at the turn of the conversation by concentrating on adding an extra dollop of milk into his tea.

“Harry!” Andromeda admonished. “After what he did for you? The least you could do is thank him.”

Harry averted his eyes and shuffled his feet under the table. “I promise I’ll send him an owl today, okay?”

“An owl?” Andromeda asked with a scandalised tone. “For saving your life? You’ll do no such thing. You’ll go over to his house and thank him properly.”

Luckily, Teddy’s crumb-covered appearance at the table stopped the conversation momentarily. “Can I have a sip of your tea, Harry?”

Harry had been expecting this, precipitating the need to add extra milk. He handed his mug to the boy, who slurped at it.

“Please,” Andromeda implored. “I really thought something terrible was going to happen to you, Harry, and I couldn’t bear to think about that. Not with so many others…” She didn’t finish the thought. “And with Teddy there and me, me being stuck in that blasted bed… He saved your life, Harry, and you know it. He deserves better than an owl.”

“I’ve saved his life before. He’s never said thank you to me.” The minute Harry spoke, he cringed, wondering just how many six-year olds there were in the room.

Teddy smushed a biscuit into Harry’s hand. Harry carefully placed the remains on the table. “You should go and visit Draco, Harry,” Teddy said. “He looked…” Teddy’s eyes scanned the ceiling. He was obviously looking for just the right word.

“Cross?” Harry prompted.

Teddy laughed. “No. Um…”

“Smug?”

“What’s smug?”

“It wasn’t smug, darling,” Andromeda said. “He looked, well, bored, actually. I think poor Narcissa is at her wits' end trying to entertain him. And I know Just. How. She. Feels.” Andromeda smiled brightly and punctuated these last four words with pinches to Teddy’s cheek, elbow, shoulder and tummy. The little boy giggled, showing off the remnants of a half-chewed Digestive.

Harry let the boy settle before speaking. “Bored? How could he be bored? He’s still got the house, his family; I hear he’s training to be – er – something or other –”

“Potions, I believe it is. Apothecary? He’s tried to explain it to me, but I couldn’t follow him. But, Harry, he has no friends. And his family, well, they’re his family. And you should appreciate his situation, although you’re a special case, of course: being the only child, especially in that family, can’t be easy.”

Immediately, Harry bristled. How dare she say such a thing? He was an only child too, dammit. Harry felt the sting of tears but blinked them away sharply, thinking of Teddy. The little boy wouldn’t understand any excessive emotional response, and Andromeda truly did have a point.

Even Dudley, who should have been an only child, wasn’t – although it was clear the Dursleys treated him as the only child in their care. Moving from them to the bosom of the Weasleys had allowed Harry to have the large loving family he’d always craved, but the true single-child experience would elude him forever. It was both a blessing and a curse.

“It’s not your fault, Harry, I would never suggest that. But think about Draco. Used by his

parents all those years…”

Harry found it hard to empathise. He’d been abused by his guardians. And Malfoy having his every whim catered to, even if he were a tool of the adults around him at the time, couldn’t have been too big a hardship.

With some effort, Harry tried to put away such dark thoughts. He shouldn’t be comparing himself to that git. From their births, through their days at school, to their current circumstances, they were nothing alike.

Except they were. Harry was bored too. He loved having Teddy around, but in between that and Auror training – which was hardly ennui-inducing – he had nothing but time on his hands. Time to sit and think about his past. His future he couldn’t see since he never expected to have one, and as a consequence, never thought to anticipate or dream of one.

Just as Harry valued visits from his friends, so might Malfoy. Even if Harry weren’t his friend, it might be better than nothing at all. And deep down, Harry knew Andromeda was right; he should say something to Malfoy. As embarrassing and ridiculous an experience it had been – nothing like rescuing someone from Fiendfyre or saving them from a megalomaniac set on genocide – Malfoy should still get some acknowledgement for what he’d done.

“I’ll go and visit him,” Harry grudgingly promised Andromeda. He bit into the biscuit, hoping it might sweeten his mood.

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Harry couldn’t have felt more self-conscious if he’d tried. He’d gauchely thanked the house-elf for the drinks and cake, clumsily accepted the cup of tea in the posh china cup from Narcissa Malfoy, and now sat nervously wondering how long it would be before he spilled everything onto what he was sure was a priceless oriental rug.

After telling Harry how nice it was for Draco to have him visiting the Manor and watching Draco turn three shades of red, Narcissa had, thankfully, left the boys to themselves, only

slightly lowering the level of shared embarrassment.

“I…er…” Harry started. “Malfoy—”

“Draco.”

Harry’s teacup wobbled.

“You might as well call me that.” Draco’s face looked as pinched as his mother’s had when Harry had first seen her sitting with her family at the Quidditch World Cup. Harry was pretty certain Draco was just minding his manners and held no real desire for Harry to start addressing him by his Christian name.

“I’d rather not,” replied Harry, ratcheting up the uneasiness factor another notch.

“Suit yourself,” Draco said, clearly nonplussed by Harry’s response.

Harry features softened slightly. “It’s nothing personal, Malfoy,” he said. “It would just feel…weird.” There was no other way of describing it.

“Probably right,” Draco concurred. “So, Potter, to what do I owe this visit? Your owl didn’t say much.”

Harry steeled himself. He tried very hard to forget his nerves and the cost of the china cup in his hand. “I thought I should come over to tell you…you…for the…thing…at the hospital.” Harry managed to blurt out this incoherent thought without any expression in his voice and making no eye-contact whatsoever.

Draco appeared confused for a moment. “What? The hospital?” Then his expression changed

to one of understanding. “Oh, that! It was nothing.” He finally took a sip of his tea. With practised ease, Harry noted.

Then Harry digested the words.

“What do you mean nothing?” He was indignant. “It wasn’t nothing, it was something!” Again with the toddler-speak, he realised a fraction of a minute too late. “I mean, it was important to me. At the time, I mean.” Merlin, could he sound any more of a tit if he tried? Why the fuck did this happen to him whenever he said more than two words to Draco Malfoy? “I’m trying to say thank you, you pillock! Why do you have to spoil everything? I can’t say anything around you without getting some snide comment back.”

For a moment, Draco simply gaped at Harry. Then the sneer was back with a vengeance. “Potter, I thought if I made a big deal out of it, I would embarrass you. But now you're upset because I’m too unaccepting of your gratitude?" He narrowed his eyes. "Or is it really gratitude? I think you just can't bear not to play the hero. That's it, isn't it? People shouldn’t be saving you because you’re Harry Potter, the Saviour of Everyone Else. "

Harry glared, daring him to go on.

Which he did, sensing he’d touched a nerve. “If we need someone, Harry Potter will always be there, whether it’s him you need or not. Harry Potter, our Hero.”

Draco paused, but by now Harry was too angry to formulate even an incoherent response.

“The Hero maybe, but perhaps not the brilliant student. Or the perfect boyfriend…" Draco goaded him.

Harry made fists with his hands.

"Yes, news of your girlfriend's love-life found its way even to us out here in the countryside. Leave you for someone she could actually do things with? Or did she try to do nice things for you and got the same response as I just did? Bet that was it."

Harry began to see red.

"No one can win with you, Potter, and I certainly don't stand a chance, do I? Me, who'd never shown you a kindness in nearly the entire time we were at school," Draco said, his voice rising in pitch and volume. "I do something heroic for a change and all I get is abuse. It wasn't a hardship, I'll have you know. Do you always give this much grief to people who help you? A simple owl saying as much would have sufficed – "

"I knew it!" Harry bellowed.

"And, you know, I didn't think twice before getting up to help you. But I'm beginning to wish I had. There, does that make it any easier?!" Draco petulantly slumped back into the chair and sloshed hot tea all over himself in the process. "OW!"

Harry was on his feet and had his wand drawn before he realised what he was doing. "Evanesco!"

The tea vanished from Draco's shirt leaving the garment in its usual pristine condition. "Thank you," Draco said, sneering.

"Whatever." Harry made for the door before either of them could say anything else.

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Mrs Black's customary outburst only served to heighten Harry's bitter mood as he walked into his house. He unwound his scarf, draped it and his coat over the sofa in the sitting room and stalked into the kitchen. Harry turned around, looking aimlessly around at the fridge, the stove, the bowl of pears, unsure as to why he'd even come into the room. He turned and

skulked back into the front room. He threw himself onto the worn velveteen sofa and glowered at the bare wall.

How was it that no matter how hard he tried, and after everything he'd achieved, half an hour with Malfoy still made him feel like a graceless unmannered adolescent? Then again, it had been Malfoy who'd spilled his tea all over himself. And, now that he thought about it, Malfoy never remained terribly poised or well-mannered in Harry's presence, either. Obviously even the arrival of a new era of peace and tolerance had had little effect on the behaviour of either of them; they might be older, but they certainly weren't any wiser.

Well, fuck Malfoy.

In a manner of speaking.

Mostly.

Harry stretched out his legs, placed his feet on the ancient coffee table and considered how easy it was to be around the people who loved him. He still had his friends and they, at least, appreciated him. They knew how he felt about them, even if he did occasionally forget to tell them; his gratitude was expressed in his actions.

Like that Sunday not long ago, when that small kitchen fire had broken out in the Weasleys' house whilst Molly was carrying the platter of roast potatoes to the table. Hadn't Harry drawn his wand, leapt around George and put out the fire before anyone had been hurt or any damage had been done to the house?

What about the time Hermione's parents had been stuck in Tullamarine Airport after visiting some friends in Melbourne? Hadn't Harry Floo'd to her side and helped Hermione get them home safely?

If we need someone, Harry Potter will always be there, whether it’s him you need or not. Malfoy’s words shouldered their way back into Harry’s head as it drooped desultorily onto his

chest.

Suddenly Harry's head snapped up; he stared at the ceiling without really seeing it. What had he just been thinking before?

…leapt around George…

George. Who, now that Harry thought about it, had also drawn his wand and had also been rushing to his mother's aid. Who was more a part of the Weasley family than Harry would ever be. Who now spent more time at the Burrow in an effort to assuage his mother's grief, but who still often appeared at a loss and out-of-sorts.

And what of his hasty trip to Melbourne? He'd gone without thinking when Hermione had Floo-called Ron late one Friday night not long ago. Harry hadn't asked Hermione if she needed his help. She and Ron were his mates; of course they would need him! But Hermione and Ron weren't just mates now, were they? And perhaps Hermione hadn't needed two people to help get her parents back to the UK during the airline strike. In fact, hadn't Hermione suggested that Harry and Ron stay for a while in order to have a nice break from English weather? After a short time in the Australian sunshine, though, it had become clear that Ron and Hermione's idea of a "having a nice break" was more like a "having a dirty weekend", and Harry had Floo'd home alone only a few hours after arriving.

Bloody hell. Maybe Malfoy…Was there a chance Malfoy was right?

No one had ever told Harry they didn't need him when he'd run to their rescue. And certainly the Press and the Ministry were still singing his praises from pillar to post. Harry didn't pay them any attention these days, of course, but he wasn't deaf to the whispers in the Ministry halls when his Auror training took him there, and still had to thwart a number of paparazzi when he ventured into Diagon Alley.

But did he honestly have a complex about saving people? And, if that were the case, could that be why he had trouble accepting the help of others? Or was it just Malfoy Harry had

trouble with?

Well, of course he'd have trouble with Malfoy. When didn't he have trouble with Malfoy?

Harry pulled off his jumper and threw it onto the seat next to him. Why did it feel so warm in here?

In rare moments of reflection, Harry felt his life had always been directed, dictated by fate and – although guided by his choices – he'd never felt he had much say when it really mattered. Sure, he chose his actions, but from birth he'd served but one purpose. His friends and even his enemies had all had a part in shaping his future and how far it would go. But even now, people rarely acknowledged any of his other achievements save those related to the destruction of Voldemort. It had come to the point that Harry didn't know what he was capable of on his own, when no one needed him. When his choices and his life were his and his alone.

Harry sulked for a while, brooding once again over the lack of any kind of father figure to talk to. He wished fervently that Dumbledore or Remus were here now. They might have made understanding himself an easier process. Having said that, even they, like the Dursleys, had contributed to making him what people still thought of him as today, the Boy Hero.

But his friends? They'd been different. And they, it seemed, had grown up. Yet here he was, still feeling like a petulant teenager.

That would be Malfoy's influence, Harry assured himself. Only Malfoy could get him worked up like this. He'd managed not to feel this way in his entire twenty-three years of life, blithely accepting the acclaim and rushing off to rescue damsels in distress.

But now he just felt…stupid. How could he have been so introspectively blind? All his life, Harry had worn his heart on his sleeve; everyone knew where they stood with him. Except him. He realised with a sinking sensation that he didn't know himself at all.

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“I still can’t believe you agreed to this, Malfoy,” Harry said, his breath blowing warm plumes into the frigid air. He watched as Draco’s eyes followed the clouds issuing from his mouth. Was it his imagination, or was Malfoy watching him closely today? Maybe he was worried one of them might do something stupid again. Given their history that was likely, particularly in light of their current undertaking.

“Why?” Draco answered in his usual defensive tone. “I like Teddy. He is family, after all.” Malfoy finished tying the laces on his skates and pulled his wool trousers down to cover them. Harry watched, not too closely, of course, fascinated by Draco’s undertaking of such a Muggle activity.

As part of his parole Draco wasn’t allowed to use magic in the Muggle world, and Teddy had insisted in skating in a Muggle park, just like Paddington Bear had in one of his books. Andromeda was planning to charm her boots to slide safely along the ice, as well as doing the same for Teddy if he was finding the skates too challenging. Harry had taken pity on Draco, and agreed to skate with him in the Muggle fashion. Luckily, the park wasn’t far from Grimmauld Place and the small pond wasn’t too full of skaters at the moment.

They had agreed it was best not to cast any Disillusionment Charms in the (very likely) event that they crashed into someone. It would be disconcerting indeed for a skating Muggle to be knocked down by an invisible force; best to let them see the clumsy boy who fell into them. In keeping with that logic, Teddy had been warned to stick to one naturally-occurring hair colour. Much to Harry’s amusement, the little boy now sported the same shade of locks as any number of Weasleys.

“You know how to skate, right?” Harry couldn’t resist teasing Draco and -- he hoped -- adding to his already questionable mood; Harry had noticed Draco’s expression in response to Teddy’s hair. Although Harry knew he would soon be eating his words, since it would shortly be glaringly obvious that, aside from one foray onto a rink during an outing in Year Six at primary school, he’d never once set foot on the ice. At present, he stood with one hand safely glued to a thin tree as he wobbled at the edge of the pond.

“Of course I can skate, Potter,” Draco said indignantly. “I can skate and ski. I am

accomplished in most winter sports, in fact."

Harry, tired of Draco's over-long preparations, leaned down, grabbed one of Draco's arms through his heavy winter coat, and hauled him to his feet. Draco flailed his arms and immediately grabbed hold of the front of Harry's parka, threatening to pull them both over. Harry grasped Draco's gloved hands to stabilise him, until he realised what he was doing and dropped his own hands to his sides.

"Bloody hell, Potter," Draco grumbled as he finally righted himself and made a show of releasing Harry with a very contemptuous expression.

They stood at the edge of the lake and watched as Andromeda led a wobbling Teddy onto the ice.

"Right, let's go. Can't hang about all day." Harry took a brazen step forward; he overbalanced and took another quick step onto his other skate to compensate. Windmilling his arms, he made contact with Draco's coat again, and this time held on for dear life.

That had the unfortunate effect of pulling Draco across the short expanse of ice between them. He, in turn, grasped hold of Harry's parka, and it was clasped together like this that they staggered towards Teddy and Andromeda.

"Let go, you idiot!" Draco growled, although he didn't release his hold of Harry's coat. Then he added quietly, "You're going to pull us both over."

Harry watched as Draco looked around, probably wondering how many people had seen them stumbling across the ice together like some parody of an ice dancing routine. Too late, both boys realised they'd been rumbled; Teddy was pointing at them and laughing so hard his little legs were about to give way and he, too, was going to end up in the state Harry and Draco were just barely avoiding. Regrettably, Teddy's actions did exactly what Harry reckoned Draco was fervently trying to avoid – all eyes on the ice turned towards them.

“Shit,” Harry swore, as his ankle twisted under him. Draco hauled him upright. “Thanks,” Harry said in an offhand manner, not even realising what he’d said.

“Don’t flatter yourself, Potter, I wasn’t doing it to help you. If you fall over, I will too.” Draco steadied them both by gripping Harry around the shoulders.

Harry tried not to read anything into that and then mentally slapped himself for even thinking there was anything to read into the gesture. Much to Draco’s obvious displeasure – as it made them wobble even more – Harry carefully turned to survey their progress from the bank. About fifteen feet. At this rate Teddy, aged six and on skates for the first time, was going to make it across the entire pond in the time it would take them to go thirty feet.

“I thought you said you knew how to skate, Malfoy,” Harry accused. He took another shaky step.

Draco, still plastered to his side and gripping his shoulder, had no choice but to follow. His foot slipped and his face buried itself in Harry’s hair as he hissed, “I know how to Wizard skate. I don’t know how to skate like a Muggle.”

Harry pretended it was the chill in the air that made him shiver. Luckily righteous anger overran nascent feelings of...what? Something he couldn’t place – although a stirring deep in his chest threatened to remind him. “You picked the perfect time to make that distinction, Malfoy!” He shook his head, trying to regain his game face.

"Oh please, Potter. Like you're such an expert." Draco attempted to stand back from Harry in order to point out how poorly Harry was managing to remain upright. Sadly, no sooner had he released Harry's shoulder than both boys toppled over onto the ice with a thud. Teddy's squealing, mocking laughter filtered across the pond and his ginger hair got a shade brighter.

Several concerned Muggles skated towards them and extended helpful hands, but Harry shook them off. He stood shakily and waited with as detached an air as possible while Draco used several parts of his body as handholds to pull himself upright. Harry pretended not to care

and instead took stock of their surroundings.

They were now about twenty feet from the bank, still a good distance from the opposite side, from which Teddy and Andromeda were making their way steadily in their direction. Harry waved at them and little Teddy laughed again.

"Potter, what are you doing? Do you want him to see you like this?" Draco grabbed Harry's arm and they haltingly began sliding forwards.

"Like what? I can't skate, Malfoy. I never said I could. But I love my godson, and if it means one afternoon of looking –" Harry glanced down at his arm and Draco's death grip on it, "– and feeling uncomfortable, then I'm willing to do it for him. What's your excuse? Or did you just come in the hopes of skating with someone next to whom you'd look like an expert? Although I must say, you planned that poorly, didn't you?"

They both looked away from each other to discover that whilst having this little discussion, they'd inadvertently strayed from their intended path towards the oncoming flame-haired Teddy, and instead were headed directly into the evergreen bushes that lined the pond.

If their abrupt change of direction worried him, Draco gave no notice. Maybe because he was too busy being Draco Malfoy. "That's complete crap, Potter. I do look like an expert next to you." He smirked at Harry, then suddenly yanked him towards the ground, only this time they didn't stop at the ice. There was an enormous crack and the bottom half of Draco disappeared into the frigid water. Harry grabbed his arm just as Draco doubled the strength of his grip on Harry's arm.

"Hold on, Malfoy!" Harry shouted, although he felt anything but sturdy enough to anchor them both. "Let me go for a moment and I'll pull you out." He tried to sound calm, noting the panic in Draco's face. Harry realised then that he didn't even know if Draco could swim. Although, if memory served, swimming in water this cold, whether diving after a sword or simply falling in by accident, was no easy thing; at this temperature, even if he could swim, he wouldn't be doing so for long.

Harry flattened himself onto his stomach on the ice and caught Draco under the arms. He pulled as hard as he could, but the weight of Draco's soaked clothing was enormous, and it took all Harry's strength just to pull Draco's shoulders clear. By this time Andromeda, in her charmed boots, had made it across the pond, little Teddy in her arms. The Muggles were too far away to arrive before her, although he was sure they'd all have their mobiles out and be ringing 999 by now. Harry strove to hurry.

Once Draco's arms were clear of the ice, he assisted Harry by pulling himself up and rolling clear of the frigid black water. Harry was very much aware of the spectacle they made, and quickly forestalled any biting comments from Draco on the subject by shouting at the oncoming Muggle rescue squad.

"He's fine!" Still kneeling, Harry put up his hands in a gesture that he hoped would indicate they needed no help. "Everything's okay!"

"My hero," said a bitter-sounding voice at Harry's knees.

Teddy looked like he was laughing and crying at the same time, and his quickly morphing hair colour clearly indicated his distress. Andromeda, too, had noticed, and tried vainly to calm him.

"Andromeda," Harry said, watching Draco sputter and shiver, "please take Teddy home, we'll be fine."

Andromeda eyed the congregation of Muggles that still surrounded them from a distance. "Are you sure you'll be all right?"

"Don't worry about them," Harry assured her, following her gaze. He smiled back at Andromeda and her armful of little boy. "I'll take him home and Floo-call you later."

Andromeda nodded and Harry leaned in to nuzzle Teddy. "Don't worry about your cousin Draco," he said softly. He drew his wand under the cover of the cuddle and used it to cast a

discreet Warming Charm on Draco. He couldn't risk a drying charm; the Muggle on-lookers would know that Draco had been pulled from the pond soaking wet, and standing up from the ice completely dry would definitely arouse suspicion. Harry was pretty sure that was the last thing Draco wanted.

Teddy visibly calmed, or at least his changeable hair settled to one relatively normal colour, as he watched his cousin once again pull himself upright with the aid of his godfather's clothing. He giggled and Harry relaxed slightly. The small crowd of Muggles also seemed to be placated by Draco's standing position and most turned to go about their business, much to Harry's relief.

Teddy leaned forward, trying to reach Harry in order to give him a hug. Harry, still wobbly on skate-clad feet, patted his ginger head and said, "I'll talk to you later, okay, Teddy Bear?" Teddy's little face contorted and Harry quickly back-pedalled. "Sorry, sorry! I forgot you're too old for that nickname now, aren't you?"

"He secretly loves it," Andromeda stage-whispered and Teddy shook his head vehemently.

Draco bristled next to them. "Do I get a cuddle?"

Harry wrapped an arm around him and squeezed. “If you insist, Malfoy.”

Teddy and Andromeda erupted into giggles. Draco shook off his arm and they both nearly fell over again, which did nothing to stop the loud giggling coming from the elderly lady and little boy. Still holding onto Harry’s parka, Draco leaned over and kissed Teddy on his dimpled cheek.

"Goodbye, boys," Andromeda said finally. Tugging Teddy with her she moved away, fading in with the last of the concerned Muggle on-lookers.

Once she and Teddy were out of earshot, Draco rounded on Harry. "Potter, get me out of here, now! You know I'm not allowed to use Magic and my Apparition licence is still suspended for

another year."

Harry, torn between frustration and a somewhat inappropriate sense of nostalgia for Draco's spoilt behaviour, sighed. Part of him was uncomfortable, chilled, wet, and irritated as hell, but another was almost pleased that he'd been witness to yet more of Draco's humiliation. "Fine, let's get these skates off. We can walk to somewhere more secluded and I'll take you back to the Manor."

They held each other's sleeves as they inched their way to the nearest dry but snow-covered bank. Once they were back into boots and had collected stray mittens and scarves, Draco grabbed Harry's hand. Harry looked down at it.

"I can't go back to the Manor, Potter. Not now, not like this." Draco glanced at Harry, whose eyes were still looking at their joined gloved and mittened hands. Draco quickly let go when he noticed. "I'm soaking wet and also I told my parents I'd be away most of the day. They'll wonder why I didn't stay with Aunt Andromeda and ask a load of awkward questions. Can we…? I mean –"

"Yeah, come on, then," Harry said quietly, wondering if inviting Draco to Grimmauld Place was the smartest thing to do. He really had no other choice, though. Draco wasn't allowed to use Magic out here, and probably didn't know where the hell he was anyway. Cold, damp, and ambivalent, Harry vaguely wondered if maybe he should have stayed in Australia even if it meant gate-crashing Ron and Hermione's romantic holiday…

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Once out of sight, Harry Apparated them to a point close to Grimmauld Place. Despite the nauseating feeling Apparition instilled, Harry was grateful for the brief reprieve from having to listen to Draco bitch about how he had now contracted pneumonia because of the delay in leaving the pond and the ineffectiveness of Harry's Warming Charm.

It was a very brief respite. Draco started up again immediately upon arriving at the house and continued to complain up the path, through the door and into the front hall. And then, as it turned out, the only reason he stopped moaning about being wet and cold was so that he

could comment disparagingly on the state of Harry's dwelling compared to the Manor.

Mrs Black seemed to be put in better spirits than usual by Draco's presence, saying how nice it was that Harry was finally keeping company with a “better class of Wizard”, then in the same breath grumbling that she wasn’t sure if she approved of her nephew spending time with Harry. The rather one-sided conversation came to an abrupt end when Draco unceremoniously sneezed on the portrait, and Harry pulled the velvet curtain over Mrs Black’s face before her vitriolic tirade could intensify.

Harry led Draco into the sitting room and drew his wand. Draco backed up and visibly blanched. Perplexed, Harry’s brows drew together. “I’m just going to dry you off, Malfoy. Relax.”

But Draco looked anything but relaxed. “No,” he finally muttered. “Don’t do anything. And don’t mess with my hair.”

Harry couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You’re just going to stand there dripping on my rug because you don’t trust me to fix your hair?”

Draco refused to respond and petulantly crossed his arms over his wet coat.

“Do it yourself then,” Harry said, exasperated. A familiar feeling filtered through him. This was the Malfoy he remembered. This was the vain, obstinate Malfoy, not the one that went skating with children or clung to Harry like he meant it.

Draco’s glare faltered and his gaze shifted to the floor. “No.”

“What?!” Harry was incredulous. “You’d rather stand there freezing and wet?”

“Idonthaveawand,” Draco muttered, still not looking at Harry.

“Sorry?”

“I said,” Draco over-enunciated, “I don’t have a wand.”

“What do you mean? Of course you do… Don’t you?”

Draco didn't move, just gritted out, “No. I don’t. I could never find another one that would work. For all the ones I tried after losing mine, I might as well have been a Squib. All the wand-makers I spoke to told me that as I already had a wand, no other would work until that one was destroyed. My parents insisted on buying me one, but it was pretty much useless.”

“So where is this new one?” Harry asked. Although he didn’t always need his own wand for every spell or charm he cast nowadays, he still felt naked without it. He couldn’t imagine how Draco felt. Maybe it was time to start trying to.

Draco finally looked at him. “It fell into the pond. You’d already pulled me from the water when I noticed; I didn’t want you to have to go back in.”

Harry thought for a moment. “Wait, you mean you had a wand at the hospital and didn’t use it?”

Draco shrugged. Harry imagined he’d inspect his fingernails next.

“Malfoy?”

“Potter, think! I had it; but like you, I had to lock it away when I got there!” He looked down, as if ashamed of his next statement. "I wouldn't have used it, anyway. I told you it never

worked as well as my old one. I couldn't trust it to do what I wanted it to and…" Draco broke off, his cheeks coloured slightly.

"And you were looking for an excuse to hit me?" Harry prompted.

Draco looked sheepish, then mumbled "Didn't want you to die."

Harry worked hard not to show his surprise. That was the last thing he had expected to hear, and it moved him. But like Draco, he was loath to explain the embarrassed expression he probably wore. How did Malfoy have the wherewithal to even consider the best course of action in an emergency like that, and then admit to it now?

Caught between pity and empathy, Harry sighed. "Fine," he said, indicating the worn velvet-covered sofa. "Sit down and I'll find you a towel and…something else to wear." Never in his wildest dreams had Harry envisioned uttering those words to Malfoy, but then never had Harry anticipated entertaining him at Grimmauld Place, either. He wandlessly ignited a fire in the hearth and then dashed upstairs to his room.

He opened his school chest and almost reverently lifted Draco's old wand from where it had lain inside since he'd left Hogwarts. Harry had almost forgotten he had it, had made no plans to return it, but now…

He stood, walked two steps towards his wardrobe and stopped suddenly. There was no way on earth Malfoy would deign to put on any of his clothing, Harry reckoned. As changed in some ways as Malfoy seemed to be, there were limits, and Harry was pretty sure this would be one of them.

The sound of another sneeze from downstairs encouraged Harry to hurry in his task, and he finally opted for an old but suitably expensive-looking dressing gown he found in the wardrobe of what had been Regulus's room.

Then he returned to his own room where he quickly Floo-called Andromeda and Teddy from

the fireplace and assured them that he and Draco had made it home without doing any harm to one another. Duty done, Harry took the robe downstairs where he found Draco staring into the fire, cold water dripping off him and seeping into the fabric of the sofa on which he sat.

“Potter, you lit that fire without –” Draco stopped when Harry handed him the dressing gown. Draco inspected it briefly. “I’m not wearing your bathrobe,” he declared, dismissing Harry's thoughtfulness with an aristocratic wave of the hand.

“You’re right,” Harry agreed, dropping the robe into Draco's lap. “You’re not. That belonged to Regulus, I think.”

“A dead man’s clothes? Potter, is that the best you could do?” At least the momentary indignant outburst had returned some colour to Draco’s paler-than-usual cheeks.

Harry had just put his hand into his pocket to withdraw Draco’s wand, but stopped at Draco’s words. What had he been thinking, believing Malfoy had changed at all, that their being here together was anything more than the result of a ridiculous series of events? It wasn't as if they were friends, even though they might have behaved as such, if only for bare moments.

He left the room to allow Draco to change, pre-empting his demand for Harry to leave, which Harry was pretty sure he would make. Thoughts of what he might be missing by allowing Draco his privacy briefly flitted across Harry's mind before he literally slammed the door closed on them.

But that uncomfortable tightness in Harry's chest didn’t completely die – nor had it, Harry realised, no matter how many times Draco had been a prat, no matter how many times he had baited Harry, no matter how much of a nuisance he made of himself. Harry lived in hope that maybe with all that Draco had been through, if he were shown just a little kindness, he might…

Maybe Harry could make a difference. At one time, he'd thought the plan might have some merit.

He’d thought wrong.

Draco smirked at him when Harry re-entered the sitting room. “So, you should be happy now, Potter, after yet another day of helping your fellow man.”

“What?” Cold trickled down Harry's nerve endings as surely as if it had been he that had been plunged into the pond. “Malfoy, you didn't plan that whole thing, did you?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Draco's continued smirk said otherwise.

Harry sat down in a chair somewhat less upholstered than the sofa and took a long look at his houseguest. Draco’s damp blond hair still hung limply, his cold lean body wrapped in a faded dressing-gown. Harry struggled to reconcile Draco's current appearance with any number of times he remembered Draco looking good – no – not good, never good. Better, yes, that was it. Harry faked a laugh to distract his rebellious libido. “You didn’t plan very well.”

Draco, aware of the sudden scrutiny, tried to smooth down his wayward hair. Harry knew just how he felt. “What do you mean?” Draco asked, his smirk threatening to turn into something darker.

Harry genuinely laughed this time. "You're stuck here in my sitting room in a bathrobe.”

Draco looked around. “Could be worse.” His gaze fell and rested on Harry's clothes, making Harry feel incredibly self-conscious despite him being the only one in the room fully dressed. Though his next words surprised Harry; he was expecting to hear something about the condition of his socks: “Thank you.”

Harry said nothing and just waited.

Draco scowled. “Not enough gratitude for you, Potter?”

“I don’t want your thanks, especially knowing this was all staged just to lose a wand you didn't like.” Harry didn't mean to sound as cranky as he did; he'd been aiming for cynical.

Unsurprisingly, Draco was just as snappish. “It wasn't just because of the wand, you idiot. And I think we now both know you don’t do this for thanks, you do it because you can’t help yourself."

Harry stood up and glared down at his houseguest. “That’s not true! Every time I've done something for you, you've needed it.” He thought a moment, then added loudly, “And vice versa!”

"Oh, yeah?" Draco raised an eyebrow at him. Harry hadn't expected him to remain so calm. He'd thought Draco would be nose to nose with him by now. And, Harry had to confess, he was a little disappointed that Draco wasn't. “Like when?”

For lack of anything better to do, Harry sat down again. He felt his face warm as he recalled the few times in his life when he and Malfoy hadn't been fighting and had instead actually done something for one another. “When…when you didn't identify me at Malfoy Manor. I would have been dead if you hadn’t lied for me.”

Draco shrugged again. "I just said that so my aunt would leave me the hell alone. And no doubt one of your friends would have come to your rescue."

Harry didn't believe him and his expression made that obvious. But when Draco still wouldn't rise to the bait, he upped the ante. “What about when I saved you from the Fiendfyre? Are you gonna tell me that you didn't need me then? That I was just getting off on it?"

Draco smiled in what could only be described as a completely evil manner. Harry could have

kicked himself for his poor choice of words. "No more than I was, Potter."

Harry stood up again. He was surprised that he hadn't stamped his foot yet. How did Malfoy do this to him every bloody time?

“Okay, are you telling me that I genuinely didn't need saving in the Forbidden Forest when your mother told Voldemort I was dead? I didn't have anyone with me then." The statement brought with it melancholy memories of his parents and lost friends. And as good as an example it made now, he wasn't ready to elaborate further.

Fortunately, Draco didn't seem inclined to talk about it either. “That wasn’t me; that was my mother, like you said. Are we going to argue over who's done more nice things for the other now, Potter, is that it? You don't seem to be satisfied unless we're fighting about something!"

Harry could only open and close his mouth like a goldfish for several seconds. Finally, he found his voice. "I can't believe you just said that. You're the one who's never happy unless we're fighting –"

Draco interrupted, determined it seemed to catch Harry out with every new utterance. “So tell me, Potter, how many times have you said thank you for all of this help?”

“Er… What? From whom?" Harry calmed down enough to twig what Draco was insinuating, then became even more defensive. "You've got some nerve, Malfoy! I’m sure I've said it loads of times.”

Grey eyes regarded him. Draco's next words could have been said with malice or sarcasm, but instead, they seemed to be uttered with simply a sense of curiosity. “And was it as painful saying it to those other people as it was saying it to me?”

Harry tried to cast his mind back to a time he’d actually thanked anyone. He must have, mustn't he? He was so very grateful to his friends and his mentors. He was sure they knew how he felt. And he had said something to Narcissa Malfoy. He remembered that clearly, at least.

And no, it had not been a hardship. But he hadn't the history with Narcissa that he had with her son.

"No, it wasn't.” Harry whispered.

“But I’m guessing it wasn’t easy.”

“I don’t know.” Harry, now completely unnerved by Draco's calm and accurate assessment of his psyche, determined to turn the tables. His hand once again touched the length of hawthorn in his pocket, and this time he withdrew it. He held it out to Draco.

There followed a very long and not unpleasant silence. Harry sat down next to him on the sofa and looked into Draco's face, wondering if he'd finally stunned him into civility.

"Potter, I don't know what to say…" Draco’s eyes had become impossibly wide.

Harry didn’t think he’d ever seen him look so surprised before. And there was something else, something Harry imagined might be reverence, although he had a hard time imagining anything Draco might hold in such high regard, aside from his own precious self.

The randomness of the thought made Harry inwardly chuckle. Unfortunately, he had the poor grace to do so out loud as well.

“Merlin, Potter, what do I need to do to convince you I’m grateful for its return?” Draco looked at the wand fondly. “This is the most valuable thing I possess. I felt lost without it. I’m…thankful…you’ve kept it safe all this time.”

“Yeah, sure.” Harry said, and then paused, realising he’d said that just to wind Draco up even more. What was wrong with him?

Draco was silent for a long time and just stared at Harry in a peculiar way; it was very disconcerting. The fire crackled away in the hearth warming their cold skin but did nothing to warm the atmosphere.

"You know what I think, Potter?" Draco gave him no time to respond. "We both know you have a thing about saving people. But I also think you don't believe a word of thanks anyone gives you. Why is that, Potter? Don't you think people are grateful?" Draco sat up straighter, making his point. "How many times have you heard someone expressing their undying love and gratitude for killing You-Know-Who? Or delivering us all from something or other whilst we were at Hogwarts? Merlin, you even managed to single-handedly win the House Cup in First Year."

"I had help, Malfoy!" Harry interjected. This psychoanalysis by his schoolyard nemesis was the last thing he wanted.

"I know that, Potter, maybe better than anyone, but that's not the way the world sees it! Sure, Granger, Weasley, even Longbottom were honoured for their part in the War, but who remembers them?"

"I do!"

"Shut up, Potter; that was a rhetorical question. The point is that everyone in the Wizarding World knew who you were before you'd even heard of them, much less knew your own history. Everyone was thankful for your survival from the time you were a year old!"

"What's that got to do with you? You've never been grateful for anything. You just expect things to happen and they do. You've always had everything." Harry's tirade sounded so petulant to his own ears that he cringed.

Draco sat back into the cushions. "Maybe. But at least I've learned how to say thank you."

“Not any more easily than I have, apparently,” Harry said, still petulant, still cringing at his childish tone. He shook his head in exasperation.

“Shut up,” Draco huffed.

“No, you shut up!” The fire blazed, mirroring Harry’s emotions and intent of continuing the infantile argument, but Draco’s next comment moved the conversation from infantile to the bizarre.

"You look good when you're angry; did you know that?" Draco's eyes flashed.

"Well, you – what?"

The expression which crossed Draco’s features strongly suggested to Harry that he hadn't intended to say that aloud. Now it was Draco’s turn to silently open and close his mouth.

Harry’s voice filled the void. “You think I look...good?” A crooked smile found its way to his face and he felt himself blush. It had been a long time since someone told him he looked good, except...Mrs Weasley, and that was usually when he was scrubbed up for yet another award ceremony.

“I didn’t say that.” Draco didn’t meet Harry’s eyes.

“You did, you liar. Not ten seconds ago.” Harry tried not to smile outright, but it was a losing battle. Draco continued to look elsewhere. “And you, um –” Harry tried to come up with a suitable compliment that didn’t sound too girly or require that he lie. Wait -- lie? Who was he kidding?

But before he could formulate one, Draco said to the wall, “Especially in your Auror uniform.”

Harry was caught between perplexity and pride. The world was no doubt tilting on its axis, but any moment now Draco would punch him or insult him and all would be well again.

Instead, Draco scooted along the sofa so he was actually closer and finally, finally turned to look at Harry, his newly returned wand pointing directly at Harry. “It's a compliment, Potter. You’re supposed to say thank you.”

Harry thought of reaching for his own wand, but realised he'd never have it out of his sleeve before Malfoy could make his move. How had he let Malfoy get the better of him? And in his own house? Some Auror he was going to make.

“What, Potter? Something amusing?” The sneer had returned and Harry’s world shifted back to its accustomed axis. “What is it going to take to convince you that I’m grateful for this?” Draco brandished his wand.

Harry eyed the length of hawthorn being waved in his face. “Your not hexing me would be a good start.”

“I’m not going to hex you." Much to Harry’s relief, Draco lowered his wand. "I’m going to kiss you.”

“Good. Wait, you’re wha –?”

Draco practically crawled on top of him.

Harry’s eyes widened and he made a choking sound, not unlike the ones he’d made when he’d had the boiled sweet lodged in his throat. It appeared Draco was trying to stick his tongue into the same place. And rather than pounding Harry on the back, he pushed Harry into the

sofa.

“Gah…” Harry gasped when the need for air became too great. Draco leaned back, letting Harry catch his breath. Then he leaned in again. “Okay,” Harry murmured after the next kiss. “Yeah…” Another kiss, this one softer and a lot less one-sided. “Mmmmm…”

“Potter,” Draco said, and Harry looked up at him. His hair fell fetchingly over the grey eyes. “How about I give you something to really be thankful for?” He smirked and reached for the zip on Harry’s hoodie.

Harry pulled the collar together. “What are you doing?”

Long pale fingers flitted from Harry’s jacket and to his face and gently took off the glasses. With one hand still groping for his wand, and the other holding his collar closed, Harry could do little to stop him.

“I’m trying to take your clothes off, idiot.” The smirk was back; Harry could see it clearly even without his glasses, Draco was that close. “Kiss me again.”

Curiously, Harry didn’t register the words so much as the fact that Draco had neglected to say please. When his brain caught up, he stared at the other with a stupid smile on his face.

Draco was clearly not thinking of courtesy. “Potter, must I do everything myself?” he said almost crossly, and kissed Harry carefully but thoroughly, his tongue moving across Harry’s lips and setting every nerve ending on fire.

Deciding he’d rather have his hands on Draco than clutching for his wand and his jacket, Harry moved both of them up to squeeze his shoulders. Draco made a most agreeable humming sound, and Harry decided to explore the muscles of the arms hidden under the robe.

Robe…robe…the robe is in the way, Harry's brain helpfully supplied. What did Harry do with obstacles? Oh yeah, he eliminated them, worked around them, pushed through them. He'd learned that in Auror training…odd that he'd think of that now and in these circumstances.

Harry's brain left off thinking about Draco's robe for a moment.

Honestly, what the hell was going on? Malfoy, who until this afternoon hadn't said more than a dozen words to Harry since the War, had saved his life and was now literally taking Harry's breath away. Did Malfoy know, for instance, that Harry hadn't had a relationship with anyone since he and Ginny had called it quits? Did Malfoy know why he and Ginny weren't together?

Harry hoped not. But he obviously knew something Harry had been slower to learn; or maybe he didn't, maybe he was just counting on Harry feeling the same way. Hell, Harry thought, this is Malfoy – he didn't care about anyone but himself. But, if this was how he showed it, Harry was all for more of Malfoy's selfish behaviour.

How long had he been thinking about Malfoy in a more-than-friendly way? He'd resisted the image when it'd first pushed its way into his mind's eye, that night after he'd embarrassed himself making an awkward pass at Charlie Weasley at yet another award ceremony.

Malfoy couldn't have been more different from Charlie who was, Harry had felt that night, the most gracious and understanding man in the world. Who'd been very sorry to disappoint Harry. Who'd been surprised and flattered and inconveniently involved with the Romanian Minister of the Interior.

After spending the best part of a sleepless night trying to forget how he'd made a fool of himself, Harry had woken to images of Malfoy, sweaty and panting and frotting against him like he was trying to prove something. Harry had felt unnerved for the remainder of the night and through the following day. Why Malfoy? Why now? He'd fought a similar vision two nights later when he'd succumbed and touched himself; trying to picture an adequate substitute for Charlie, he saw instead Malfoy, dipping his head as he leant forward to kiss Harry almost tenderly, just as he was doing now, in the Grimmauld Place sitting room. Harry had sighed and given in to the vision, realising then that his "Why now?" had been a meaningless question, that in all their years at school, Malfoy had captured his attention more than Ginny or anyone

else ever had.

Maybe Harry had had something to prove then, maybe it was his very real belief that of everyone he knew, Malfoy would never be drawn into the Hero's Circle that surrounded him. But he had been a force in Harry's life nonetheless. Charlie had never been part of that circle either. And he was safe, he'd never hurt Harry. But Harry, as Malfoy had just finished pointing out to him, didn't do safe. His subconscious knew that, his body knew it also; it had been Malfoy's name that escaped Harry's lips in the dark that night.

And it was Malfoy's name he spoke now. Harry forced himself to break away, to breathe, to take stock. "Malfoy, are you trying to prove something to me? Where is this coming from?"

Draco propped himself on one elbow and stared off towards the fire, and for a moment Harry was afraid he'd realise just what he was doing, stand up and run into the night. Instead he surprised Harry yet again.

"From the heart, Potter." Harry wondered if the expression on his face was as stupefied as it felt. It must, at least, have conveyed an expression of surprise because Draco went on, "Yes, Potter, I do have one, and you've been in there for a while. I just didn't know what you'd do if I told you; you have a hard enough time accepting gratitude from your adoring public. Just like you seem to have a problem expressing it." He paused and looked directly at Harry. "I thought this might be a better way of showing you how I feel."

Harry smiled despite himself. "I think you might be right." He boldly reached up and pulled Draco's face back to his.

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The dying fire gave the only illumination, casting long shadows and little heat. Not that anyone in the room needed it.

After what seemed like hours spent exploring each other's lips, tongues, mouths, Draco stood up and pulled Harry to his feet. "Let's get these things off," he whispered, dropping the

bathrobe.

Harry nearly knocked himself out on the coffee table trying to take off his trousers over his trainers. No one else could ever make him so wound-up and reckless, but Harry didn’t have time to feel embarrassed as Draco pushed him back onto the sofa. Draco stood naked before him, pale skin glowing in the meagre firelight, his hands in Harry’s unruly hair.

Reaching out and gripping the firm flesh of Draco’s arse, Harry pressed his face into the skin of his abdomen. It was warm, why had he thought it wouldn’t be? Draco’s demeanour might be cool, but his body clearly was not. Harry turned his head and trailed his tongue across Draco’s belly to his prize, reaching a hand out to grasp Draco’s cock and push it past his lips.

His triumph was short-lived when a cranky voice above him grunted, "OW, Potter, do you know what you’re doing?"

Harry's already red face went even redder. He reckoned his cheeks might be the same colour as the spear of flesh in his hand. He released Draco's cock from his mouth. "Er, not really, no."

Long fingers tangled affectionately in his hair. "Mind the teeth."

A few more gentle suggestions later and Harry found himself sputtering around a mouthful of semen, then being manhandled back onto the settee.

He barely had time to notice their new position – sitting with his back pushed against the sofa's arm and Draco astride him, one leg wedged between the cushions and Harry's side, the other along Harry's other flank – when he heard Draco mutter something.

"What?" Harry gasped, reaching up to push the blond fringe away from Draco's eyes as his head bowed towards Harry's.

"Shut up and kiss me, Potter," Draco said and Harry did, only to gasp around Draco’s tongue a moment later when he felt himself encased in the most divine tight heat.

He instinctively tried to thrust upwards, to fully sheath himself in this wonderful warmth, but hands pressed against his shoulders and a curtain of blond hair wafted across Harry's face as Draco shook his head.

"Wait," Draco whispered. "Please."

Harry stilled, humbled, first by the sensation, then by the sentiment. He focussed instead on the warmth of Draco's chest against his and the expanse of smooth back beneath his palms.

Then a mouth was on his again, and Draco's tongue once again sought his. Harry continued to stroke Draco's back, trying to reassure him that he would work to his pace, that his urgency could be controlled, even if the strength of his feelings could not.

There was wonder, and pleasure, and yes, gratitude, rolling like waves across their undulating bodies and flickering under fingertips, slick with perspiration and spit. They might never be able to articulate the emotions in words either could trust, but expressed as touch it was close enough.

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Harry woke in his bed at Grimmauld Place with Draco’s breath warm against his shoulder. No doubt Draco would be embarrassed when he woke, but maybe he’d be slightly less prickly, too. And that made Harry smile. In that instant, he found that his world had forever changed. Fate, he realised, could be overcome -- if it had been fate dictating his and even Draco’s lives till now. Nowhere in his imaginings of a life beyond Voldemort had Harry ever seen his life stupidly cut short by a boiled sweet, nor he and Draco waking up next to one another.

Harry revelled in the glory of understanding that the world might not come to an end if he wasn’t always there, and vowed to learn to accept the gratitude that was given him when he was. His friends were responsible people, capable of looking after themselves, and if not –

hard as it might be for Harry to watch the fallout – he wasn't to blame. Draco would probably be useful in instructing him when to step away, Harry thought with a smile. And as strange as it seemed, he could teach Harry a thing or two about humility.

But first, Harry was going to learn to accept and enjoy the closeness.

He turned in Draco's sleepy embrace and watched as the pale eyelashes fluttered. When Draco eyed Harry with an apprehensive expression – not regret, exactly, more expectancy mixed with the I-can't-believe-we-just-did-that look that Harry had anticipated – Harry leaned in and kissed the worry away.

The kiss was soft and slow and delicious and Harry didn't want it to end. Never could he have imagined Draco kissing anyone like this. The ones he'd pressed to Harry's skin the night before had contained an element of need – the need to reassure, the need to explain, the need for more.

This… This kiss was different: it held feelings of shyness, but contentment. They practised this kiss for a long time.

After a while, though, the need returned and Harry rolled Draco onto his back, settling between his legs, his erection pressed into Draco's thigh.

"That spell…" Harry whispered. "The one you used last night? Say it again, yeah?"

Draco smirked, chuckled and then smiled up at Harry – a true smile – his first one. "You don't always have to use a spell, you know, Potter," he said. "There are ways of preparing your partner without using magic."

"I know," Harry said with a shy smile of his own. "I just don't want to wait that long." He pushed

Draco chuckled again, a bewildering sound that was growing on Harry by the minute. When he stopped, he muttered the spell, and Harry gently pushed himself inside Draco’s body.

“Oh gods, Draco," Harry sighed. "Thank you."

The End

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