Torn Are the Soft Ties

Draco stared at the scene before him, the clinic not at all what he had expected.

The carpets were lush blue and free of mystery stains, the walls painted with grassy hills and bouncing bunnies and other cutesy images that moved under cottony clouds billowing near the ceiling.

The furniture consisted of adult-sized plushy couches and chairs, and brightly coloured kid-size seats that were littered profusely with children and toys.

The reception desk in the waiting room doubled as a felt board that had a bizarre array of struggling felt-animals in various grotesque stages of assembly. Currently, there was a boy with a rather serious expression concentrating very hard on getting his part-Gryndilow, part-Horklump to work. It had tentacles and legs and undulated as it scrabbled around wildly, its two heads pointing in opposite directions, vying for control.

"Oh my god, Ethan!" came an exasperated American drawl. "It would be much simpler if you'd just stick to one kind of animal."

The harassed woman eased back into her chair, mindful of the child crawling about her ankles and the obvious bump in her belly indicating more on the way. She brushed back a strand of frizzy blonde hair only to have it flop forward again, and said in a bothered way, "What about a nice, simple animal, like an erumpent, hmm?"

"I don't want an erumpent!" Ethan replied crossly in the same American drawl, not looking up from his Gryndi-Lump "I don't want simple! Easy's boring!" He watched his macabre beast as it pulled so far into each direction that it snapped back suddenly, flipped over and landed on its back awkwardly. "But maybe I don't want two heads, either..." He pulled at a horned Gryndilow head, placing it to one side and looked

up as Draco approached.

"Hey, Mister! What would go well with a Horklump?"

Draco recoiled. Children didn't dare address him usually; he was beginning to think he'd wandered into his own worst nightmare. The Clinic he was looking for would have those washed-out lime-green walls and yellowed ceilings that clashed with stark-white linens and unassuming furniture. And no obnoxious offspring.

"You look a little lost, honey!" A stout dark-skinned woman wearing a Medic's blue coat peered at him in amusement.

"What?" These children were already addling his brain. He cleared his throat. "I was looking for the Bamboozled by Babies Clinic actually. I must have passed through the wrong door or something." His own accent drew a smile from the woman.

"No. You found it all right. Is your wife in an appointment? What's her name, hon, shall I see if I can locate her?"

"No." Draco winced at her assumption. "No, I'm not with anyone." Draco looked around him. There was no way he was about to declare why he was here in front of all of these... mothers. "Is there somewhere else where we can talk?"

"Do you have an appointment?"

Draco sighed impatiently. "No. Look, you're a Medic. I just need five minutes of your time. Can we go to your office?"

The woman looked at him over the top of her glasses. "You need an appointment if you want to see a

Medic, Mr. ...?"

Draco ignored her prompt and didn't bother to hide his frustration. "I have only just arrived from England," he stressed as if that alone explained everything, "If I could just speak to a Medic...?"

"Well, that's why you make an appointment, hon -- to speak to a Medic."

Draco gave up. "Right then! When can I have an appointment?"

The woman bustled round the desk and pulled out an open appointment book. "Let's see," She flipped though an enormous amount of pages.

"Wait a minute," Draco interrupted, "Are those today's appointments?" he asked, pointing at the original page where she started.

"Yes."

"You mean, you don't have anything free before..." he tilted his head, "Two months' time?" he finished in disgust. The woman eyed him cautiously.

"That's right."

"But I need to see someone now!"

She gave him an indulgent smile and patted his wrist as if fond of his eccentricities. "Now, now. It all seems very urgent when your wife falls pregnant, but her local Healer is fine until she's in her second --"

"I don't have a wife!" He snapped. "I am not here for someone else!" His raised voice attracting the attention of several of the mothers, even some of the children were watching him wide-eyed. The Medic blinked at him.

"I'm sorry?" she asked, "Whatever do you mean?"

Draco sighed and closed his eyes briefly -- this hadn't seemed nearly so complicated when he had made the somewhat desperate decision to leave England and travel to the States in search of the best (and not-so-coincidently, furthest) family planning and obstetrical clinic he could find.

He leaned forward, glaring at the woman. "The appointment is for me."

She frowned a little and asked hesitantly, "You mean, you...?"

"Yes!" he hissed, heat flooding his cheeks.

She appeared confused as she asked, one eyebrow perked high, "Are you planning on getting pregnant or are you already--"

Draco slapped a hand across her mouth to prevent her from finishing that sentence. She grunted in annoyance, her eyes glaring at him.

"For fuck's sake, woman!" he burst out. "Is there someone here who has one iota of respect for privacy, and the decency to offer it when it is so obviously required?"

A small sob broke from the vicinity of Draco's knees. He glanced down to see the boy -- Ethan -- whose eyes were brimming with water, peering up at him fearfully. His mother swept him up and away, scowling at Draco as she did so. The boy sniffled into her neck whilst Draco was treated to several harsh glares and the odd tutting sound. He scowled back where he could.

"I thought I recognised that bellow."

Draco's head spun around at the familiar British accent. His sneer dropped away in place of stunned recognition -- Harry Potter was standing calmly in an office doorway, dressed in green Medic robes, a file under one arm and a patient at his side.

"Only you could disgruntle an entire crowd of onlookers without even meaning to," Potter said wryly as he glanced at the scene. "And unhand Medic Brunella. She has patients to see to."

"What the hell are you doing here, Potter?" Draco asked in bewildered ire as his hand dropped.

Potter raised his eyebrows, gave him a long look and gestured to his robes. Draco rubbed at his temples, swallowing heavily.

"Now we know why I am here, why don't you tell me what you are doing here?"

The whole waiting room was still watching on. Draco shifted his weight, not quite able to believe his luck that of all the places in the world he could have been, Harry Potter was here.

"I just need ... to speak to a Medic. Today. Now," he said, resigned.

Potter nodded once, a slight frown on his face though he didn't push further. "Well, as you can see, we're rather busy. However," he pointed out as Draco began to protest, "if you would care to wait, I will see you when I'm done."

"Not you! Someone else!" Draco glanced around hurriedly looking for another medic.

"Both of our reception staff are out sick today and we are down a Medic. Everyone is already taking on extra patients." Potter glared at Draco. "It's me, or no one."

Draco glared back. He narrowed his eyes, his old school rivalry rearing its ugly head, insisting he not give in, and making him abruptly turn on his heel and walk out.

It was official. The fates had finally declared war on him. He hadn't wanted anyone from home to know why he was here. He had come all the way from England to America, for Salazar's sake, swapping Healers for 'Medics', to have this handled discretely and with the least amount of fuss possible and then, BAM! Harry fucking Potter!

"Fuck!" Draco slowed to a stop not too far from the door.

But he had no other choice. He had done his research, and this was the only clinic that could help. And anyway, if Potter really was a Medic, he'd have to keep quiet because of patient-medic privilege, or something like that. And it was here, or nowhere.

Draco rubbed his hands over his eyes tiredly. Dropping them wearily he turned, entering the clinic again. Potter look up from his file as Draco crossed the waiting room. "I'll wait."

It was seven hours later, with the waiting room and the other offices blissfully empty, when Potter motioned a headachy Draco into his office.

*

"Why?"

Malfoy snarled at Harry across the desk. "It's none of your fucking business why."

Harry sighed and put down the pen he was holding, having managed to fill out only the first three lines in Malfoy's file -- today's date, his name and DOB, and a condition report made up of three words: Twenty weeks pregnant. Before he could even approach the medical issues though, he had to acknowledge, "You are not the type of wizard we normally get, Malfoy."

That was an understatement. It was still quite rare for a male to make the decision to become pregnant -- after all, it wasn't at all natural and the body had to undertake a huge change. The men willing and also suitable to take on the physical and mental changes, not to mention the pain of actual childbirth, were usually those who dressed and acted like women full time; those who felt they were female in every way on the inside.

"Of course I'm not!" he spat. "That's all the more reason."

"But you are gay ...?"

Malfoy clenched his teeth, pink blotches appearing on his cheeks. "What the fuck business is that of yours?"

Harry blinked tiredly.

"You inform me that you are almost five months pregnant, and that it must be aborted, yet you refuse to give me any more information. You are talking about a fully formed foetus here. Babies have been known to survive being born at five months, but you just want it 'gone'." Harry rested his elbow on the desk as he supported his chin contemplatively. "I am going to need to know why."

Malfoy's pale lips thinned. "All you need to know is that I don't want it! That I never wanted it! So it would be appreciated if you would take it out at your earliest convenience. Please."

Malfoy had added on a 'please'. Venomously, but there it was -- a veritable first. But Harry couldn't abort pregnancies for no reason, especially not when they were so far along. Not just 'because I want it gone'.

And the fact that he was pregnant at all meant that it must have been deliberate, no matter what he just said. It's not the sort of thing that happens by accident in males. It's possible something had happened to change Malfoy's mind about wanting the baby. Harry's best guess was a falling out with the other father, since Malfoy couldn't come up with a legitimate reason, and what sort of fucked-up way to deal with things was that? To get rid of an innocent little life caught in the middle? God, how he hated the fall-out from messy break-ups. Malfoy should be able to feel the baby kicking by now, should have formed some sort of bond with it. Harry glanced down at Malfoy's belly. There was no obvious bump, but some people barely showed until their sixth month. He'd learn more after he examined him. For now, he would try and reason this through.

"I am intrigued. How did you get pregnant if you never wanted it?"

Malfoy tensed. "A series of unfortunate events."

That still wasn't going to cut it; Harry needed details to make an informed decision. Malfoy really did look very pale though; Harry was going to have to check him for anaemia, too. He scrawled it down in the file, glad to be making some headway.

"Malfoy," Harry leaned forward in the hopes of getting through to him, "I can't help you unless you tell me what is going on. There are rules for this sort of thing, ethics to be considered. I am guessing you approached other places before coming all this way, so you must know that it isn't common practice to abort so far into the pregnancy; in fact most Clinics and Hospitals have a flat ban on it. It's doubly impossible for males because of the preparation needed to become pregnant -- it shows clear intent and no one will do the procedure at such a late stage just because you've changed your mind. And honestly," he added, shrugging his shoulders lightly, "it's quite normal to get nervous once the whole thing becomes so real-"

"Did you not hear me?" Malfoy seethed. "I already told you I did not do this on purpose!"

Harry clicked his teeth together a few times as he considered this. "Even if that were possible -- why now? Why leave it so long?"

"Because I didn't know!" Malfoy growled.

"Five months and you didn't realise something was up?" Harry asked with an air of dubiousness he wouldn't normally use, but this was Malfoy, and he was being extraordinarily uncooperative.

Malfoy closed his eyes briefly. Harry waited while the other man took in a number of calming breaths, easing his agitation. He appeared to come to a decision before opening his eyes again.

"I make potions, Potter; highly specialized potions containing rare and potent ingredients. I have, more recently, been trying my hand at creating new potions, elixirs, salves and the like." Then he admitted shiftily, "I have also been known to test the more innocuous ones on myself, including a trial fertility elixir just six months ago. I hadn't realised it worked in the way it did until I tested myself when I started getting really sick about two weeks ago, spending far too much time being intimate with the toilet ..."

Harry had begun casting a series of charms at Malfoy's abdomen as soon as Malfoy admitted testing experimental potions on himself. The first two confirmed that he was indeed pregnant, and that he was almost 20 weeks along. Unfortunately, the third revealed that the likely reason Malfoy was not showing was because the foetus was underdeveloped -- not at all surprising, since he hadn't been taking the usual supplements needed for male pregnancies. The potions he tested on himself may have had something to do with the heart murmur detected in the fourth. Harry started scribbling madly in Malfoy's file.

"... Potter!"

"Hm?"

"Focus! The sooner I can complete my business here, the sooner I can get back to my labs and analyse what happened."

Harry finally looked up from his note taking. "Complete your business?"

Malfoy nodded once.

Harry tilted his head. "Doesn't that sound rather ... inappropriate?"

Malfoy was unmoved. "Do not romanticise this, Potter. Trying to manipulate me will not work. I want it gone."

Harry went back to finishing his notes as he spoke casually. "I'd always understood it was a good thing when a baby was born into a pure-blood family." He glanced up at Malfoy more seriously. "I thought you people were all hung up on having an heir? Why would you pass up an opportunity like this? It's something even your father would have approved of."

Malfoy's jaw clenched and his hands gripped the arms of his chair so hard his knuckles turned white. Harry frowned as he continued.

"Not everyone is able to get pregnant, you know, even with help. There are people who would change places with you in an instant." Malfoy's eyes appeared unfocused as Harry tried again. "New life is a beautiful thing, Malfoy. A gift"

"A gift?" Malfoy whispered. Harry nodded; though he had the feeling Malfoy wasn't even seeing him.

"Does he know you're here?" Harry hesitated. Malfoy hadn't spoken of his partner once, and it could be a touchy subject, especially if they had just separated. But maybe it would get him some answers. "Malfoy ... Does he know? ... The other father ...?"

All colour suddenly drained from Malfoy's face, making him as white as a bleached bone.

"Malfoy?" Oh shit.

Malfoy's eyes clamped closed as he suddenly convulsed. He tried to stand but he convulsed again, his hands trembling so badly he couldn't gain a grip. He ended up retching over the arm of the chair, choking on strings of saliva.

Harry had sped out of his chair and was behind Malfoy, trying to steady him so he could get him to the examination table. Grabbing him under the arms, he pulled him up. But Malfoy lashed out suddenly, roaring, "Get the fuck away from me!"

He struck out blindly hitting Harry on the jaw. "... the fuck away!" He managed to fight free of Harry arms, tossing him to the carpet before doubling up wretchedly, his arms clutching his stomach. "... ohfuckohfuckohfuck ..." he cried brokenly and then he heaved again, staggering.

Stunned, Harry picked himself up off the floor and quickly began adjusting the examination table, lowering it to reach his thighs so he could get Malfoy onto it easier. He grabbed the heaving man, hauling him into a sitting position and then steadying him on the table. But at once Malfoy struck out again.

"Don't you fucking touch me!"

In a savage burst of flailing limbs, Harry was driven back. "Don't you fucking touch me!" Malfoy convulsed and finally collapsed back, his eyes still closed, his head flopped back against the wall. "Just don't ... don't fucking touch me ..." he panted.

Harry stood back, not daring to touch Malfoy again. Brushing a hand over his face tiredly, he wondered what the fuck had just happened.

*

"Here,"

Draco felt like he had been trampled by hippogriffs. His stomach and chest were sore from the spasms, and his throat burned from bile. He was dizzy, and his head throbbed, and he couldn't open his eyes for fear of them leaking.

Potter'd had to use those damn words -- your father would approve. Flashes of a hand clapped over his mouth, of his cheek slammed into a grimy brick wall and rough hands restraining him, had suddenly invaded his mind. It wasn't the first time it had happened; people mentioned his father often, so he'd had practice at riding out the triggers. It was far from easy; they never failed to make him sick to the stomach, but he had learned to contain it.

However, when Potter referred to the thing inside of him as a gift, the only reason he hadn't jumped the desk and throttled the other man was because he was unable to move under the weight of images assaulting him.

But then Potter had gone and said something that had shattered the tenuous hold he had on himself, and he had just wanted out.

He swallowed painfully.

That ... face. The visage that haunted his darkest and most grievous hours -- a vision he never allowed to penetrate his waking mind, had crept through him like maggots through a rotting corpse and had suffocated him.

Draco raked a hand through his hair in an attempt to assemble himself. He felt raw and disorientated, and utterly exposed. Pushing off the wall, he kept his head bowed and opened his eyes.

There was a white paper cup hovering in his periphery.

"Take it." It was nudged closer. "You haven't eaten or drunk anything all day, I'll bet. You're dehydrated. It'll help you feel better."

Draco reached out and took the cup, his trembling fingers brushing Potter's. He lifted it to his nose and sniffed. Urgh! It smelled like hospital water, tinny and sterile. He could feel eyes on him as he took slow sips, smacking his lips together to ease the foulness of his mouth until it was all gone. Cautiously, to avoid unwanted touching, he allowed Potter to retrieve the cup and dispose of it.

"Just the one for now. You need to take it slow or risk expelling it again," Potter stated. Draco snorted weakly and Potter hesitated as he said, "Take off your shirt and unbutton your trousers." He went about the room, avoiding Draco's sudden tension, collecting the file off his desk and then going to the sink and washing his hands. "Then lie down on the table."

Draco ruffled his hair in agitation as he stared at the floor. "That's not necessary, unless you plan on removing it right here and now in your office, is it?"

Potter grabbed a hand towel, drying his hands as he turned from the sink, contemplating him. He replaced the towel and took the few steps to Draco, placing his hands on his hips.

"I have to look at you, Malfoy." His voice was calming, yet firm. "You cannot undergo any treatment via this clinic if there hasn't been a full patient examination first. It's protocol."

Draco knew the other man was right. He sighed and unclasped his cloak, hanging it over the back of the chair, and then lifted his shirt, tossing it on top of the table before loosening his trousers.

"Are you going to tell me what happened just now?" Potter queried sombrely.

"Nothing happened!" Draco snapped. Predictably, the other man looked doubtful at the obvious brush off. "Can we just get on with this?" he bit out.

Potter sighed. "Lie back."

Draco lay down stiffly, using his shirt as a pillow cover. Even though he knew it was coming, he still flinched when Potter's hands pressed into his abdomen.

"Have you noticed any changes when urinating?"

"Oh gods!" Draco groaned, and flung the back of his arm over his eyes. Salazar's sandpit, this was excruciating. "More and more frequently. It was one of the reasons I tested myself. That, the projectile vomiting, and the tumorous lump where my bladder should be."

"You mentioned you started vomiting only recently?" Potter droned professionally, palpating the area exposed by the open trousers.

"A fortnight ago," he replied and Potter hummed. His hands worked their way lower until his fingertips disappeared under the trousers. Draco's heartbeat sped up.

"Has there been any pain or discomfort while urinating?"

"No."

"Have you noticed any difference in the colour or texture?"

"Good god. No, Potter! What is this obsession with my toileting habits?"

Potter's lips curved slightly before straightening again. "I want to make sure we don't miss anything. You've had no monitoring or guidance during a crucial stage of your pregnancy. It's possible your body isn't coping very well with the added pressure."

"Well, it wont have to for much longer."

Potter took a breath. "There are other options, Malfoy." His hands worked their way up the side. "You could have the child adopted, for instance. A magical child will find a home --"

Draco hissed and curled up as pain bolted through his side when Potter's probing hands pressed under the ribcage. He remained partially sitting to glare at Potter, fuming. As if the man's vocal manipulations weren't painful enough.

"Fuck adoption! And fuck you, Potter! This thing will not stay in me a second longer than necessary. Now if you've finished feeling me up, I'd like to put my clothes back on."

Potter's face reddened. "You want this so much Malfoy, you are going to have to do it my way. An operation like the one you are gunning for is extremely dicey. I have to know exactly what condition you are in to even consider taking the risk. If you don't cooperate, you can kiss any chance of aborting the foetus goodbye. Now I suggest you lie back down so I can finish this."

Draco threw himself down petulantly and Potter moved his hands back to his torso, pressing under the ribs on the other side. Draco clenched his teeth and couldn't hold back a groan when Potter found his painful target. Pulling his hands away, Potter drew his wand and murmured chant-like under his breath, watching as Draco's torso developed a network of blobs and lines that joined up map-like. He shrank and transferred the image to paper, and retreated behind his desk to rapidly scrawl in Draco's file.

"You can get dressed now," he said, checking his watch.

Draco pulled on his shirt and slid off the table, buttoning his trousers. He donned his cloak as Potter filled out a number of different coloured forms and began handing them off.

"These are the tests you will need done. Come back first thing tomorrow morning, we open at eight. In the meantime," he spun around in his chair and stood up, walking to the door, "make sure you have at

least four more glasses of water and a good dinner tonight. Wait here."

He disappeared through the door as Draco clutched at the many test requests. Potter came back moments later with a small box clinking with potions.

"Begin these before dinner," he pushed the box onto Draco. "There is a schedule inside to indicate what to take, and when. If there are any side effects, cease them immediately and contact me, here." He produced a card with a Floo address and stuffed it into Draco's shirt pocket, since he had no free hands.

"What the hell ...?"

"They're only nutrient potions. I can't give you anything else until you come back with that list of potion ingredients you may have ingested." He shuffled Draco towards the exit. "And before you disregard them -- the potions are for your health, not necessarily that of the child's. As I said before, you cannot undergo any procedure unless you are fit enough to cope with it."

Potter opened the door and helped Draco through it. "Make sure you eat well and drink plenty of fluids -- no alcohol." He paused, eyeing Draco. "You do have somewhere to stay, I assume?"

Draco frowned, somewhat flustered. "Well, I haven't organised anything as of yet. I came straight here after I arrived and spent all day in your waiting room," he groused. "But now that you have oh-so-kindly ousted me, I can finally find some --"

"Wait here."

Draco growled as Potter disappeared again. "Potter! What the fuck?"

But he was back quickly, minus his Medic's robes, joining Draco outside the clinic. He locked the doors up and warded them before turning and striding off without looking at Draco.

"Follow me."

They rounded the building, and Draco was just about to launch into demanding what the hell Potter was playing at, when the other man stopped abruptly and grabbed hold of him. He felt the lurch of Apparition and the next thing he knew he was standing in the lobby of a bizarre hotel, Potter's arm still gripping him steadily.

*

"You all right?" Harry asked, eyeing Malfoy in concern.

Malfoy shook him off and glared around. "No, I am not! Where are we?" The sudden Apparating seemed to have made his legs somewhat wobbly.

"'The Falconer Inn.' I stayed here when I first came to the States," he replied, looking about. It was an old-west-saloon-bar-themed wizarding hotel on Ramshackle Row, the local magic district. Decorated in rich burgundy and dark woods, it included such over-the-top trimmings as keg barstools, mounted quison heads (a magical beast not unlike bison and equipped with an armoured frill-neck), and an old upright piano against the wall.

"Merlin's knickerbockers!" Malfoy proclaimed, his lip curling as he peered at the furnishings. "This is the worst hotel I have ever had the displeasure to enter, and the corniest. It would be you that inflicted it upon me."

"It's clean," Harry commented. "And it's close to the clinic."

"It's deplorable."

Harry breathed out in irritation. "Unless you want to go Muggle it's the best you are going to get." He crossed to the front desk, where a clerk sporting a bushy English moustache fondled the chain of his fob watch fondly.

Malfoy sneered at the man as Harry checked him in. The clerk stashed his Galleons in a ridiculously ornate register and handed over a filigree key.

"C'mon," Harry said, leading them through a pair of batwing doors that practically decked Malfoy as they flicked back off of Harry, and past a bulky wooden bar to the lifts.

Then Malfoy suddenly gagged. "Oh gods. Potter," his nose scrunched up tight on his pale face, "please tell me that isn't a spittoon."

Harry looked down at the pottery container and glanced at Malfoy sideways. "That isn't a spittoon?" he intoned unconvincingly.

The self-playing piano burst into a rolling bar-tune.

"Splendid," Malfoy snarked. "All we need now are the Can-Can Girls." Harry raised his brow in question and he explained, "The Manor has portraits of various American ancestral cousins, the backgrounds in which could only be more like this hovel if it had a boudoir attached."

*

When they got to the room Draco was so exhausted, he didn't even bother with the biting comment on his tongue about the dácor; instead he pulled out his trunk and enlarged it to unpack later, before flopping on the bed.

Potter tottered off to the bathroom after drawing the curtains, but Draco registered nothing after he heard the taps go on, lost to the oblivion of sleep.

"Malfoy."

Draco was being prodded in the shoulder. "... f'ck off," he grumbled but tried to rouse himself anyway, the left-over certainty from his school days -- if someone else was waking him, he should probably get up -- kicking in.

"Malfoy? I got you something to eat." Potter's hand slid behind Draco's shoulder to help ease him from the bed, guiding him to sit up. Draco tried in vain to shake off the heavy muzz of sleep.

Potter grabbed the pillow from the unused side of the bed, placing it behind Draco and scrunching it into position. He then eased Draco back into the cushioned comfort. "I'll bring a tray over. You like pasta?"

Draco nodded, fighting to keep his eyes open. The 'episode' he'd had earlier, along with nothing to eat, had obviously affected him. Hating that he felt so -- vulnerable, he made a mental note to make sure he ate at least once a day. He was predominantly left to his own devices at the Manor since his parents had died. The house-elves didn't dare interrupt him when he was working and he spent much of his time trying to increase his standing by developing new creations in his lab. It was ... interesting ... having someone fuss over him for a change.

Potter placed a large wooded tray on the bed in easy reach before handing him a glass of water. Draco drank it all down, not having realised he was even thirsty. Potter refilled it from a carafe, setting it on the nightstand before retrieving two of the potions from the box he had given Draco. Sitting on the side of the bed, he handed the potions one at a time to Draco for him to drink, which he did without preamble, too fatigued to object.

Draco savoured the rich warmth of the liquid as it slid down his throat, finding the taste extremely pleasant as the ingredients instantly activated in his body. "Mmmm ..." He closed his eyes as the magic seeped through every part of him, making him feel cosy and delightful.

Wait a minute.

"That last one was no nutrient potion," he accused mildly, being far too relaxed to stir up any real anger.

"It's a soothing draft." Potter said calmly. "It should help with any residual tension and soreness left over from your episode earlier."

"'S'nice ..." Draco slurred, rolling his head to the side.

"Don't go to sleep, Malfoy. You have a plate of lasagne and salad to get through before you retire for the rest of the night." Potter's hand brushed Draco's forehead and cheek, causing Draco to open his eyes. Potter lifted the appetising looking dinner and forked a small amount ready. Draco managed to lift his heavy limb and claim the utensil, chewing the food steadily. It was tasty, though he was too drowsy to enjoy it.

Potter handed him the plate and left after watching him eat a few mouthfuls. "Don't forget to drink plenty of water," he reminded as he closed the door after him. Draco ate as much as he could stomach before pushing the tray away and settling under the covers. He was asleep before his head hit the pillow.

When he woke in the morning, he placed the tray outside his door before showering and getting dressed. He was late for all of those blasted tests, and figured the sooner he got them over with, the better. He quickly swallowed two more of the potions listed on his schedule, knowing Potter would scold him and threaten no procedure if he didn't, and headed down to the lobby before Apparating to the clinic.

*

Harry had finished preparing the nurse for the tests Malfoy needed, instructing her not to disclose what

each of the tests were specifically for, knowing the man would likely refuse more than one on the grounds that they were testing the health of the child, and were therefore superfluous as far as he was concerned.

Harry still held out hope he would be able to convince Malfoy to carry the child to full term. Chances were the heart murmur was treatable, and given the quality of male pregnancy nutrient potions these days, there was every reason to believe the foetus would improve substantially from its underdeveloped state if Malfoy stuck to the regime from now on.

There was one thing worrying Harry though. The man's blood pressure was high, too high. The reading had been taken after his episode the day before, so it was a possibility it would be better today, though it appeared from his reaction to touch Malfoy's kidneys were inflamed, and that could indicate they were under too much stress due to the pregnancy and the high blood pressure combined. Harry would know more after the tests, but he suspected Malfoy would have to take things easy for the remainder of his pregnancy -- if Harry could convince him to go ahead with it.

It was doubtful, too, that Malfoy was in any physical condition to undergo such a difficult and demanding procedure as an advanced abortion, though he would know definitively by the end of the day, and he was prepared to forcefully encourage the adoption option in that case. Since Malfoy still refused to shed any light on his circumstances, Harry could only assume the reason he regarded the baby so hostilely was something to do with his relationship with the other father. After all, how many reasons could there be under the circumstances?

"Medic Potter?"

Harry looked up at the nurse hovering in his doorway.

"Nurse Duress said to let you know Mr. Malfoy has arrived."

"Thank you, Wylie." Harry flashed a brief smile as the male nurse left before breathing a small sigh of relief. The git was two hours late, but Harry wasn't terribly surprised, given the man's exhaustion the previous evening, which was the only reason he hadn't stormed Malfoy's hotel room already.

Thank God one of their receptionists was over her bout of the flu and had returned this morning. It sounded like Medic Keane would be back tomorrow too, so unless anyone else suddenly fell to the virus, they were through the worst -- which meant things would begin easing up, and maybe then Harry would have the chance to make it up to Rogan, who was becoming increasingly irritated with their lack of contact lately.

Harry continued to see patients and catch up on paperwork, breaking briefly for lunch. Since Malfoy was going to have to hang around for a number of hours, he had bought lunch for him as well, so he wouldn't go all day without anything to eat. The receptionist was instructed to keep plying the man with water to ensure he had a continuous supply in the hopes of avoiding what had happened yesterday.

By the time he finally caught up with Malfoy, it was after three.

"What a charmingly attentive receptionist you have." Malfoy uttered, reclining regally in his chair.

"Is that the list of ingredients you've ingested?" Harry asked, picking the parchment from Malfoy's hand when he nodded. "What's left to do?" Ignoring the other man, he plucked one of the two forms from Malfoy's fist.

"Did you time this or something?" Malfoy intoned as he watched Nurse Duress bore down on them, clutching a small clear container.

"Mr. Malfoy. Do you think you could fill this?" the nurse asked briskly, holding it up.

Harry grinned as Malfoy stood languidly. "Considering I have likely drunk the equivalent of Niagara Falls, I'd say that container -- in all probability -- will prove rather inadequate."

"This shouldn't take much longer. I'll have the results around six-ish. I can drop by the hotel when I'm done here?" Harry asked as he returned Malfoy's form to him. "Say six thirty? We could grab dinner ..."

"Splendid. And don't worry," Malfoy threw over his shoulder, following the nurse to the toilets and waving the urine collection container, "I'll save some for you."

*

Draco ambled along the cobbled street. Ramshackle Row was bustling with magical folk, and it wasn't long before he found what he was looking for.

'Helen Back's Apothecary' was two stories high and contained more raw ingredients than all of Knockturn Alley and Diagon Alley combined. Draco absorbed the familiar smell of white musk and frankincense commonly used to mask the unpleasant odours of some ingredients, as he browsed the many bins of plant clippings and animal parts, and inspected countless phials, ampoules, bottles and tubs.

"'Afternoon," a southern accent drawled behind him. Draco turned to see a striking man, slightly younger than himself, approach. His auburn hair hung lose and cowboy-ish around his ears, natural flecks of gold framing his handsome face, and his large brown eyes glittered in invitation as he gave Draco the once-over, lips arching in approval.

Excellent. This may not be as impossible as he'd thought. Draco returned the easy smile.

The man beamed. "If you're lookin' for somethin' in particular, I'm sure I can help y'all." The young man stepped closer.

Draco leaned in. "I'm sure you could."

A small shiver spread down the man's back. "Mordrid's pizzle, that accent ..." he said, eyes hooded.

"Gets me every time. So, what can I do you fer?" He was quirking an eyebrow.

"You look like you know your way around, and what I am looking for can't be found on the shelves."

The man smirked. "I'm always up for a challenge."

Draco chuckled seductively. "Mmm, I just bet you are. It just so happens, I am very keen to get my hands on something rather special," He slowly raked his eyes down the man's body. "And if you could see your way clear to helping me, you would, naturally, be on the receiving end of my own particular style of appreciation."

The other man swallowed thickly, stuttering slightly, "Wh-what are yer after?"

"Starworgurt."

The other looked taken aback for a moment, and then frowned, curious. Normally starworgurt was only available on Authority -- back home that meant you had to have Ministry approval in the form of a signed order, and you had to account for every gram of usage, as it could be extremely toxic and was only used in abortive potions and a few other more nefarious brews -- Draco imagined it would be similarly protected here.

Sensing the man's indecision Draco moved in. Running his fingers lightly up the man's shirtfront he tempted, "Did I mention how good I am with my mouth?" The man shook his head minutely, his gaze fixed on Draco's lips as they whispered. "Oh, its extraordinarily skilful, and once you have become intimately acquainted with my tongue, you will know just how deep my appreciation runs when I swallow Every. Inch. Of you." Draco ran a finger over the man's bottom lip. "I'll have you so hot and wet, cowboy, you'll be howling like a coyote when I suck you dry."

The man whimpered and Draco traced his hand down the man's front palming the growing erection. "Just say yes."

"I can't get it until closing, when the boss lowers the wards on the backroom."

"Tonight's soon enough." Draco reassured, holding the man's gaze as he moved his hand back up the man's body and around his nape. "We could meet around nine?"

The man's need was coming off him in waves. This was in the bag.

"Yeah," the man croaked, nodding. "I'll be out front."

Draco brushed his lips across the mouth in front of him in promise. The other man didn't stop at that, however. He grabbed the back of Draco's head and crushed his lips to Draco's forcefully. Only Draco's single-minded determination to acquire the starworgurt stopped him from pulling his wand and cursing the man's dick off, instead he gathered a fist full of the other man's hair and yanked his head back, holding it there. The man gasped and Draco bared his teeth, but slowly a smile crept over the other man's face, clearly getting off on Draco's display of dominance.

"Tonight," Draco said forcefully, easing his grip when he had made his point. The man nodded, eyes glittering as he watched Draco back toward the door a ways and finally turn. Fuck, he couldn't cope if the man was that grabby tonight. If they met, he would need to make sure he was the one in control.

As he exited the apothecary he let out a long breath; now he had a back up. If Potter told him he refused to do the procedure, he had another way out; not one he was keen on using, but given no other option it was worth the risk.

Draco swallowed the last two potions Potter had supplied upon arriving back at the hotel, and grimaced. Definitely not a soothing potion among them; still, it should be the last time he would need to worry about it -- by tomorrow he would be solving his little problem, and perhaps the day after he'd be back in England, all of this just an irritating memory.

He relaxed on the bed until Potter knocked. The other man wouldn't quite look him in the eye as he

suggested a local restaurant, and they left, Potter remaining evasive every time Draco tried to bring up the test results and Draco feeling a distinct edge of dread creeping in.

"So. Are you planning on ignoring the enormous white erumpent squatting on our table all night?" Draco quipped. "Or are you finally going to tell me when I can pack my trunk and head to the hospital?"

Potter ducked his head as he took a sip from his water. "Well, here's the thing. There are other --"

Draco held up a hand. "Before you start -- I don't want to hear again about the moral implications of what I want, nor do I want to have to listen to all of your supposed 'options'. What I do want to know is, are you going to okay it, or not?"

Potter cast around for a way to phrase what he had to say. "The test results showed that you have hypertension, and that your kidneys are poisoning your system as they malfunction under all of the pressure. The ingredients you have ingested since gestation have only exacerbated the situation. If you are not careful, your kidneys could pack up all together, which would lead --"

"Are you going to do it?" Draco hissed. "Yes. Or. No?"

Potter sighed, the fight suddenly gone out of him. "No ... I can't ... It's too risky."

Draco's jaw ached it was clenched that hard as Potter rushed on.

"Aside from the fact that I don't want to remove a twenty-week-old foetus, or that you wont tell me why it's so important to you, you are not in any condition to be undergoing a complicated surgery ..."

Draco wasn't listening to Potter's babbling; it looked like he was going to have to make that meeting with the man from the apothecary after all. He was not looking forward to it, even though the man was handsome enough -- he was too eager, and Draco hadn't had sex since ...

Draco winced. Perhaps listening to Potter's verbal vomit was better.

"... and I can get you counselling Draco, to help you face the pregnancy until the baby is born -- and if you want -- put up for adoption. The counsellor who works out of the clinic is very good --"

No. He definitely didn't want to hear that. Potter stopped abruptly when Draco stood from the table. "Goodbye Potter," he concluded, "and thanks for nothing." He navigated the restaurant without looking back.

*

The man was outside the Apothecary when he arrived. Draco had stopped at a bar in the Muggle part of town to steady his nerves, and almost an hour and a half and several gin and tonics later Draco was finally ready to do this.

After an awkward exchange Draco suggested they go back to his hotel room, and the man, Brent, he called himself, readily agreed.

"Do you have the starworgurt?" Draco asked as he closed the door behind them and hung his cape. He probably should have asked earlier, but the alcohol humming through him had put him a little off his game.

The man who had introduced himself as Brent took out a black pouch with a gold thread tie and placed it on the small table. Draco checked the contents, and was satisfied it contained what he needed. Closing it tightly he placed it in his trunk, locking and warding it and then almost hexing the other man when he suddenly snaked his arms around Draco and nudged him to turn.

He began unbuttoning Draco's shirt, leaning in to kiss him, but Draco abruptly leant away, reaching back

and unfastening the man's arms.

"I believe I promised to make you howl," he said flatly, and began divesting Brent of his shirt.

Not to be put off, Brent crowded Draco, murmuring into his ear, "But you're so fuckin' hot." His hands were persistent, his fingers on Draco's buttons, slipping the first few through with practised ease. Draco had tensed, momentarily frozen. Brent kissed his way down Draco's neck as his shirt was opened all the way and pushed back. "So pale and pretty."

Draco's sudden panic snapped him out of it. He grabbed the man's hands and held them fast in front of him as he said, "Drop your trousers." Brent raised an eyebrow curiously but did as he told, shucking them off, along with his pants.

Draco dropped to his knees, taking the leaking shaft into his hand and stroking it a few times as he built up the nerve to do this. He touched his tongue to the underside of the head, and then did it again, letting it linger longer until finally swiping at the glistening drop of pre-come at the tip. He might as well have been licking cardboard for all he felt; there was none of the insane want and need that used to flare within him when exploring a cock. Still, the noises above him assured him that Brent was unaware of his total lack of sexual excitement, and encouraged, he eventually found a familiar rhythm, kissing and laving the cock expertly before finally wrapping his mouth around it. Every now and then Brent would push himself too forcefully down Draco's throat, but he gained a good grip on Brent's thighs and was able to regulate the thrusts even as he took the man deep into his throat.

The man grew very vocal, spouting cheap little encouragements in between his loud moans of pleasure; it was embarrassing and Draco concentrated hard to shut him out. He fondled Draco's hair and palmed his face when Draco rolled the man's balls in his hand. When Draco inserted a finger in his mouth alongside the cock Brent looked down and muttered 'yeah baby's until Draco worked his finger back and inserted it, curling it just so. This spurred the man to greater heights of dirty talk that Draco found couldn't shut out.

"Oh yeah. You're such a slut! That's it. Take it! Yeah, you're a whore for it! A dirty little cock-sucker! Bet you love it, don't you?" Draco wanted to spit the man out using his teeth and punch him in the head, but it was almost over, Brent was close, so he closed his eyes tight and tried not to think, sticking to a rhythm and sucking harder, desperate to get this over with. The man's thrusts became erratic, and Draco braced

himself just in time as Brent cursed and shuddered, emptying himself into Draco's mouth. The man continued moaning as Draco fought the urge to gag, allowing Brent's bitter seed to fill, and then spill, cascading an impossible amount down his chin.

As the other man collapsed back onto the bed, Draco stumbled to the bathroom, feeling disgusting and used, to spit out as much of the residue as possible before rinsing his mouth and surrounding area with water, refusing to look in the mirror. He dried himself with a towel, and leaning over the sink, arms either side of it supporting him, head bowed, he took a moment to settle the slight tremble that had started when he was still on his knees. When he made his way back into the room the sickening stink of sex was suffocating, so Draco crossed to open a window, passing Brent, who was sitting on the end of the bed. But then the man was suddenly behind him, one arm fastening Draco to his chest, the other groping at Draco's limp cock through his trousers.

Draco's heart skipped a beat as he stilled. He knew Brent was no real threat, just a pushy bastard.

"You weren't even hard."

The voice in his ear was mocking and accusing in his mind, and Draco stayed unmoving and silent as the hand squeezed and massaged.

"You just gave me the most amazing head I've ever had, and you didn't even crack a stiffy." He turned his head to study Draco silently.

Draco felt tense and awkward and a little bit sick as he stood under the piercing gaze, and he hated it. He was used to the knowledge that something was broken inside him, and that he couldn't get an erection any more, but it still made situations like this fucking cumbersome.

"Are you even gay?"

"Fuck you! We're done!" Draco snapped.

"Aw, don't be like that!" He teased, finally removing his hand from its pointless stroking. "We can still have some fun." The man's cock was hard again as he pushed it into the crease of Draco's arse. "I'd love to fuck that pretty little ass of yours--"

Draco bucked and threw the bastard off, making a dash for the bathroom. His stomach convulsed, threatening to expel its contents but little came out as he struggled to swallow the urge. He retched once more before he brought it under control.

"Christ! What's the matter with you?" Brent was standing in the doorway of the bathroom, wearing an angry, incredulous scowl.

"Get out!" Draco gasped, wiping the back of his arm across his mouth as his stomach churned. The other man hovered. "NOW!"

Draco rolled his back against the wall as the other man resentfully collected his clothes, and half-dressed, stalked out the door, but not before throwing a sneer at Draco. Draco coughed, bile and the alcohol he consumed earlier having risen enough to burn his throat. That wanker, all he had to do was get his cock near Draco's arse and Draco fell apart. God, he was so fucked.

*

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Harry slammed his fist on the door again. The fucking prick would have to answer it to get him to stop. Who did Malfoy think he was, walking out on him at dinner? Harry had done everything in his power to help, and all he'd received in return was insults and agro. BANG! BANG! BANG!

He was in a foul mood. After Malfoy had left him at the restaurant, he had gone home and showered and

then sought out Rogan -- whom he had cancelled with earlier so he could meet with the Great Git Malfoy in the first place -- only to find Rogan not at home as he said he would be. So Harry had gone to Rogan's place of work where he sometimes lingered if there were things to do, but the shop was dark and empty.

After going for a trek to walk off some of his tension, he had wound up here at Malfoy's hotel room, and he was just about ready to break the fucking door down.

"Malfoy!" He yelled, leaning his ear against the door. A barely audible moan resonated through the wood.

Shit!

Harry kicked at the door before remembering he was a wizard and drew his wand, throwing his repertoire of unlocking spells at it and thanking Merlin when one of them worked. The door quietly clicked open.

He found Malfoy lying on the bathroom floor, with a bloody stain spanning his pyjama bottoms, a broken phial next to it and scraps of starworgurt sprinkled all over the place. Christ! The idiot had tried to take pure starworgurt as an abortive.

He needed to get him to the hospital, fast.

*

Waiting on results of a friend or loved one in a hospital was never an easy thing, and though Malfoy was technically neither, it was still no easier, even in his own ward.

Harry had done everything he could to halt the bleeding while renal specialists had worked on Malfoy's

kidneys, which had finally packed up under the onslaught of toxins. He had been placed in a magically induced coma to help his battered body heal, and now all they could do was wait.

Malfoy didn't stir as Harry watched on from the chair next to his bed. He was still clueless as to the circumstances of Malfoy's pregnancy and the reason he was so determined to rid himself of it, but one thing was for certain -- it wasn't as simple as Harry had first suspected. The man was a potions brewer. He knew the risk he was taking, ingesting pure starworgurt, yet it wasn't enough to deter him.

It took two weeks for Malfoy to come out of the magically induced coma. Harry happened to be on duty in the hospital at the time, and was called by the nurse.

Malfoy was lying on his back, eyes fixed on the ceiling, and didn't acknowledge him when Harry entered. He picked up Malfoy's wrist and stared at his watch, taking the man's pulse.

"How are you feeling?"

There was no answer. Harry collected the chart hanging off the end of the bed. Glancing at the unmoving man, Harry jotted down his observations. "You're very lucky to be alive, Malfoy. Another few minutes and ..." He left the rest of that sentence hanging between them.

"It's still there, isn't it?"

Harry looked up at the rasp. Malfoy still hadn't moved.

Harry stood by the other man's shoulder, placing a hand on it. "The baby survived, yes. It's fortunate the starworgurt doesn't cross the placenta, and it had only partially separated from the wall. I was able to bond it magically and prevent any further damage."

Malfoy turned his head and directed a hateful glare at Harry.

"I had to do it. You would have died. Both of you."

He contemplated Harry's words for a moment and appeared to lose some of his steam. He didn't say anything though, just turned his head back to staring at the ceiling.

Releasing the shoulder, Harry continued, "I've scheduled a counselling session for after lunch." At Malfoy's flickered glance he explained, "Standard hospital procedure. Mind-Healer Zenobie is good at what she does. Give her a chance," he added when Malfoy's lip curled in distaste.

The nurse had already given Malfoy a drink. "Are you hungry?"

"No."

"Well, lunch will be here in just over an hour. In the meantime, keep up your fluids."

Malfoy turned his head to look at Harry. "Is my trunk still back at the hotel? When can I leave?"

"Your trunk is no longer at the hotel, your mishap happened two weeks ago, Malfoy. As far as being discharged, you'll need to stay here overnight for observation, then if all is well I will take you back to my place, where you'll find your things are waiting for you."

"... your place?"

"M-hm." Harry wheeled a tray over from the corner of the room and placed it nearer the bed. "You'll be staying where I can keep an eye on you until the baby is born." Ignoring the man's sneer, he lowered the bed slightly and tilted it, sitting Malfoy up more. "After that, what you do is your own concern, but you will not harm this baby any further than you already have."

He planted a hand on either side of Malfoy's head and glared at him angrily. "Whatever the circumstances are surrounding your pregnancy, whatever 'reason' you might have for not wanting this baby, it is not the baby's fault. It is completely innocent of any wrongdoing. You, however, are not. But you have a chance to make up for some of the despicable things you have done by taking care of yourself and giving this child the best start to life you possibly can." Malfoy was frowning at Harry, through eyes that had become overly watery, and glistened with something more than anger. "Your baby will be born healthy, and -- so help me god -- you will do everything you can to make sure of it. Is that understood?"

Malfoy may have looked on the verge of tears, but it was also clear he'd like nothing better than to spit in Harry's face. He didn't, though. He just glared right back at Harry as though the power of speech had left him.

Harry finally eased back, releasing the other man from the veritable cage of his arms. He turned and left without another word, though he stopped just outside the door to eavesdrop on Malfoy's sniffling. He hoped he hadn't gone too far. Mind-Healer Zenobie would have his balls if he'd made Malfoy any more erratic.

*

"Mr. Malfoy, I presume?"

Draco looked up at the woman approaching. She was in her late forties, had long, dyed blonde hair currently loosely pinned. A heavy fringe rested across her forehead, and she was wearing fawn-coloured robes better suited to business pursuits. Her eyes crinkled around the edges as she smiled.

"It's a safe bet," he said scathingly. "I doubt you'll find too many other Misters in the Maternity ward."

"Touché," she affirmed good-naturedly. She found a visitor's chair against the wall and pulled it closer to the bed before sitting herself comfortably, an open folder resting in her lap. "It's still a rare occurrence,

even nowadays. Not many men willingly undergo pregnancy and childbirth."

Draco felt some of the colour leave his face at the reminder.

He was locked into this until the end now. There was no way of getting rid of the foetus without killing himself, and though he sometimes got so maudlin that he wondered how he was going to go on, there was never any question that he wanted to live.

"I am not willingly undergoing it, either," he remarked bitterly. "I have no choice."

The woman raised her eyebrows. "You must have a very interesting story to tell."

"No, I don't!" he snapped. The woman looked momentarily confused, and then scoffed and chuckled lightly as if realising why Draco was hostile.

"Of course. You have no idea who I am, do you! Let me introduce myself," she stood up and held out her hand, smiling. "Mind-Healer Zenobie, at your service." Draco eyed her hand like it was smeared with unmentionable substances. She hesitated for a moment. "Oh, all righty." Seemingly resigned to the fact that he wasn't about to shake her hand she retracted it, sitting back down.

Draco snorted. He had more or less become used to the idea of seeing a counsellor, and had even dared hope it might do him good, but he could already tell this women was an idiot.

"I've had your file for the past couple of weeks," she murmured, shuffling through the sheets of parchment, "and it indicates your purpose for coming to the States was to have an abortion?" she asked, glancing up as she pulled a sheet free and settled it on the top.

Draco sighed heavily. "Wonderful. That was two weeks' worth of investigative psychology, was it?"

The woman tittered in amusement. "Oh no, not at all. Very witty though, Mr. Malfoy."

Draco rolled his eyes.

"No. I picked up a little more than that. For example," she wrote something down and then turned her attention back to him. "You are here."

Draco blinked as she watched him expectantly. The fact that he was here was glaringly fucking obvious. Was she really this thick?

"Are you really this thick?"

"Oh dear, no, no, no, you misunderstand," she concluded. "What I mean is that you're here, and not back home. That's a long way to come."

Draco grunted, working his jaw in agitation, not liking where the questions were headed.

"Do your parents not approve?"

Draco turned a steely glare on her and said darkly, "My parents are no longer an issue." His glare was usually threatening enough to make anyone withdraw, but the healer's expression remained open and expectant and Draco found himself supplying an answer just to get her to stop looking at him like that. His eyes dropped to his lap as he uttered, "Both my parents are dead."

There was pause.

"The war?"

Draco twisted his hands. "No," he snorted bitterly. "They survived, against all odds, only to be picked off by vigilantes. Some fucking justice. It's all about revenge. That's all it's ever about. They weren't always sunshine and rainbows, but they were different at home. They were good to me, and I ... and mother even helped Potter in the end. And maybe they weren't the best people in the world, but they didn't deserve that. They didn't fucking deserve that." Draco trembled, not sure if he was talking about just his parents anymore.

"What didn't they deserve?"

"To die," he spat. "To be pardoned and punished anyway. To be cursed and bloodied and barely breathing. To be beaten and raped," his voice cracked on the last word. When he noticed his hands shaking he quickly drew them under the covers.

"Draco," the woman's voice was suddenly much richer. "Your parents weren't raped."

Draco swallowed painfully. He pushed back into the pillows and turned his head away. "I know."

There was a long pause.

"It was you."

Draco closed his eyes, wishing he could hide from the world behind them. It was so fucking humiliating.

"We don't have to talk."

Draco rolled onto his side away from the Healer and buried his face in the pillow, too afraid to voice even a refusal, not sure what would come out. It wasn't long before he heard the shuffling of paper and the scratch of a chair across stone.

A hand squeezed his shoulder briefly. "I'll see you tomorrow." She left, pausing briefly to speak to someone outside the door.

*

Harry swallowed, his head falling back on the door.

It had never occurred to him that Malfoy had been violently raped. And he had been so hard on the man. He couldn't even imagine what it must be like -- to carry the child of a person who raped you.

Anger, which until now had paled alongside the sick feeling that had first swamped his stomach, began to coil tightly in his chest. What kind of sick fuck --

"Harry," Catherine Zenobie interrupted Harry's thoughts as she appeared around the door, closing it behind her. "Do you have a moment?"

Harry nodded and led the way to his office. It was small and plain, but Harry spent so little time in it that he never bothered to personalize it much.

"You heard my conversion with Mr. Malfoy?"

"Er, partially. I was just on my way in," Harry admitted as he showed Catherine to a chair and seated himself. "I didn't mean to eavesdrop, he's told me so little."

"Hardly surprising, given the situation," she lamented. "It's obvious he hasn't had any counselling; in fact, I doubt he has told anyone at all before today."

"I had no idea it was something like this." Harry muttered. "I had words with him earlier and now ... now I don't know why he didn't throttle me. The things I said ... "

"Harry, you indicated in the report that you went to school together. Were you close friends?"

"No -- rivals, but never friends. I spent most of my time trying to figure out what he was up to next, and he seemed to spend most of his time trying to prove I wasn't better than him." Harry reflected, frowning slightly. "I suppose, outside of my closest friends, I know him better than anyone else from Hogwarts. I often wondered how he was fairing..." Harry lifted a hand to rub his eyes tiredly.

"It sounds like you both cared very much about being able to effect the other, which usually translates to caring about the effect the other has on you. It is possible, that you might be able to aid him in accepting himself." At Harry's questioning frown, she explained sadly. "Draco Malfoy has hidden this secret for almost six months, because he is utterly ashamed of it."

"He's got nothing to be ashamed of," Harry said, indignant. "The bastard that did it to him, on the other hand --"

"We know that," she interrupted, holding up a placating hand, "but Draco cannot see it rationally, like we can. He may even feel that he is to blame." Harry growled and Caroline continued, "That is between the patient and myself to discover, however. I'll come again, same time tomorrow."

"He's being discharged tomorrow morning. He'll be staying with me; you could always do it there?"

Catherine nodded. "That will be fine. And I'm glad to hear he won't be going back to a hotel room, alone."

"I don't trust him by himself after what happened."

"Don't be too hard on him," she said as she rose from her chair. "He's been trying to deal with this alone for a long time."

Harry nodded and saw her out, and hesitated. "Should I tell him I know?"

"That's entirely up to you, Harry, though your reaction will be important to him. I'll drop 'round about two."

*

Draco followed Potter through the flat to the bedroom.

"Your trunk is at the foot of the bed," Potter gestured, "and the bathroom is just across the hall. My room is next door. There's an office-cum-library next to the bathroom, which you are welcome to make use of, and you already know where the kitchen and living rooms are."

Draco wandered into the room and sat on the bed -- he tired easy. Potter said that was due to his messed up kidneys working overtime; just another reason he had accepted Potter's offer, though the most important was that no one back home need ever find out.

Potter studied him. "You should probably get some rest."

"I just got out of bed an hour ago," Draco retorted.

"You've also got a lot of ground to make up. Kreacher!"

The wickedest, wrinkliest-looking house-elf that Draco had ever seen popped into existence.

"Can you get Malfoy a carafe of water and a glass to keep on his nightstand?" At the name 'Malfoy', Kreacher's eyes searched out Draco and widened, all watery and slightly mad.

"Kreacher will get the most worthy Master Malfoy anything he wishes. It is an honour to serve you, noble sir." The elf performed a great sweeping bow whilst muttering into the carpet about vulgar Americans versus the true English aristocrats. Draco snickered; trust Potter to have a completely barmy house-elf.

"Oh god, don't encourage him." Potter rolled his eyes, addressing the elf. "Malfoy is haughty enough as it is, Kreacher. The water, please."

"Very good, sir." It bowed again and popped out.

"I am not haughty," Draco sulked, eyeing Harry indignantly. "Its called class, Potter. If you're lucky, maybe some will rub off on you while I am here."

Potter's place was surprisingly comfortable, furnished with practical couches, a small dining suite that only sat eight people, and a cosy bathroom that included a bathtub the size of a small lap pool. As acceptable as it was, Draco made sure, on that first day, to scrunch his nose up at everything anytime Potter was near.

Three weeks passed by in a monotonous blur. Draco spent a lot of time resting -- his body was almost permanently fatigued -- and kept up with the potions Potter brought home, because it was easier than dealing with the Golden Boy in a snit.

Mind-Healer Zenobie visited regularly, and Draco found that even though she came across as an idiot, that was just a cunning disguise to drop your guard, wherein she would peel your carefully laid barriers

away layer by layer, until there was nowhere to hide, and nothing to do but face the truth.

Potter spent a lot of time working between the clinic and the hospital, heading out at all hours when he was on call. He went out Saturday nights, not returning until morning. Draco suspected he had a girlfriend, not that he cared. Or anything.

The bump was more prominent now, too. Draco was finding it hard to fit into any of his trousers, as the tailoring spells only went so far, and when he did manage to struggle into them, they pinched and hurt. Potter had brought home half a dozen elasticised trousers after seeing Draco wince every time he sat down. They were utterly wanting in any shape or style, but they felt almost as luxurious as his silk pyjamas -- not that he would admit it to Potter -- and were later joined by more hideous yet comfortable clothing to accommodate his growing bulge.

It was Saturday night again and Draco was flopped on the couch, flicking through the telly (such an appropriate name since all it ever did was talk at you), when Potter came out of the bedroom all spruced up, his hair reasonably tamed -- for Potter anyway -- and his contact lenses in.

"I'm off," he announced as he passed by the back of the couched.

Draco craned his neck. "Kisses."

Potter stopped abruptly. Turning to look at Draco, a blush warmed his cheeks. "Er..."

Draco's eyes widened. "Chocolate Kisses," he clarified. "Don't forget to bring me some back."

"Oh, right ... right," he faltered. He shuffled his gloves from hand to hand for a moment and then turned on his heel and left.

The door closed behind him and Draco settled thoughtfully back into the couch. That wasn't what he expected. Not that he had done a lot of thinking about kissing Potter, but the man hadn't looked

horrified at the idea. In fact, Draco could almost have sworn that there was disappointment in his eyes before he left. Interesting.

Draco pulled his neck up and winced at the ache. He had fallen asleep on the couch once he'd turned the telly off, and was lying in the dark, but something had woken him up. As he rubbed his nape the front door clicked open and the sound of giggling and scuffling footsteps echoed from the hall. The hall light clicked on and he lifted himself onto his elbows to peer at the hallway. The unmistakable sound of muffled kissing and groping preceded two figures that virtually fell into the lounge.

One of them chuckled. "Mmm ... Harry, God, I want you."

Draco frowned -- a bloke then. Potter was dating a bloke. But that wasn't what interested him right at the moment; there was something ... familiar ... about that voice. Draco watched as the two shadowy figures writhed against one another.

"I wanna feel your cock inside me, Harry," the familiar voice breathed. "I want you to stretch me and fuck me and slam me into the bed ..."

"Shhhhh," Harry urged. "I don't want to wake Draco."

"I may still be sleeping, since I seem to be having a nightmare," Draco drawled. The two men jumped and the light clicked on.

Both men's eyes were wide, Potter's from having been caught out, but the other man's eyes were wide in recognition.

"Shit. I'm sorrym Malfoy. I didn't know you would still be ... sorry." Potter faltered, embarrassed.

Draco shifted his gaze to Harry as he lifted himself from the couch. "It's fine, I'll just get myself a bucket on the way to bed."

"No ... wait." Potter blurted and indicated the man with him. "Er ... this -- this is Rogan."

Not Brent then. Draco glanced at Brent-slash-Rogan to see the man's gaze fixed on his abdomen. Draco looked down and saw his track pants were slung low, pushed down in the front exposing his obvious bump. Draco yanked them up.

"A pleasure -- Rogan, was it?" he intoned, the insinuation not lost on the other man.

Rogan gave a short nod, tucking his hands in his jacket pocket defensively.

Draco couldn't help the uneasy shudder than ran through him. The disaster of their tryst was still fresh in mind; he could feel his cheeks heating up. Turning quickly, he muttered goodnight and, ignoring Potter's questioning frown, hotfooted it to his room.

As he lay in the dark, he could hear low murmurs coming from the living room. So his boyfriend cheated on Potter; he wondered if the git had any idea. Probably not. Potter was far too old-fashioned to have an open relationship, and too moralistic to put up with infidelity. No, Rogan was playing him for a sap. And the way he was staring at Draco's bump, he had obviously put it together that Draco had wanted the starworgurt for himself. If Potter ever found out that his perfect little boyfriend had given it to him for the promise of a bit of cock, he'd be out faster than garlic at a vampires' convention.

Draco rolled over as he heard the front door close and one set of footsteps head to Potter's room. He smiled to himself at the thought of Brent's sulky features as he was pushed out into the night with no sex. The idea of Potter and the other man doing it made him feel slightly nauseous. Thank Merlin he wouldn't have to listen to the inevitable noises coming through the wall. Maybe he should tell Potter all about 'Brent', so he wouldn't ever have to listen to it.

*

It wasn't until five weeks later, when Rogan turned up at the front door while Potter was on a night shift one evening, that he regretted his decision to stay out of it.

"Hi honey, I'm home!" Rogan drawled, pushing the front door open further, forcing Draco to step backward as he crowded him. "I do wish you had kept your pretty little mouth shut."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Draco thundered, his pulse speeding up as the other man neared. "I didn't say anything."

"Don't bullshit me!" Rogan glowered, kicking the door closed. "Something's been off ever since the night we came back here and you interrupted, and he's refused to see me for the past fortnight. What did you tell him?"

Draco stepped back as the other man pushed forward, ending up in the living room. "Fuck you," he spat. "If he's finally seen you for who you are, then that's your own fault for being such a worthless prick in the first place. It's got nothing to do with me."

Rogan gripped Draco's arms and shook him. "It's got everything to do with you!" He growled and threw Draco into the couch angrily. Draco fought viciously to get up before the man could pin him, but he was hindered by his bump, and in the ensuing struggle he ended up falling face-first on the floor.

"Everything was fine until you showed up!" Rogan yanked Draco's arm up his back and straddling his thighs, leaned down and hissed in his ear. "You fucking owe me, you little prick tease, and I'm going to collect."

Draco was breathing in and out fast, and yet there wasn't enough air. He groaned in agony as the man on top of him moved, forcing his bump into the floor. Fuckohfuckohfuck, he needed air. His head was

yanked off the floor and words were spilling over him, but he was too busy gasping.

He couldn't breathe!

When his cheek was thrust back onto the floor and held there, the image of a brick wall and yellowed teeth in a shabby little alley assaulted him -- oh god no, he didn't want to relive that again, the episodes had all but gone since he'd arrived at Potter's, he wasn't ready to deal with it again.

But because he was suffocating and couldn't get enough air, and because Mind-Healer Zenobie said he had to face the truth to conquer it, and because a hand was suddenly yanking at his bottoms -- he let go.

The images fighting their way forward swamped him and he sunk into the abyss, lost to his own hellish memories.

*

"That's 'im! That's the one!" A small hand was thrust under his cloak as Draco struggled against the massive hands clamped over his mouth and torso. It fumbled around until it touched on his ingredients pouch, grasping it and yanking it free. Hope sparked for the first time since he had been grabbed and dragged disarmed into the dark little alley. If they were after the potions ingredients, they had what they wanted ...

A crack rang out in the confined area and the same voice as before spoke excitedly. "We've got 'im. It was easy, just like ya said!" Heavy steps echoed as they drew nearer. Draco searched the darkness for their owner. A Lumos spell flared to life, and he stared wide-eyed at the figure approaching.

Tall and broad and cloaked in leather, long inky black hair framed a grotesquely mangled face with almost no recognisable human features, just decaying flesh and sinew. Dark sunglasses covered the eyes, and Draco had to wonder what lay beneath.

"I've been waiting for this pleasure for quite some time."

Draco lurched against his captor's grip as he watched the lipless mouth rasp. His head was forced forward, closer to the disfigured man and he averted his eyes, unwilling to look at the rancid and mottled flesh. A hand reached up and stroked his hair gently, the unnaturally black lenses glittering as something writhed behind them. "So beautiful. So perfect." The face came closer and Draco flinched, wincing at the sight.

"Hard to look at, isn't it?" The hand that stroked his hair lightly brushed his ear, smoothly caressed his neck and then trailed down his front suggestively before cupping and squeezing the front of Draco's trousers. Draco jerked, trying to shrink away. "Unfortunately, my dear boy, you shall never be able to forget it.

"Get him ready, Garvan."

As the disfigured man retreated, the smaller man began casting Silencing Charms in the surrounding area. When the huge oaf restraining Draco finally released his mouth, his desperate cries only appeared to please and excite his three assailants. A violent kick from Garvan had his knees buckling, hitting the cobbled surface painfully. His arms were yanked high behind him and then Garvan backhanded him, landing a swift kick before he seemed satisfied.

Draco was then stripped of his clothing, even down to his shoes and socks. He panted with pain and exhaustion, his pulse running as furiously as his mind as the two men held up his hunched and naked body for the third man. The man slowly approached, the foul flesh of his faceless visage quivering when the mouth formed an unnatural smile.

Draco could feel his legs giving way under the onslaught of fear and disgust. This ... thing ... was going to touch him? Rape him? Draco had had sex, but he'd never bottomed, and now this monster was going to brutally invade him? "No! ... No no no no no! ..."

The man stopped in front of Draco and reached both arms up, taking his cheeks in his hands and meeting

Draco's watery gaze. He spoke in tones of false regret.

"I owe your father, dear boy; he helped create what you see before you. As he is now gone, you are my only window to revenge." Draco clamped his eyes tightly shut as the man rested his fetid forehead against his. "I will spare your life where I would not have spared his, but nothing more. Be grateful."

His two accomplices pushed Draco's cheek into one of the grimy alley walls and held him there and his cursing gained a new urgency as he writhed and wrenched his aching body against the cold surface. Hands, warm and heavy, trailed down his back, groping and squeezing and ranging all over his bared flesh.

"I've never fucked another man before," he breathed close to Draco's ear. "Or should I say, boy? You are quite the specimen though. Just as well you're a fag, eh?" His hands slid down to palm Draco's arse cheeks. They squeezed and rubbed gratuitously as fingers trailed his crease. The man chuckled darkly. "I've heard tell that you boys are tight."

At the sound of a zipper being opened Draco made a sudden bid for freedom, his efforts barely testing the two men that held him. Garvan watched him lecherously from where he stood only inches from his face. Draco looked into the glittering eyes, saw his own doom and closed his eyes tightly again.

By the man's arm movements Draco could feel him stroking his own cock. Then Garvan and the oaf nudged his legs apart. Draco tensed.

He began a mantra of the word No like a prayer under his breath. His pulse raced and his eyes flew open as his arse cheeks were separated. The blunt head of a large cock touched his crease. "Your hole is fucking miniscule, boy," the man behind him growled. Draco held his breath, his body rigid. When the cock was thrust forward it didn't go in, not even nearly, and Draco cried out and trembled and grit his teeth against the bruising agony.

It took several thrusts for the man to get even part the way in. Draco screamed and was almost crawling through the wall at the burning pain in his arse. He wept openly now, his tears mixing with the grime on the wall, but the bastard behind him wasn't about to give him time to adjust; pain lanced up his spine as

he thrust again.

Draco was shaking badly, his entire body cold and wretched as he waited for the relief of unconsciousness.

"Where's the blood coming from?" The man's hand swiped his inner thigh and blood covered fingers were thrust into his vision. "See this? It's pouring from your arse." Garvan snickered. "Don't tell me you're a virgin, boy."

Draco barely saw the blood through his hooded eyes, but when he started slipping down the wall the two men either side heaved him back up, the oaf pinning Draco's arms above his head.

"Fucking Christ," the man sighed wearily. "Let's get this over with." The man's cock slid in the cooling, sticky substance oozing from Draco as he lined himself up again. "A twenty-three year old fucking virgin. With looks like yours," he mocked.

His cock pushed in, buried to the hilt. By then Draco could no longer stand under his own steam and was being held firm as he slowly ebbed away. But the man violating him was having none of that and grabbed his hair, turning his head. "Don't you pass out on me, lad." He released Draco's hair to grab his hips firmly. "Make sure he stays conscious," he demanded.

The oaf grasped Draco by his hair while Garvan slapped him awake.

"C'mon now, boy. Ya gotta stay with us, lad. Doesn't count if ya pass out. Don't wan' us to have to come and pay ya another visit now, do ya?" The threat somehow penetrated Draco's pain filled world and he jerked his head in an effort to stay conscious. "Thadda boy!"

"Lucius Malfoy's boy is no longer pure!" the man crowed vindictively, hiking Draco's hips back and speeding up. "His prized possession broken, and nothing will ever make it properly whole again."

Draco buried his face in his arm, the words lancing him hotly, cutting deeper than any knife could.

"Do you think daddy ... would approve ... of you now?"

Draco choked down his sob, determined not to cry anymore, but then a hand gripped his limp member. He startled, lifting his head and opening his eyes. Garvan was grinning maliciously at him as he began massaging Draco's cock.

"No," Draco croaked, his whole body screaming it. Not that! Oh, gods -- he didn't think he could bear it if they made him come -- but the fist worked his cock as it thickened and lengthened in the foreign hand.

Draco met Garvan's glare and appealed, "... please." But Garvan only taunted him with his tongue, raking it lasciviously over his own lips, extending it out of his mouth until it protruded and wriggled and lapped at the air repulsively. Draco closed his eyes again, shutting him out.

Arousal was building in the pit of his belly, snaking out through his legs and arms to the tips of his fingers and he fought it desperately. But as the man fucking him picked up his pace, so too did Garvan and Draco had to grit his teeth as tendrils of painful fire from his arse were drowned out by rivulets of pleasure radiating from his cock. The man behind him thrust roughly as he reached his crescendo, and the hateful hand on his cock pumped rapidly, and Draco tried to hold it back but his reluctance only seemed to rush him closer to the edge. His orgasm hit with devastating force as the other man groaned, his cock pulsing and emptying in his arse.

He could feel Garvan's eyes on him as he squeezed Draco's wilting cock one more time before pulling his hand away. The maimed man's softened cock slipped out of him, the last shred of dignity torn free, leaving a gaping ragged wound and it was all he could do to keep breathing. He collapsed on the cobbles when they released him.

"I shouldn't need to warn you of the consequences of reporting this," the faceless man threatened, "though I doubt you'd want anyone to know. Fucked up the arse by a faceless monster? Getting your rocks off being defiled in an alley ... not very ... 'Malfoy'. You are fortunate to still be living. Best leave it that way, eh? "

Garvan and the oaf manhandled Draco as they re-dressed him, Garvan licking his come-stained fingers vulgarly for Draco's benefit. He cancelled the Silencing Charms and then all three of them Disapparated, leaving him propped up against a wall on the alley floor.

Draco's heavy eyelids fluttered a couple of times before he slid down the wall unconscious.

"Draco! Christ, I'm sorry ... Draco ... "

Draco groaned and opened his eyes to find himself staring into green eyes and a panicked face. "... Potter?"

Potter nodded and breathed out heavily. "I thought ... I thought I'd lost you there for a minute. I thought you'd slipped back into a coma."

Draco turned his head to note he was lying in Potter's arms, head against his chest, and they were both on the living room floor. A suspiciously Rogan-like mound lay nearby. Then Draco remembered.

"That fucking arse ..." Draco carped, rubbing a shaky hand over his forehead.

"I'm sorry, Draco." Potter said guiltily. "I'm so sorry. I ... I had no idea he would ..." He cut himself off as he glanced away painfully.

"How could you know Potter, he was only your boyfriend, after all," Draco sniped. He pushed himself away from Potter and moved to stand to his feet -- a much more difficult thing than it used to be. He swayed as blackness threatened and Potter scrambled to steady him, but it ebbed and he was able to shake the other man off.

Draco eyed the unconscious form on the floor. "What did you hit him with?"

"My fist."

"Pity you didn't Crucio him," Draco said darkly.

Potter wiped a hand over his face wearily. "I'm so sorry you had to go through that again."

Draco raised his suspicious gaze to Potter, who fidgeted nervously.

"I heard you that first day Catherine saw you in hospital." When Draco narrowed his eyes he continued sombrely, "I didn't say anything because ... it was none of my business then ... now it is, though."

"Really. How so?" Draco asked waspishly.

"Because it's my fucking fault it nearly happened again, alright?" Potter snapped, his eyes watery. "Plus it's not like we hate each other anymore. Christ, we've been living together for almost two months!"

Draco closed his eyes and sighed. "You might want to rephrase that, or one of us might get the wrong idea."

"I wouldn't do that to you, Draco. I wouldn't put you in that position." Draco stared at Potter intently. "You have enough to deal with. And anyway," he sighed, subdued, "I'm an obstetrician Medic, and you are my patient. We cannot have that sort of relationship. Not until I discharge you."

Before Draco could think too much on what Potter was saying, the lump of clothing on the floor moaned. Draco unconsciously backed up as it stirred slightly. Potter stepped forward so he was between Draco

and Rogan, wand in hand and his anger showing again, but Rogan stilled once more.

"Was it him who gave you the starworgurt?" Draco eyed Potter for a moment before nodding. Potter winced as he asked, "What ... How ...?"

"I sucked him off," Draco snapped. "Obviously he decided that wasn't enough."

Potter worked his jaw angrily. "You should have told me."

"It was none of my business," Draco repeated Potter's words back to him.

Potter closed his eyes and sighed, turning back to Rogan. "What do you want to do with him?"

"Nothing." Draco scrunched his nose up. "He's not worth the bother."

Potter looked over his shoulder at him cautiously. "Are you sure?"

Draco nodded. "Just get him out of here."

"Oh, I have every intention of making sure he leaves and never darkens this doorway again," he said threateningly, eyes fixed on Rogan.

"I think I'll lie down for a bit."

Potter turned his head again and watched as Draco departed for his bedroom. As he neared Rogan, Draco paused. A wry smile crept across his lips and he snorted quietly. "So boorish, Potter. You had a wand, you realise?"

Potter smiled dryly. "I'll be in to see you when I've disposed of him. I want to make sure you're both all right."

"Whatever." Draco waved a hand dismissively as he disappeared up the hallway. "You can tell Kreacher I'll need some gratuitous pampering upon waking. And I want comfort food; pancakes with blueberries and ice cream and lashings of syrup."

*

"Your renal function is fluctuating, and the baby is still stressed," Potter said seriously. "The heartbeat is too high. It should be calming down with your influence."

"Potter, there is barely a part of me that doesn't ache. Perhaps it can sense my ongoing agitation." Draco was utterly exhausted, yet he hadn't been able to sleep, still antsy after everything. The scene with Garvan and the others had played over and over in his head while he had lain there, tossing about; it still made him nauseous, but it didn't terrify him like it had. Perhaps Zenobie had been right. Perhaps accepting what had happened would help him get past it.

He was relieved Potter was back now, though; he could finally relax. The slight tremble in his hands was already easing.

"I'll get you something." Potter said, standing. "It might help to settle the baby, too."

Draco sighed wearily, throwing an arm over his eyes. A few minutes later he was being urged to sit up and drink. He eased back down when he was done, closing his eyes and just enjoying the instant relief of the soothing and pain potions as they crept through him.

"Mmm ... tha's bedda," Draco slurred and then opened his eyes again. "You gonna stay for 'while?" With

an almost-smile Potter nodded. "Tha's goood," he sighed, closing his eyes again, "den I can sleep."

He woke a couple times, sweating and shaking as his dreams renewed and distorted the memories he had re-lived just hours ago, creating horrific nightmares. Potter was always there, cooling his forehead and tending to his garbled requests for water. Then he would stay awake and Potter would talk to him, tell him nonsense until he felt distanced enough from his nightmares to sleep again.

He was also sort-of woken a few times by Potter, gently pulling his shirt and covers aside, exposing his abdomen for tests, but those times he almost instantly succumbed to sleep once again under the touch of Potter's familiar, warm hands.

Potter was still there monitoring him, apparently having taken the day off, when Draco finally did rise. He got his pancakes and his pampering, with a good dose of fawning thrown in, and he was beginning to feel much better, when something suddenly did a loop-d-loop in his belly. It was a most peculiar feeling.

As the days wore on he was treated to a full repertoire of movements, including kicking, poking, stabbing (and what the hell was that?) and turning, also tiny little rhythmic jerks that Potter explained as hiccups. Draco's kidneys had taken a nosedive the night Rogan stopped by, and hadn't recovered, which meant he had to rest a lot. Potter explained they couldn't be repaired until after the baby was born due to the nature of the procedure, so now he had a load more potions to remember to take. Potter chastised him severely -- went off his effing nut precisely -- if he forgot even one.

So Draco had taken up watching movies with the baby for something to do, and had rapidly come to the conclusion that Muggles were really on to something with all that science fiction stuff. Potter brought home a selection for him to watch each week, and the Star Wars trilogy had so far proved a favourite; the baby kicked up excitedly whenever the theme music started up.

It had been going swimmingly -- there seemed absolutely no limit to his love of space (it was the final frontier after all) -- and then he saw Alien.

Potter had in the end dosed him with his magic soothing potion whilst firmly explaining that male birthing was nothing like the chest-bursting scene that had had him hysterical. He even brought a small book back from the clinic the next day that backed up what he had said. Still, Draco had watched nothing

but Spongebob Squarepants for weeks after.

Mind-Healer Zenobie -- or as Draco called her now -- Obi-wan Zenobie due to her skill at mind-bending, was very impressed with his progress, and they spent most of her visit sipping tea and discussing hospital gossip.

Everything had been gliding along nicely -- or waddling along, since Draco was now more bulbous than a bubotuber -- when one day whilst watching The Matrix (and oh my god, wasn't that the mind-fuck of the century!), when his back began to twinge uncomfortably. Seconds later harsh pain was arcing out of his back and around his sides.

Draco had read the pocket-sized book Potter had given him about male pregnancy deliveries, and knew this wasn't the usual slow build-up labour pain; it was three weeks too early, anyway. The stabbing agony was relentless, and worsening by the minute. He tried to heave himself off the couch, but ended up crumpled on the floor. By the time he managed to call Kreacher coherently, he was in agony. Kreacher took one horrified look at Draco and Disapparated.

Draco passed out from the pain.

*

Harry cast a diagnostic spell the second he arrived after Kreacher's call; then he grabbed Malfoy by the shoulders, lifted the man into his arms and Disapparated. He didn't have much time; Malfoy's kidneys were failing. He began shouting directives the minute they hit the hospital, and it wasn't long before Malfoy was hoisted into a theatre, surrounded by frantic staff.

The baby had to be delivered right away, or they would lose both of them, and for that they would need Malfoy conscious -- so Harry Enervated him. It took three tries before Malfoy finally came round. Sweat immediately lined his forehead as he curled up, lifting his shoulders off the table and screaming in agony. Two nurses injected him quickly -- one with a pain reliever, the other with an inducer, whose effect was immediate. Malfoy allowed himself to be lowered back down, his teeth still gritted in pain, the dose only

enough to take the edge off because of the risk to the baby.

Two other nurses were stripping Malfoy efficiently, but Harry noticed he was blindly struggling with them when they tried to relieve him of his trousers. He waved them off and moved to the top of the table, placing a hand on Malfoy's forehead and stroking his hair gently back as people buzzed around him, preparing for what was to come.

"Draco?" he asked, leaning in to meet the other man's pained eyes. "Draco, listen to me." Harry watched in sympathy as Malfoy's eyes squeezed tightly shut and then refocused on him. "Your kidneys are failing. We're inducing labour, and I need you to stay with me so you can push when it's time. Everything will be okay, just focus on my voice. I'll help you through it." Harry moved to the bottom of the table. He began removing the trousers that were halfway off, and Draco let him. Once he was naked Potter erected the stirrups and lifted his legs into place. A warm blanket was placed over him.

The renal specialist walked in just after Harry had applied the salves to Malfoy's opening that would help him stretch rapidly. Satchel Orton was a robust man in his sixties with salt and pepper hair, not too tall, and he had clear blue eyes and a jowly chin that wobbled when he walked. Harry went to the sink to wash up and sterilise his hands while the specialist cast a few charms and watched the results transfer to a large white board on the wall.

He spoke seriously. "He doesn't have much time, Potter."

"I know."

Satchel Orton moved closer and lowered his voice, saying urgently, "Labour will take too long. If you take the baby out now you can at least save its life."

Harry turned on him and growled quietly, "I will not kill him by cutting the baby out! He will give birth normally but quickly, and then you will fix him!"

He knew that if you cut a male open when birthing, he would die. If he were a woman, there would be no problem because a woman's body remained fundamentally the same -- all it does is re-size. But a

man's body was roiling with magical changes that begin in a chain reaction from the moment of pregnancy, and continue right through to the elimination of unnecessary female biology immediately following birth, and finally the re-organisation of what's left. The process was mapped physically throughout the body and, if interfered with, became chaotic.

If just one of the many, many magical directives underway became unable to complete its purpose (which would happen because the baby didn't travel down the birthing canal, for example), then none that follow would have a correct beginning and end, and anything could happen, from the lungs ceasing to exist instead of the womb, to the internal organs being re-shuffled into the wrong place -- a liver would not work terribly efficiently as a brain, etc.

Orton shook his head. "He will likely not make it through the birth, you could end up cutting him anyway when his system is overrun with toxins and shuts down, and by then the child may be in the birthing canal. You risk losing both of them!" he hissed.

Harry swallowed as he watched Malfoy writhing in pain. "He's stronger than he looks. And he's ... he's a stubborn bastard. He's not going to give up that easily." Harry left the man, the conversation over.

"Aaaaaargh!" Malfoy cried as he tried to curl up. "Fuck," he panted. "Harry!"

"I'm here," Harry assured, moving so Malfoy could see him.

"Fuck ... it hurts," he whimpered and then panted again. "I don't think ... I can do this."

"Yes, you can!" Harry said forcefully. "The reason it's hurting so badly is you're having contractions now, too, but they'll be over before you know it. You can do this, Draco! You can. And I'll be here every step of the way." Harry put his face inches from Malfoy and waited until the painful mist partly cleared from his eyes. "After everything you've been through, you're not going to give in now." He paused, adding, "I won't let you."

A tear dripped out of the corner of Malfoy's eyes as he stared at Potter, his expression still pain-filled and

scared. "Don't leave me," he breathed back.

"Never."

"He'll be ready to start pushing in about six minutes," a nurse monitoring Draco's dilation chimed in. Harry motioned to Orton, positioning him behind Draco so the man could react quickly once it was done. The seven members of staff were all busy, laying out blankets and organising the mobile crib, preparing equipment and keeping up monitoring charms. As Harry checked the readings on the board again, Malfoy grabbed his hand, squeezing it viciously.

Harry squeezed back. Malfoy had large dark circles developing under his eyes and his mouth was looking chapped and bruised. His hair was plastered to his head and his skin was sickly pale. Harry hoped to God he could hang on long enough.

When Harry positioned himself on a stool between Malfoy's raised legs and ordered him to start pushing, he thought perhaps they were going to make it. Malfoy pushed and screamed and cursed everyone he had ever known as the baby made its way down the birthing canal, but it was a huge drain on him in his already weakened condition. It only took about twenty minutes until the crown of the head was visible, but the contractions had been coming fast and hard, with barely a break between to speed things up so by then he was barely lucid. Harry kept talking, encouraging and goading him into finishing it, but Malfoy was utterly exhausted and losing the battle against the poisons overrunning in his body.

Harry hardened his tone and ordered Malfoy harshly to push again, afraid he would lose them both as Orton had predicted, but it made no difference. Malfoy was slowly drifting away.

"Malfoy! Malfoy!" Harry barked, only inches away from his face. Malfoy groaned, his eyes remaining closed. "Wake up! Don't you dare let go! Open your eyes!" Harry was getting desperate. The baby was already going into foetal distress from being in the canal too long. Orton gave him a pitying look. But just then Malfoy opened his eyes.

The eyelids were drooping and he looked barely there, but he met Harry's gaze. "C'mon, Draco, you can do it. We just need a couple more pushes," he said in a much more restrained voice.

"... 'M so tired." His voice was slurred as if affected by a soothing potion, but it was much more sinister than that.

"I know," he admitted, gripping Malfoy's cold hand. "But you're nearly finished, just a couple more and you're done. I promise."

"Mm ... promise?" he asked, licking his parched and split lips.

"The baby's heart rate is nearing critical," a nurse's urgent voice up-dated them.

"Yes," Harry assured. "It'll all be over."

"En ... ener ... Enervate me..." Malfoy breathed.

Harry's stomach dropped. "D-draco, no. In your condition, it would --"

"...'S okay ... Harry," he murmured. "... doesn't hurt ... anymore"

Harry straightened, stunned as Malfoy's eyes edged closed. He was losing him.

"Do it, Potter," Orton said sombrely. Harry glanced at his colleague for a second through blurry eyes before he turned his wand on Malfoy. When he cast the spell it was barely audible.

Malfoy jolted and his eyes fluttered. "Again," he said, his breaths raspy. Harry cast it again and flinched as Malfoy jolted once more. His eyes were open as he searched out Harry.

"Push, hard," Harry croaked and moved back into position. Malfoy took a couple of gulping breaths before he pushed, the nurses rolling him forward so he could bear down. His face was flushed red, and he moaned as he breathed out but quickly started pushing again.

"That's it, Draco! You're doing it!" Harry encouraged. "Keep pushing."

Malofy pushed and pushed and cried out as something gave way.

"The head's out, Draco! You're almost there, just another big push ought to do it."

Malfoy whimpered, took a sharp breath and gave it everything he had left, crying out as the baby finally slipped free. He sagged back into the nurse's arms and they laid him back against the pillows as Harry gripped the tiny baby securely. Malfoy's barely open eyes met his.

"It's a girl," Harry announced, his eyes bright, his smile genuine.

Malfoy signed, exhaustion etched on his face. His eyes rolled back and his head lolled to the side as Harry glanced at his readings. The Enervating spells had pushed him beyond his limit, and his stats were dropping rapidly.

"Orton!" he snapped, but Orton had already begun motioning to the two nurses closest to him. Harry pulled his attention back to the infant in his hands, passing it to a nurse who stimulated it magically, causing the baby to splutter. Another cast a gentle cleansing charm and then both of them did a basic health check. Harry finished delivering, clamped and cut the cord and then quickly healed the tear that had alarmingly stopped bleeding -- not because it wasn't a large wound, but because Malfoy's blood was obviously no longer pulsing through his body. His heart had stopped!

Harry leapt off his stool and rounded on Orton, only to be pulled up short as the nurse yelled urgently, "She's going blue, Medic Potter! She's not getting enough air into her lungs!" Harry looked frantically between Malfoy and the baby. Orton shook his head.

Harry, feeling torn in two and positively ill, barked out transfer orders and he and the antenatal nurses exited the theatre to rush the baby to the Comprehensive Treatment Area.

'He's gone,' echoed through Harry's desolate mind as they raced along the corridor. When they reached the CTA Harry gathered himself and went about helping the baby breathe as he diagnosed the problem. His thoughts were incessantly invaded by the image of Malfoy's deathly pale body lying lifelessly on the theatre table. His hands trembled as he wrote out the baby's file, indicating where the problem was and what treatment was underway. Because the infant was born three weeks premature, her lungs were not quite fully developed and were still full of goop. They had to be gently sucked clean and given time, they should develop normally.

A kind nurse brought him a cup of tea and sent him a pitying look as he tolled away at the paperwork. For a moment Harry couldn't breathe through his anguish, and his eyes burned desperately.

Malfoy was ... Harry sighed, he might as well give in to his instinct and call him what he's wanted to for a while now. Draco had been living with him for months now, and he had got used to his banter. He had watched him grow as the baby grew, had not only bought clothing for Draco to use but had also acquired some small jumpsuits for the baby. He'd squirreled them away, knowing how Draco would have reacted if he knew. He hadn't want to hear how they wouldn't be needed, because the child would be given up the moment it was born.

It was a moot point now. The little girl would grow up without ever having known her father -- the things about Draco Malfoy that had made him unique, like the way he would leave a dozen empty Chocolate Kisses wrappers on the couch all smoothed and flattened out and in a perfect little stack; or how every now and then when he went for a bath he would forget to do a Silencing Charm and he could be heard talking freely to the baby bump about whether it would come out looking more like Yoda or an ewok; or how he used to surreptitiously brush tell-tale crumbs off his bump whilst denying having nicked the last of the Snickerdoodles.

The infant had been settled and was being monitored, and he had to see Orton, so Harry made his way back to the theatre. It was empty, no trace that any of them had ever been there. When he turned, he came face to face with the very man he had been looking for.

"Harry. How is the infant?" Orton asked kindly.

"She's fine. There don't appear to be any further problems," he answered sombrely.

"Good, good. I was just on my way to see you. Your patient? You called him Malfoy? Draco Malfoy?"

"Er ... that's right, yes." Harry choked slightly and cleared his throat.

Orton's brows knitted together in concern. "You look dreadful, Harry. Are you sure everything is all right?"

Harry's head snapped up angrily. "Of course everything isn't all right! I lost a patient today." He sighed, the anger gone again at Orton's shocked look. "And a friend."

"What in Nanny's knickers are you talking about?"

The two men stared at each other in confusion for a moment, and then both of them seemed to realise what was going on at the same moment.

"Draco ... he made it?" Harry asked, almost not daring to hope, but Orton was already nodding in ascent.

"You were right about that one, Harry. He was quite a bit stronger than he looked."

"But his heart stopped." Harry said. "You shook your head at me before I left ..."

"Ah, yes. His heart did stop briefly, but I was able to place a stasis spell so that I could work on him for a few minutes before zapping his heart and starting it up again. It can be done if you catch the patient

when they're merely intrinsically dead, and it would have done him no good at all to have continued pumping his poisoned blood around," he said matter-of-factly. "And I shook my head to indicate there was nothing you could have done by staying behind, and that you should go to with your charge."

"Where is he?"

"He's in the renal ward and he's still very weak. It will take him some weeks to get his strength back, but it should return. His kidneys are now functioning at about sixty percent, which means he probably won't even notice any trouble at all once he's recovered ... He really was very lucky. Oh, and just be aware ... he's probably a tad whimsical. He's had a rather large dose of painkillers."

Harry grabbed Orton's arms and smacked his lips to the man's cheek. "Thank you! Thank you!" Giddily he turned and ran towards the renal ward, leaving a rather stunned Medic behind.

*

"... Draco ..."

Mmm, Draco felt like he was enclosed in warm fuzz -- the kind that was soft enough to be down, mind you, not the kind that tickled and itched! Or perhaps he was floating on a summer breeze, wafting to and fro without a care in the world because everything around him was heavenly and welcoming and somehow he just fit.

"Draco ..."

Mmm ... the hand that smoothed over his forehead and carded his hair was full of trusted comfort, and the voice that murmured and beckoned, humming enticingly through his senses, lured him forth from his serene world.

Draco opened his eyes dreamily and smiled at the familiar and desirable sight of Harry leaning over him, his arm stretched out in mid-touch as it caressed his head.

"'lo, Harry," he purred, his body subtly arching up. Harry stared at him, his eyes sparkling with mirth and something more as he continued to pet his forehead.

"Thought I'd lost you ..." was all Harry said in reply. Draco pulled his arms from the covers to reach out and gently touch Harry's face. His cheeks were wet. Draco wiped his thumbs tenderly through the tears and slid a hand to Harry's nape, pulling him closer, parting his lips just so and tilting his head.

They paused inches apart, hesitating for just a moment before their lips met softly in a questioning kiss -- lingering, tasting, full bottom lips brushing and dragging tenderly. It seemed to last forever and Draco was left slightly bereft when Harry eventually pulled away, a secret smile on his lips.

Noticing Draco's cup of water was empty he picked it off the nightstand. "I'll get you some more." And then he slipped out of the room. Draco closed his eyes and drifted pleasantly.

A clunk beside him woke him with a start. He opened his eyes and a pang of disappointment shot through his chest at the sight of a nurse replacing his drink. She smiled at him and adjusted him to sitting up, and asked if he would like anything else. Draco shook his head and closed his eyes again when she left.

Maybe the kiss'd had a completely different effect on Potter. For Draco it had confirmed his suspicions that he was becoming painfully attracted to the man. Kissing him had felt better than any kisses he had ever shared. In fact, he'd never really bothered much with kissing before, but after having experienced it with Potter, he was changing his mind about that. It could have been a fluke, so of course, more kissing was called for, just to make sure.

That is, if Potter ever came back. And then he suddenly realised something. He opened his eyes and daylight was streaming into the room through the cracks in the heavy curtains. It had been evening when Potter was last here. He must have slept for hours.

"She needs feeding in an hour, if you're not too tired."

Draco turned his head towards the door and his heart jumped, not just at the fact that Potter had come back, but also at the sight of the bundle Potter was holding. His pulse rate sped up, and he didn't think his eyes could possibly get any wider as the other man made his way cautiously to his bedside.

"She's beautiful, Draco." Potter smiled, holding the little bundle of pink blankets out. "She's small, but she'll mostly catch up -- given time."

Draco stared disbelievingly, his arms coming up unbidden because Potter had settled her on his lap and he was letting go!

"Potter ... wait,"

"She has your pointy chin," Potter said, and Draco frowned and immediately looked down at her chin, temporarily distracted.

"That's not pointy," Draco defended. "It's chique." At Potter's raised eyebrow he huffed. "She has noble blood. Just because she's not part Neanderthal..."

But the comment died on his lips.

He stared at her.

There was a large foggy spot floating around in Draco's head as he thought about all of the parts of her that weren't his to know. Couldn't know. Didn't even want to know.

He saw out of the corner of his eye Potter had stilled. He swallowed heavily.

Just then her puffy eyes opened, barely slits with dark glassy pools peeking out. She blinked sternly a couple of times, her tiny fist that had somehow wriggled free of the blankets opening and closing, and finally focused directly on Draco's gaze.

She seemed to eye him with the same trepidation he felt.

"Draco?"

He stared at her diminutive little features. The squashy little nose and petite-bow lips and downy blonde hair, and wondered what his mother would have thought of her. Would his parents have considered her a Malfoy?

A splash of moisture collided with her cheek, making it twitch and her eyes blink.

"Draco ..."

He dragged his blurring eyes away and turned them on Potter who was staring at him in concern. His arm came up and he palmed Draco's cheek, and raked his fingers through Draco's hair.

"She's yours, Draco. She belongs to no one else," Potter confided. "Your body made her, it was even your potion, too. She's a part of you, and she's meant to be here."

Draco looked back at the bundle in his lap. She had once again closed her eyes. "But what if I can't ..."

"You can." Potter assured. "She will love you more than anyone else in the whole world. "She's your family, Draco."

Draco thumbed the miniature fingers that hung in the air and they gripped back as he considered her tiny form.

"I've asked Kreacher to bring in a catalogue from the local baby store, so you can choose some of the things you'll need for when you both come home."

Draco glanced at Potter and paused.

"Is it a good baby store?" he asked, deciding to ignore the obvious question of Potter's house being 'home', not quite sure how to deal with it.

"No idea," Potter breathed, seemingly relieved not to be addressing the obvious as well. "But since its for a Malfoy, knowing Kreacher, he'll have them looking for twenty four carat golden nappies bins."

Draco snickered, and yawned -- big.

"I'll take her, you get some rest." Harry gently gathered the pink bundle as Draco relaxed back into the pillows. Once he had her securely he brushed Draco's hair back from his forehead and leaned down to kiss it.

"Here, Potter." Draco indicated, tapping his finger to his lips. "I want to make sure it wasn't just the drugs."

Potter chuckled and brought his lips down. This kiss was necessarily briefer, since the position was more awkward, having to do it around the oblivious wee female in Potter's arms, but Draco was sure about one thing, it hadn't been a fluke! Kissing Harry Potter was something else.

After Potter had left, Draco closed his eyes, surprised at how tired he really was. The thought of staying

with Potter was a relief. He wasn't ready to go back to England just yet. And who knew what the future held? Maybe, just maybe, there was a place for all three of them here. Together.

END

♥ Please close this window to return to LJ and leave a comment for the author. ♥

Disclaimer:

All recognisable Harry Potter characters and settings in this work of fanfiction are the property of JK Rowling and her associates.

No copyright infringement is intended. No profit is made from this work.