Beginnings
The prequel to *Aftermath*

By Mystwriter

Rated: NC-17

These are the events three weeks after Voldemort's defeat, the prequel to The Hogwarts Series that begins with "Aftermath".

Summary: Harry is free for the first time in his life; free to finally face his own sexuality; free to begin his life and find out who he is. But Draco Malfoy is also free; free from Azkaban but lost and alone in a Muggle world he barely understands.

Even though it's technically a prequel you'll be happier if you read the Hogwarts Series in order beginning with "Aftermath". Just read them in the order they appear on the banner.

Book Seventeen in the Hogwarts Series

Chapter One—Aftermath
Chapter Two--Draco's Doom
Chapter Three—Hogwarts Eternal
Chapter Four—Draco's Lessons
Chapter Five—Everyday Life at Hogwarts
Chapter Six--Everyday Life with Draco
Chapter Seven—A Simple Hogwarts Affair
Chapter Eight—A Hogwarts Honeymoon

Chapter One--Aftermath

Harry Potter opened his eyes and sat up in bed with a start.

Then it all came back to him.

There was no more Voldemort. It was almost a chant in his head now. No…more... Voldemort. Harry defeated him. Killed him. The Dark Lord

was no more. He didn't have to wonder why his dreams had been so pleasant. Nothing and no one was there interfering with them. He fell back into the pillow and sighed from the depth of his being.

It had been three weeks. Three weeks of constant celebrations. Three weeks of being hounded by the press, by wizards and witches full of smothering gratitude, by guilt because of those that did not survive. But there was one thing that he never anticipated. Well, more than one. Firstly, he never actually expected to survive himself. And secondly, he never imagined being free.

He laced his fingers behind his head and stared blearily at the ceiling. It was *his* ceiling, this. His own place. His flat. A London flat. A *Muggle* flat. He'd briefly toyed with the idea of living in a wizard part of town, but he dismissed the notion quicker than you could say "Boy-Who-Lived". It was much better in Muggle London. He was anonymous. Free to be just Harry. He sighed. Just Harry. And then he sighed again, a little more deeply. Because the problem was, he didn't really know who "just Harry" was anymore.

He propped himself up on his elbows, glanced at his side table, and grabbed his glasses. Fixing them on his nose, he raised his knees and hugged them over the blankets. For seventeen years he had been Harry Potter: the Boy-Who-Lived, at least to the Wizarding world. To him, of course, at least for the first eleven years of his life, he was just the cousin of the fat Dudley Dursley, the unwanted relative dumped on a strange doorstep, treated like the lowly step-son in something out of a fairytale. They called him stupid and lazy and useless when he never felt like any of those things. It was lucky he never believed it. But when he found out he was a wizard, everything had changed. He discovered he was special, and not just for surviving Voldemort's killing curse, but because he could do magic. And yet, he always felt a little behind every witch and wizard he met, always playing catch-up. Everyone else at Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry knew more about magic and the Wizarding world than he did, and every time Harry turned a corner he had to learn something new.

It was annoying.

But at eighteen, Harry was a fully-fledged wizard, a true hero, an orphan…and a gay man who didn't have the least idea what to do with that information. Of course he had known he was gay since he was twelve. Girls never interested him in that way. Only boys did.

Correction. One boy.

Harry rested his chin on his knees. Now that Voldemort was dead for good Harry could actually take the time to think about it. The one boy that really did it for Harry, the *only* boy was his arch nemesis from school, Draco Malfoy. Draco bloody Malfoy. The boy who brought Death Eaters into the school, who caused the death—or what everyone *thought* was the death—of one Albus Dumbledore, the school's headmaster. Draco Malfoy, who had spent all his years at Hogwarts making Harry's life miserable with his aristocratic blather and better-than-thou-Pureblood attitude. How could Harry have ever fallen for a boy like that? He shook his head, blushing at the thought. But he had. He sure had. He knew if he could only have convinced Draco to come to the side of Light, he could be someone worth loving. Except for the other problem: Draco was straight. *That* was quite an obstacle. And so he pined. The whole world wanted to grant Harry his every wish, but it was the one thing he wanted they couldn't give him.

He glanced at the clock. And today was Draco's trial. Harry didn't think he could make himself go. He swore he would. He needed to know why Draco did the things he did. After Dumbledore came out of hiding and revealed that he had not been killed, that it had all been an elaborate plot hatched between himself and the late Severus Snape, he explained to Harry that Draco was forced to become a Death Eater and do the things to Hogwarts that he had done out of fear for his parents' lives. And Harry *did* remember Draco crying in the boys' toilet when he couldn't get the Vanishing cabinets to work. He was lamenting to Moaning Myrtle how scared he was. But all the following events quite blew it out of Harry's head. Until now.

He dearly wanted to believe that Draco couldn't actually be that evil and cruel. Not like his father, the deservedly *late* Lucius Malfoy. But Harry knew he couldn't possibly think clearly where Draco was concerned. He dreaded going to the Ministry. He was bound to be mobbed. And he couldn't go disguised because they wouldn't let him into the trial. He sighed and threw back the covers. He'd have to go as himself, whoever that was.

After bathing and dressing, Harry looked at himself in the mirror. His eyes traveled to his famous scar and he leaned into the mirror, staring at it. He could swear it was fading. Could it really be? After all these years, his famous scar might actually disappear. Then he'd only have his round glasses, green eyes, and unruly black hair to make people turn and point and say in stage whispers, "Is that Harry Potter?"

He rolled his eyes at his reflection. He wasn't so young that he didn't realize that in a few years—who knew how many exactly—he wouldn't be famous anymore. No one would remember. Just like they seemed to have forgotten that Dumbledore defeated the evil wizard Grindlewald some fifty years ago. Strange that people would forget something so important.

Harry looked forward to it.

He dressed in his Gryffindor robes as it was the nicest thing he owned, if a bit small in the shoulder, and left the flat, locking it with a charm he threw non-verbally over his shoulder. He took a Muggle bus to the Leaky Cauldron, waited for the double-decker to leave the area, and walked through the door only witches and wizards could actually see.

The room was smoky and dim, but Tom the bartender always knew who came in to his establishment. But he was conscious of Harry's renewed fame and so he didn't call out to him. He only nodded a greeting as he continued to wipe his bar glasses. Harry did not arrive unnoticed, however, and a few old wizards came up to him to shake his hand and tell him how proud they were to meet him. Harry was gracious to them, for they seemed genuinely appreciative and didn't hound him for an autograph or other trinket and he was able to easily escape to the darkest corner where he met up with a bushy-haired girl and a red-headed boy who had been talking quietly and holding hands.

Harry slid in beside them and for once, they didn't start and release the other's hand. Harry smiled. "So. It looks like it's on."

Ron Weasley smiled sheepishly and gazed up at Hermione Granger. She smiled at him. "Yeah. It's on."

"'Bout time," said Harry under his breath.

Hermione slowly released Ron's hand and leaned over the table earnestly toward Harry. "Harry, are you sure you want to go to the trial?"

He stared at her meaningfully. He'd only confided in Hermione about his feelings for Draco. He was sure Ron didn't know and probably wouldn't want to. "I'm sure. I have to know why."

"'Why'?" said Ron. "We know why. He's an evil git, that's why."

"You heard Dumbledore," Harry said. "Voldemort threatened his parents."

"Feeble excuse, that. He's wanted to be a Death Eater forever. Always acted like one."

Harry looked at Ron askance. "You were at the final battle, Ron. You saw that Malfoy was helping us—"

"Yes!" said Hermione, sitting up. "And Snape explained, too—"

"All I know is that he saw it wasn't going to go well for his side and he decided to switch. It sounds like typical Malfoy to me."

Harry shrugged. That may very well be what happened. It was certainly in character with what they knew of the Slytherin. But Snape. That was a problem. Snape had clearly fooled them all and turned against Voldemort at the last moment. *"I haven't been his servant for years, you stupid boy! You know nothing!"* he had sneered. And when Dumbledore "resurrected" he had explained it all to Harry. It was hard to really take it in but Harry had seen it with his own eyes. And had seen Snape die, too. The potions master had seemed…happy. Dumbledore had called it "absolution" but Harry never fully understood that and Dumbledore never explained entirely.

"Harry," said Ron for the third time.

Harry looked up sheepishly. He'd been like that for days, sinking into his own thoughts. He supposed it was to be expected. Ron was sliding something across the table toward him, a wide grin on his freckled face. Harry looked down in the dim light of the candles and his eyes widened. It was a Chocolate Frog card. They came with every chocolate frog sweet, but most people bought them strictly for the collectable cards of famous witches and wizards. Harry had had his own collection while at Hogwarts, but he managed to lose a lot of his old possessions, and things like this just didn't seem as important to him anymore. He knew Ron once had a huge collection.

But what got Harry's attention on this particular card was his own three-dimensional face looking back at him. In fact, it winked at him.

"What—?" He snatched it up and stared. There was his face—messy black hair, round glasses, prominent scar—smiling out of the card.

"How's that, Harry? Finally fame is worth something. Your own card!" He pounded him on the back. "I'm proud of you, mate." Of all the honours the Ministry heaped upon them all, Ron seemed proudest of this. He was never more glad to be Ron Weasley's friend than right now.

Harry was speechless. He turned it over and read the longer-than-usual cv:

Harry James Potter—Slayer of Voldemort, Boy-Who-Lived
Order of Merlin, first class; Special Citation as Protector of the Wizarding World

Harry Potter began his fame when only a year old when Voldemort murdered his parents James and Lily Potter in attempting to fulfill a questionable Prophecy. Potter is the only known survivor of the killing curse which in this instance backfired and dispelled Voldemort for some years. Since then, Potter became known as the Boy-Who-Lived. At eleven, he was entered into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry where his interesting career began. In that first year at Hogwarts, Potter became the youngest Seeker in a century for Gryffindor; stopped Voldemort from obtaining the Philosopher's Stone; defeated the monster from the Chamber of Secrets and stopped Voldemort again at age twelve (and received a special award from the school); at age thirteen was the youngest wizard to achieve a full corporeal Patronus; at age fourteen he was the fourth and winning champion in the Tri-Wizard Tournament and was sole witness to the Dark Lord's rise, escaping him again; at age fifteen defended himself successfully against Voldemort's attack on the Ministry of Magic; at age sixteen left the destroyed Hogwarts in search of Voldemort; and at age seventeen successfully slew the Dark Lord for good. Currently studying for a possible teaching position at Hogwarts.

Harry reddened. "Well. Laid out like this I look like quite the bloke, don't I?"

Hermione smiled. "What's that bit at the bottom all about, hmm?"

"Er…you mean 'currently studying for a possible position'? That bit?" He felt a little guilty not telling Hermione earlier about it but it had just come up a week ago. How did the Chocolate Frog people get a hold of that information anyway? "Well, Dumbledore owled me last week and sort of…proposed that I think about teaching. At Hogwarts."

"What about being an Auror?" cried Ron.

Harry slumped in his seat, glad for the murky gloom that hid their table from the rest of the room. "Aren't you a bit tired of that, Ron? I mean, chasing Voldemort was one thing. But I think I've had it. Whenever I thought about it, it just made me weary. And a little sick."

Ron screwed up his lips. "Yeah. I guess I know what you mean. I'm not much for it myself." Ron hadn't had the marks for it anyway, Harry knew, even if he had finished his seventh year, which none of them had, choosing to chase Voldemort and his Horcruxes instead. But since Ron had become one of the heroes of the war with an Order of Merlin himself, Harry doubted the Ministry would overlook any of them if they wanted to become Aurors. He looked up into their faces. It had been three weeks of eating and sleeping properly but they all still looked haunted, hollow, and so very old.

"So when Dumbledore offered it," Harry went on, "I told him I'd consider it. And I guess I am."

Hermione leaned forward, her stare concentrated as if trying to read his mind. "What would you teach, Harry?"

He gave a lop-sided smile. "What do you suppose?"

Ron grinned. "Not Defense! Not really!"

"I still need training and studying and I've got to finish my seventh year, but Dumbledore said he'd take care of all that. Said Hogwarts won't be ready to open anyway for at least two years and seemed to think I'd be ready by then."

"You really going to do it, Harry?" asked Ron.

Harry shrugged. "Nothing else has come up yet."

"What about playing pro-Quidditch?"

Harry rubbed the back of his neck uncomfortably. "I dunno, Ron. Quidditch just doesn't seem…*important* anymore."

They sat in silence for a time. They did that a lot. He wondered if anything would ever get back to normal or if there would always be

those horrendous memories between them of the final battle. Would they ever get the screams and the splash of blood out of their minds? Could they ever look at one another and really laugh again? Everyone else seemed to, but of course, not everyone else had faced Voldemort, now had they?

Hermione finally broke the spell by looking at her watch. “I think we should be going if we want to get there before the crush.”

“Do you really think that’s possible?” said Harry, rising. “The reporters are probably permanently camped out there.”

Hermione slid out of the seat. “Is that why they haven’t moved Malfoy to Azkaban?”

“That's what Dumbledore said,” said Harry. “They keep him locked up at the Ministry instead. ‘For his own safety.’”

“Why bother?” said Ron, leaving some sickles on the table. “He’s headed there anyway.”

Harry’s heart lurched uncomfortably in his chest. No, he would not allow his former feelings for Malfoy to colour his judgment in this. If Malfoy was guilty of crimes then he had to face justice and serve his time. But he hated the idea of the handsome Slytherin locked away at Azkaban, even if the Dementors weren’t there anymore. He supposed he’d have to get over him for good then.

There was a line at the fireplace, but Tom motioned to them from behind the bar. Harry approached and the innkeeper leaned over and whispered harshly, “Mr. Potter, there’s my private floo in the back. No sense you lot waiting in line with everyone else. It’s always open to you three.”

Harry ordinarily didn’t like taking special privileges, but the line *was* awfully long and he didn’t want to be late to the Ministry. “Thanks, Tom. Good of you.”

“Think nothing of it, Mr. Potter. Come this way.” He lifted the opening in the bar, and led him, Ron, and Hermione through the back. Tom's private quarters weren’t much cleaner than the tavern, but Harry only made a cursory inspection as he headed for the fireplace. “Going to the trial?”

"Er…yes."

"Well. Hope Malfoy gets what's coming to him."

"Yeah. Thanks again."

Harry grabbed some floo powder and stepped into the fireplace. He cast it down and intoned, "Ministry of Magic!"

* * *

A circus, that's what Harry called it. Every reporter from practically every Wizarding paper from every country was there. Only a few had been allowed into the trial chambers themselves and many other average witches and wizards scrambled to get seats for what the papers were calling the "Trial of the Century". Harry and his friends found themselves with Ministry escorts, being led down the crowded corridors and into the chamber. Flashbulbs went off, but Harry tried his best to ignore them. He'd gotten a lot of practice at it for the last few years. But recently it had trebled. It seemed the papers had a picture of Harry in every mood. Every mood, that is, except content.

Dumbledore pushed forward and grabbed Harry's arm. The Ministry guards moved back out of the way. "Harry, my boy. And Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley. I have seats here for you quite out of the public glare." Harry gratefully followed. This was swiftly becoming a nightmare. He wished now with all his heart that he had begged off. He didn't want to do this, didn't want to see this. Could he stand to see Drac—*Malfoy*…so degraded, the wolves howling for his blood? He settled into the seat indicated and pooled there like some too-wet Christmas pudding.

There was a constant roar of conversation in the chamber, even amongst the purple-robed Wizengamot. What were they waiting for? A Ministry minion rushed up to the head witch, whispered in her ear, and gestured toward Harry. Oh. That's what they had been waiting for. Him.

The head witch banged her gavel on the stone table. Everyone began quieting. "We will come to order," she repeated, her efforts now heard as the crowd fell to a hush. "Bring in the accused."

A hush fell over the room, rippling all the way to the back where the reporters were. A door opened. Harry strained to see, but all he saw

were heads of the people in the crowd. And then… a glimpse of white-blond hair trudging forward. And the sickening sound of the clink of chains. Was Draco shackled?

Horrified, Harry watched as the tight group got closer to the front and when the crowd parted, there was Draco, shoulders slumped, face and hair dirty, and heavy shackles wrapped around his wrists and his ankles. Harry's mouth dropped open. In another lifetime he would certainly have been happy to see this. But not after all those years of feelings for the Slytherin; not after the final battle when Draco *helped* them; not after Voldemort was dead and Draco fell to his knees at Harry's feet and between sobs *thanked* him with all his heart.

At least Hermione must have known how he felt. "This is terrible," she whispered.

"It's only what he deserves," growled Ron.

Dumbledore stepped forward and the Wizengamot rustled in a flurry. Draco looked up slowly and upon seeing the old wizard, suddenly shrank from him and hid his face.

"These chains are not necessary," said Dumbledore, barely controlling his anger.

The head witch leaned forward. "They are very necessary, I'm afraid, Albus. He is an extremely dangerous Death Eater—"

"It remains to be seen exactly what he is," said Dumbledore.

The head witch smiled. "On the contrary." She raised a parchment. "This is a full confession, signed by the accused in front of witnesses."

The crowd gasped. Dumbledore said nothing. The head witch went on, raising the parchment to her face and reading it aloud. "'I, Draco Lucius Malfoy, attest that I was a Death Eater and follower of Lord Voldemort—' There. What else do you need? This is only a sentencing hearing. And I don't think it will be a surprise to anyone the verdict of that."

"I should like to hear the rest of this 'confession', Ariana."

The witch frowned. "It's only a few minor details—"

"Still. In the interest of justice. And at least for the benefit of the *Daily Prophet*..." He swept his hand toward the back where all the reporters and their quick quills vibrated. The reporters gave Dumbledore a brief cheer.

She screwed up her lips. The parchment crinkled in her tight fist. "Very well," she conceded. She flicked the parchment to straighten it and began again. "'I, Draco Lucius Malfoy, attest that I was a Death Eater and follower of Lord Voldemort…strictly against my will because of the threats Voldemort made against my life and that of my parents—"

The hall burst into shouts and jeers. Draco cringed, his head now lower than his shoulders.

Ron was as vocal as anyone else in the crowd. "No! What's he trying to pull?"

"I am curious, Ariana," said Dumbledore as the crowd began to quiet. "Was this confession taken under ordinary circumstances? Was the accused, for instance, speaking freely on his own?"

The head witch glared daggers at Dumbledore. 'What are you playing at?' was written clearly on her face. "Strictly speaking," she said, "the accused was under…well, he was under veritaserum."

Another burst of noise from the gallery caused her to slam her gavel down. "Silence! We will have silence here!"

"Let me understand this," said Dumbledore, obviously fully aware of circumstances. Harry sat forward in his chair. He was beginning to feel a sliver of hope. "The accused was under veritaserum when he declared he was forced to become a Death Eater by coercion?"

"We all know you cannot become a Death Eater by force," Ariana countered.

"True," Dumbledore conceded. "Did the accused mention *that* under veritaserum?"

"If I may—" The large-framed Horace Slughorn stood up from a far seat and pushed his way forward through the unhappy crowd.

"What is it, Slughorn?" Ariana asked, her face purpling with frustration.

"I helped administer the veritaserum to the accused. As a matter of fact, the Wizengamot insisted on many applications of the potion for several consecutive days. I was forced to take a stand and refused to allow any more applications to be administered to the boy. As you know, repeated applications of truth potion can become harmful to the brain. I feared the boy was in danger of real damage if the questioning continued."

"Horace," said Dumbledore, turning to his former professor. "Did Mr. Malfoy fight these applications?"

Slughorn rocked on his heels, a considerable task for so small a foot on so large a frame. "As a matter of fact he did not. He almost insisted on them. He said over and over again that he knew it would do him no good but it had to be told and it had to be believed. That's what he said."

"Is it your opinion that Mr. Malfoy was telling the truth in his confessions?"

"Without a doubt. Though a very practiced and clever wizard can throw off the affects of veritaserum—transfiguring it or blocking its affects by Occlumency, for instance [1][1]*—I do not believe Mr. Malfoy capable. Especially in the state he was in."

"Thank you, Horace. I merely wondered," and he turned to the Wizengamot, a twinkle in his eye.

"Albus, you are out of order," said the witch. "This is not a hearing open to the floor. This is a sentencing."

"I thought it was a trial."

"The boy confessed—"

"And I should like to hear it all. Perhaps even from the accused himself."

The grumble from the gallery became a roar and soon the audience was clamoring for testimony. The Wizengamot looked at one another. There was nothing for it. She brought her gavel down again. "Silence!"

---

[1] [1] JKR said on her web site that veritaserum can be over ridden. But as Slughorn testifies, Draco was in no fit state to be able to do so.

Turning to Draco, she scowled. “Are you prepared to give testimony to this court, Malfoy?”

In a very small voice, nothing like anything Harry had ever heard before, Draco replied, “Yes, Ma’am.”

“Very well. Proceed.”

“Ah…Ariana,” said Dumbledore, raising a finger. “I believe we can dispense with the chains.”

“Oh very well!” She stood up, raised her wand, and the chains fell with a loud clank from Draco’s wrists and ankles. He sighed deeply and rubbed his wrists.

“The boy is exhausted,” said Dumbledore. He conjured a chair and drew Draco into it. Draco never looked at the old wizard and kept his face down.

Harry knew this had been a mistake to come here. His heart wanted to burst from what he witnessed. All those old feelings flooded back and he longed to take Draco in his arms and comfort him.

But that was not to be. Not ever. No matter what Draco said, he was to be condemned. Even Harry wasn’t that naïve. He’d never likely see him again. He wanted to be anywhere but here right now.

* * *

Draco felt lighter without the chains, though the sight of them pooled around him was little comfort. Especially with Dumbledore hovering over him. Why did *he* have to be here? Why couldn’t he just leave Draco alone? Didn’t he see how much he deserved to be treated like this? They wanted to sentence him to Azkaban. Why stall the inevitable? He was more than ready to go, ready for the solitude that awaited him. It might even be a mercy. They could easily throw him to the crowd and he’d be torn apart. At least that would be quick.

“Draco,” said the wizard in a kindly voice, “why don’t you tell us what happened in the summer before your sixth year.”

His gaze darted toward the purple-clad Wizengamot, all scowling down on him. They, too, thought this was a waste of time. Who cares what he did then? All they cared about was that he was a Death Eater; that

he helped commit atrocities; that he tried to kill Albus Dumbledore but failed miserably. What was there to tell?

"I…I became a Death Eater that summer. My father had wanted me to. So…S-so I did."

The gallery rumbled and then quieted.

Ariana leaned forward, a smile like Umbridge used to wear spread on her face. "So. You admit—as you do in these transcripts—that you wanted to join the Death Eaters?"

"Y-yes. All my life I was trained for that. I expected to do it, just not so soon. My father wasn't there to see it. He was in Azkaban."

"That's where you belong, scum!" yelled someone from the gallery.

Ariana pointed her wand to the crowd. "Another outburst like that and I will *Stupefy* the lot of you!" The audience froze and held their collective breaths. With no further replies, she lowered her wand.

"So why did you agree?" asked Dumbledore.

Draco sighed. They'd asked him that already a million times, both with and without veritaserum. "Because I thought that's what my father would have wanted me to do. I thought he'd be proud of me."

"And once you were before Voldemort ready to receive the Mark, what did you feel then?"

Draco clasped his hands, scrubbing them over one another, again and again. "I…I…it was different than I expected. I was…scared. The Dark Lord wasn't what I expected. He was frightening and powerful. I was beginning to think it wasn't a good idea after all. I had been thinking of pranks and such. Not…not the blood. Not all the blood."

"Did Voldemort accept you immediately?"

"Yes. But I…I hesitated and he could tell. He wasn't pleased. But he said he needed me and I had to do it."

"Were there no Death Eaters to stand up for you?"

"M-my m-mother. But when she pleaded with him he…he…" Draco's voice broke. He cleared his throat and tried again. "He sent the *Cruciatus* on her."

The gallery muttered in a low hum.

"What happened then?"

"I told him I wasn't ready. That maybe I couldn't do it. He just laughed. I wanted to go to my mother, but she motioned me back. He told me again that I had to do it. And if I didn't want to see harm come to my parents I was to comply. He told me I had a very important task when I went back to Hogwarts. Told me I could do it, that he knew I could. I was worried about my mother and I thought that maybe I *could* do it, be the man of the house since Father was away. So I said 'yes'."

"And then he gave you the Mark."

"Yes. It hurt like hell. But I didn't cry out. He only laughed at me. He said that now that I was his, I must obey in everything. I said I would. Then he told me that I had to kill…kill *you*, sir."

Dumbledore's expression did not change. "Yes. As soon as was possible, Professor Snape informed me of the plot. And we immediately worked on a course of action. Were you surprised by this order from Voldemort, Draco?"

"Yes! He wanted me to k-kill! Right away! I was only sixteen. I'd never killed anything before. I was really scared. Then he frowned at me. 'Do it, boy, or you die,' he said. 'And if that is not enough incentive for you—' And he sent the *Cruciatus* on my mother again."

The hall was silent. Draco listened to his own breathing. Why go through this again? Why bother? It was in those papers he signed, wasn't it? *I wish they'd just sentence me already.*

Dumbledore turned to the Wizengamot. "That certainly sounds like coercion to me. Who among us would dare defy the Dark Lord under these circumstances?"

"Now Dumbledore, must we go through this again?" said the head witch. "He could have come to you—"

“Forgive me Ariana, but only a fool would believe that.”

She sat back, her lips pressed tightly together.

Dumbledore went on. “Draco was in such a precarious position. I doubt he was truly able to think beyond his own plots. Imagine the strain. Sixteen years old. Your father, the one responsible for your manipulation all these years, was out of the picture, unable to counsel you. Threats against your life and that of your parents. Raised in a household of Dark Magic and Dark ends. How could anyone expect Draco to slide out of character and come to me?”

“His head of house, then?”

“Severus Snape? The man the other Death Eaters were never quite sure of? But as it happened, Draco did go to him, and in turn, Severus came to me. That is, of course, how I knew about Draco’s plan. Unfortunately, Draco would not divulge the details and so the destruction of Hogwarts was unavoidable.”

“Aha! The destruction of Hogwarts! You can’t deny Malfoy was responsible for that!”

“And all under the same threats, Ariana. Draco could not have imagined the level of destruction to occur.”

“Did he think you’d all simply be quietly captured?”

“Why don’t we ask him?” Dumbledore turned to Draco again and the blond cringed back. “Draco, just what did you hope to achieve by getting the Vanishing cabinets to work?”

“It…it was to bring in the Death Eaters.”

“To do what?”

Draco drew a blank. He didn’t really know. To capture Hogwarts, certainly. And then what? “I guess to take over Hogwarts.”

“And to deliver Harry Potter to Voldemort!” said Ariana, jumping to her feet.

Draco crumpled into his seat. “Y-yes, ma’am. Yes, I suppose that was part of it, too.” The horror of it struck him again. Had that succeeded…if it had happened that way…

Dumbledore looked annoyed. The head witch had obviously won over some wafflers. “It doesn’t change the fact, that the boy was forced to do these things. Draco, if you had had a choice to leave the Death Eaters, would you have done?”

“Yes!”

“Of course he’d say that,” said Ariana. “He’s trying to save his skin.”

Dumbledore’s arm flung out and his finger pointed straight at Draco. “This boy does not deserve to spend the rest of his days in Azkaban. He deserves a second chance!”

He couldn’t believe it. Why was Dumbledore doing this? No one—under these circumstances—deserved a second chance. Was he insane?

The crowd burst into arguments, even amongst the Wizengamot. Draco dropped his head in his hands. If only someone from the crowd would just A.K. him it could all be over. No one would mourn him. His entire family was wiped out by Voldemort. He had nothing to live for. Why prolong it?

Didn’t he deserve all they did to him?

Draco dared a glance behind him. That’s where *he* was sitting. Everyone had been constantly looking in that direction. Draco wanted to see him. Wondered what he thought of all this. Potter hadn’t said much to him since he’d surrendered to him at the final battle and he hadn’t said much to Potter.

He turned a bit more and spied him sitting in a private box along with Granger and Weasley. Harry looked very pale. His eyes were wide as he watched. But he didn’t look like the others out for blood. Maybe he was angry or beyond anger. That could be. It was hard to tell. Draco decided not to look again.

Dumbledore argued back and forth with the Wizengamot and Draco soon tuned it out. His mind wouldn’t stop replaying everything, from the moment his mother was killed to the death of Snape. All his fault. All of it. He deserved whatever they did to him. He started rocking

himself. He knew it would be soon. This couldn’t go on much longer. All his fault.

“The accused will stand,” said Ariana.

Draco snapped to attention and slowly got to his feet. Here it was. The sentence. He tried to raise his head but what was the use? All the world knew he was really a coward. No need to posture here.

“All those in favor of Azkaban, vote now.”

Hands in the Wizengamot went up, but strangely, not quite as many as Draco first thought. The head witch looked perplexed. “Perhaps you did not hear me. All those in favor of sending the prisoner to Azkaban, raise your hands.”

“I think it was very clear, Ariana,” said Dumbledore.

“What by Merlin's beard—”

“Under the circumstances,” said a wizard sitting beside her, “I believe another punishment is in order. I recommend breaking the prisoner’s wand and sentencing him to the Muggle world.”

The crowd murmured.

Draco barely heard. What did he say?

Ariana rustled the parchment in front of her. “Hmm. An interesting proposal. And perhaps a more fitting one, seeing that the Malfoys have been notorious Muggle haters.” She looked up at Dumbledore who nodded gravely. “Very well. All those in favor of banishing the accused from the Wizarding world, raise your hands.”

More hands went up and even a few who had voted for Azkaban. Ariana smiled grimly. She raised a wand that was not her own.

Draco looked up. Banished? Is that what they said? Not Azkaban? He saw her raise his wand. She took it in both hands and suddenly snapped it. Draco jerked back. It sounded like a bone breaking. Wisps of feathery purple smoke rose from the broken pieces of his wand and then the whole wand blackened. His wand! Gone.

"Mr. Malfoy," she said leaning forward. "As of this day, you are hereby banished from the Wizarding world never to return. You may not socialize, talk with, do business with, any witch or wizard. You are henceforth forbidden to use magic. You may not enter into any magical places. You are forbidden from venturing, browsing, or otherwise engaging in business activities in the place called 'Knockturn Alley'. You will live like a Muggle, Mr. Malfoy, for the rest of your days. I trust you will be grateful for this mercy. A mercy many here feel you certainly do not deserve."

Draco stood frozen. Confused, he stared at the head witch. "I'm…I'm not allowed to use magic anymore?"

"Yes, Mr. Malfoy. That is correct. A small enough price to pay for your freedom, I dare say."

"But…a Muggle? I can't live like a Muggle."

"Mr. Malfoy, I care very little what you do from now on. Would the Aurors step forward and escort Mr. Malfoy from the Ministry?"

The crowd burst into shouts and dissent, but Dumbledore only gazed at Draco placidly. Aurors grabbed Draco on either side of him and roughly dragged him from the courtroom to a back door. They hustled him down a long dark corridor and the noises of the court grew dimmer. Draco, still in a state of shock, couldn't quite comprehend what was happening to him. They walked a long way until they reached a door, unlocked it with a spell, and opened it. They shoved Draco out into the street, an alley, and stood staring at him.

Draco blinked up at the bleary sunshine, realizing he hadn't seen the light of day for weeks. "But wait! What…what am I supposed to do now?"

One of the Aurors looked him up and down. "You're a Muggle now, my man. Best get used to it."

"I can't live like a Muggle," he repeated feebly.

"I feel sorry him," said the other. He reached into his pocket and tossed a few coins to the ground.

The other Auror looked at the sparkling coins in the gutter. "But those are knuts and sickles. He's not allowed to use Wizard money."

The other Auror cracked a vile grin. “I know.” He moved back inside and shoved the door closed. It disappeared into the brick wall leaving no trace it had ever been there.

Draco stared at the wall, barely believing what had happened. “Wait,” he whispered. “Wait.” He approached the wall until his hands reached up and touched it. His fingers touched the rough brick, the slick dew covering it. But he could feel no seam, no door. “Wait!” he shouted. His hands curled into fists and pounded. “Wait! Don’t leave me out here!” He pounded on it more fiercely, not stopping even though his hands began to bruise.

But no one came. No one would. Draco leaned his forehead against the wall and wept.

Leave a Comment

top

Chapter Two—Draco’s Doom

After what seemed like an hour, Draco picked himself up and gave one last glance at the wall. This was no dream. No nightmare. No one was ever going to open that door again and he was now on the other side. The wrong side. Suddenly, Azkaban didn’t seem like that bad a place. The Dementors were gone, after all, and at least there were other wizards there. But this!

He turned his head toward the foggy street seen as a long vertical line of white beyond the alley’s walls. The idea of Muggle London suddenly terrified him. What was he going to do? He didn’t know how to do anything! He’d starve to death. He’d freeze. Maybe that’s what they wanted after all. They wanted him to die far away from the Ministry and Azkaban, far away from where nice wizards lived.

New tears welled in his eyes. “Well, they’ll have their wish soon enough,” he muttered. The sickles and knuts sparkled on the ground and for no reason, he scooped them up and dropped them in his pocket. He made the long walk down the narrow alley and stood at the entrance to the street, just staring at the cars zooming past, the

people—Muggles—hurrying in the cold. He shivered and automatically reached for his cloak—but he wasn't wearing one. He began to incant a warming charm—but he had no wand. His heart beat furiously in renewed terror. He *would* freeze to death. It was damned cold. He wouldn't even make it one night.

He looked back at the wall, trying to see traces of the door.

Think, Draco, think! What could he do? What were his options? He felt the sickles in his pocket and knew that wasn't even enough for one night at the Leaky Cauldron, not that they would even let him in. He wasn't allowed to go to Wizarding places.

Merlin. What am I going to do?

No family. They were gone. No friends. No one would succor him. No money. The Ministry had confiscated the Malfoy estates and their vaults. No place to go.

He flipped his collar up and thrust his hands deep into his pockets and steeped out into the wet lane.

He didn't pay attention to where he was going. He kept his head down and just walked. Did it matter where he ended up? He couldn't think, couldn't come up with any bright ideas. He just walked, and when he was too weary to keep walking, he sat on the kerb, his feet in the gutter. But when he looked up, he found he was across the lane to the Leaky Cauldron. "What the hell--?" He shook his head and lowered it. What he wouldn't give right now for some firewhiskey. He had enough sickles to buy a bottle. But there was no way he could go in.

"You know, there's really no reason to even go on. That would be just perfect. No one would know. Hell. No one would care." But the idea took hold. If he killed himself, his troubles would most definitely be over. He couldn't live like a Muggle. He didn't know how. And the Wizengamot damn well knew it. So if he was dead, that would solve everyone's problems.

But how to do it.

He glanced at the main street off the lane watching cars whizzing past. He could just step in front of a lorry. That would certainly finish him. And he raised up slightly with that intention until he eased down again. No. That sort of thing was too messy. Too…public. He wanted

something away from the prying eyes of Muggles. He was a Malfoy. Surely he could be in charge of his own destiny. Then he slumped. "Because it had all worked out so well before," he sneered.

He looked down at his hands lying on his thighs. His wrists. Yes. He could slit his wrists. And his throat as well. No turning back, then. That would do it. Alone somewhere. Somehow, it seemed meant to be.

Just then three boys turned the corner obviously heading for the Leaky Cauldron. Wizards, then? But they were about Draco's age and he didn't recognize any of them from Hogwarts. Maybe they were Squibs. He suddenly remembered the coins in his pocket and his longing for firewhiskey.

"Oi! You lot!" he called to them.

They turned. Not recognizing him. So far so good.

"Any one of you want to make a few sickles? Buy me a bottle of firewhiskey and bring it here."

One boy stepped cautiously forward but stayed on his side of the street. "Yeah? Let's see the money."

"Bring the firewhiskey and I'll give it to you."

The boy shrugged at the other two and stepped inside the door only wizards could see.

A few moments later, the boy returned alone and trotted across the slick lane. He pulled a bottle from his jacket but held the bottle back. "Let's see the money."

Draco took out the sickles and handed it over. The boy pocketed it and thrust the bottle toward him. As he did, Draco noticed a Chocolate Frog package sticking out of his breast pocket. "How much for the Chocolate Frog?"

"How much you got?"

Draco emptied his pockets into his hand and dropped them into the boy's waiting palm. "Take it all. I won't need it anymore."

The boy smiled. “Cheers.” He trudged back to the Leaky Cauldron, his pockets fuller, and none the wiser. Now Draco had his last drink and his last meal.

* * *

Draco had a plan. Get himself good and drunk on firewhiskey, break the bottle, and slit his wrists and throat with the shard. He was well on his way to feeling quite numb, as a matter of fact, and found himself a secluded alcove between two buildings. Sitting in a relatively dry corner, he finished off the firewhiskey, staring blurrily at the empty bottle. “That will do nicely,” he slurred. He raised the empty bottle and broke it hard against the pavement. It shattered, and a particularly fine shard spun away. Draco crawled after it, grabbed it, and immediately cut his finger. He sucked his finger into his mouth and took the shard carefully in the other hand and then chuckled. “Worried about cutting yourself before you slit your throat, Draco?” The shard was perfect, like a knife; blunt on one edge and sharp on the other.

There was only one task left. His last meal. He tore the package opened and stuffed the Chocolate Frog in his mouth before it could hop away. The sweet chocolate melted on his tongue satisfyingly and he sat back against the wall, eyes closed, enjoying the flavors. He listened to the distant traffic, felt the pavement under him. He tried to feel the *world* just one last time and not missing it all that much, especially as drunk as he was. He almost tossed the package aside but the old habit of checking the card was stronger and he grabbed it, flipped it over…and froze.

There, looking back at him after lowering his wand, was Harry Potter. He turned to Draco, smiled, and even winked.

“Oh my God.”

He turned the card again and couldn’t help but scan the cv. “Raised by Muggles,” it said. Raised by Muggles. Course if any of the rumours were true, he was more *enslaved* by them than raised. More like a house elf.

He turned it and looked at the picture again. Potter’s wand was raised and a curse open on his mouth. Presumably, this was all aimed at Voldemort. But then the picture of Potter seemed to tire of holding up his wand and he dropped it to his side, turning to Draco again. He shrugged and tucked his wand away.

Draco grasped the card tightly in two fingers and raised it up, ready to fling it into the nearest rubbish pile. But something stayed his hand. Slowly, he lowered it again and stared at the picture. Potter was still there, looking at Draco a little anxiously…or was it Draco's imagination?

This was all so surreal. Was he really sitting in a filthy alley ready to slit his throat? It was a good solution to a bad problem. Potter achieved what Draco had failed at. After Voldemort killed Draco's parents Draco had wanted revenge. But he had spent most of his time just trying to stay alive and out of the Dark Lord's eye. And then when he finally escaped with Snape there wasn't time to plot. No one believed Potter could do it, and at the final battle, Draco only hoped that Potter would serve as a good enough distraction for him to kill the Dark Lord himself. He doubted he could do it, but he knew he would die trying. Like Snape had. The Mudblood was there and so were his ginger-haired freak friends. Certainly distraction enough. But Potter had done it. He had been surrounded by unbelievable power. Potter was indisputably now the scariest wizard there was. And Draco was somehow glad. Glad if it couldn't be himself that killed Voldemort, it was Potter. Because despite all Draco had done to him over the years, he had to grudgingly admit that there was really no one who deserved his revenge more than Harry Potter. Draco knew how it felt now to have the Dark Lord kill one's parents, to be helpless, to never know if the next blast of the Dark Lord's wrath would fall on him. And Potter had had to deal with that since he was eleven.

"Raised like a house elf." Draco had heard the rumours, exploited them, made fun of Potter for them. Lived in a cupboard. Beaten up by his cousin. Starved. Wore those awful clothes ten sizes too large. Yes, that had been great fodder for jokes. And Potter had taken it because he knew they were true. And yet…he had become this incredibly powerful wizard. The papers were saying the equal of Albus Dumbledore. Draco had seen with his own eyes. He knew it was true.

Raised like a house elf. Like a Muggle. Then it could be done. A wizard *could* survive, even excel in the Muggle world. Of course, Potter didn't have to stay a Muggle. Not like Draco was expected to do.

"If he can do it," he muttered. He pushed against the wall at his back and got unsteadily to his feet. "If sodding *Potter* can do it, then a Malfoy bloody well can!" He stood and looked around the alley. The card was still tight between his fingers and he pocketed it, not really

knowing why. And then he looked at the broken shard. Suddenly, the thing scared him and he heaved it far away. He heard the glass tinkle in the distance.

He staggered forward and wandered on, his mind blurred with alcohol. The sky darkened and it got colder. He ended up under a bridge and glanced hastily at the soul-deadened eyes of the dirty men huddled there, wondering vaguely if Dementors had gotten to them. He was shivering now and found a scrap of cardboard, draped it over himself like a cloak, hunkered down in a lonely corner, and tried to sleep.

Chapter Three—Hogwarts Eternal

Harry awoke from a nightmare. But it wasn't a Dark Lord-induced dream. It was just an ordinary nightmare, though equally disturbing.

It was about Draco Malfoy. He saw him alone and frightened, wandering the streets of Muggle London and he had decided to kill himself. He had a broken bottle and was raising the shard when Harry had awakened, the feeling of dread washing over him in clammy sweat.

Just a nightmare, he told himself. Couldn't he forget Draco Malfoy and just get on with his life?

He jumped from his bed even though the clock said 3 am. He stumbled into his small kitchen and fixed himself a cup of tea. After that horrific sight, there was no going back to sleep.

He blew on the hot tea absently, thinking about Draco. The whole thing had been horrible, from the moment they sent him in wearing shackles to the moment they banished him and dragged him from the chamber. Draco had looked dazed. He didn't look as if he really knew where he was. Thank goodness for Albus Dumbledore. He had saved Draco from Azkaban, but was the alternative any better? Where was Draco now? How would he survive? He knew the Slytherin was completely dependant on magic. How was he ever to do without it?

Harry looked toward the window, the heavy fog drifting idly by the streetlight. Was Draco okay? Was he cold? Harry's heart ached so much, he actually gripped his chest. What if he went in search of him—but no. Draco had been sentenced. He *had* to pay for his crimes, even if he had been coerced. He'd certainly done awful things ever before he was compelled. And he wasn't supposed to have contact with the Wizarding world. So Harry had to let it go; let *Draco* go.

His head slid down to the table. He lay with his cheek against the wood. "Draco, Draco. I'm still so in love with you. What the hell am I going to do?"

* * *

Harry was supposed to meet Dumbledore at three in the afternoon at Diagon Alley in a backroom of Ollivander's. He certainly wasn't in any mood to do so but he knew he couldn't mope for the rest of his life. It was time to get on with it. With the business of living.

He was in the habit now of wearing his hood up whenever he went out in public to Wizarding places. It was the only way he could get through without being mobbed. He even cast a Disillusionment charm and strolled fairly carefree toward Ollivander's. He opened the shop door. The little bell over the lintel tinkled and a muffled voice from behind some shelves called out, "I will be with you in a moment."

"No rush, Mr. Ollivander. It's just Harry Potter," he replied.

Ollivander slid into view on his library ladder. "*Just* Harry Potter? Surely not *just*." The old man smiled. "Welcome, Mr. Potter. Come along round the counter. Dumbledore is waiting for you."

"Thanks Mr. Ollivander." Harry edged between several stacked boxes and the counter and slid behind it. "Just back there?"

"Yes. How is your wand holding up?"

"Oh. It's...just fine, sir."

"Excellent. Too bad about its twin."

"Uh...forgive me, sir, but I wasn't sorry to see it go."

"No?" Sometimes the man seemed oblivious. Harry stared at him. Ollivander shrugged. "Yes, I suppose so. It isn't of course the wand's fault what a wizard chooses to do with it."

"No. I guess not. Hard to distinguish the two, though, when you're staring down the end of it and expect an *Avada Kedavra* from it at any second."

"Indeed. A most unique perspective, Mr. Potter."

Unique? Was he mental? Harry just nodded to him, pushed his hood off his face, and went to the door the man had indicated.

Inside, he saw the familiar back of Albus Dumbledore. The wizard turned at his step.

"Harry, my boy! How good it is to see you. Sit down, sit down." The tea things were already laid out on a table and Albus gestured to a chair opposite him. He began to pour. "How is the flat working out? I must say, most were very surprised that you chose a Muggle flat. I can't say that it surprised me."

"Why not, sir?"

The old wizard smiled and slid the cup toward him. He pushed the sugar bowl and milk forward. "I would think you had had enough of the attention of the Wizarding world for a while."

Harry spooned two lumps into the tea, stirred it, and added the milk. "I certainly have! If I never see my face again in the *Daily Prophet* it won't be too soon!"

Dumbledore shook his head. "That is not very likely."

Harry sipped the tea and then set the cup back on its saucer. "No. I didn't think it was. How did you endure it, sir? When you defeated Grindlewald?"

The wizard's face took on a pensive expression. "Ah. No one has asked me about that particular wizard in a very long time."

"But...was it like this, sir?"

"Not as bad. Grindlewald was evil, yes. But not nearly as dangerous as Voldemort was."

Somehow, Harry hadn't expected that. "Oh."

Dumbledore smiled and sipped his tea. "But you were telling me about your flat."

"Oh...er yes, it's a great flat. It's brilliant to be on my own at last."

"I thought it might be." He watched Harry steadily, almost a little too long. "Harry. Do give it time. It will take some time for things to return to normal. For you to feel normal again."

"That's just it. I don't know what 'normal' is. I suppose when I start feeling less lost then I'll reach 'normal'."

"Perhaps I can help with that. Have you given anymore thought to my proposal to you?"

"To teach, you mean?" Harry shook his head in wonder. "I don't really feel that I'm qualified."

"You are perhaps the *most* qualified wizard alive."

"It was a lucky stroke, that's all." He squirmed a bit. He didn't think he'd ever get used to talking about it.

"I think luck had very little to do with it. But I see you have difficulty speaking of it. No matter. I am mostly concerned with my staff. And I definitely need a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher."

"Well, if you really want me. But you know I'll be gone in a year." Harry bit down on a scone slathered with raspberry jam.

Dumbledore blinked at him. "And why is that?"

Harry grinned. "Because you can't seem to keep a Defense teacher for more than one year."

"Of course not. Not since Voldemort cursed the position. But I don't think it is cursed anymore. Do you?"

The scone stopped midway to Harry's mouth. "Oh." No longer hungry, he set the scone down on the plate. "Um...so...if I take it I'm there for life?"

"Well, only as long as you wish it."

"I see." Harry grasped the handle of his tea cup, lifted it, but did not drink. He set it down untouched. "Professor, I don't see how I can possibly know enough to teach it. I don't know nearly enough spells and counter jinxes. And its loads more work than teaching a bunch of fifth years." He was thinking, of course, of when he started

Dumbledore's Army in his fifth year, when Dolores Umbridge held sway at Hogwarts.

"That is a good point, Harry. Since the school isn't nearly ready to reopen, I would think the time will provide adequate preparation for you. You must, of course, first complete your sixth and seventh years. This is something I insist upon. And then special training with an experienced wizard."

This seemed interesting. Harry leaned forward. "Who, sir? You?"

"No, dear boy. I was rather thinking of Remus Lupin. I daresay, you could use the practice and he could use the funds."

"Oh. Oh! I'd pay him, certainly!"

"As if he would take it from you. I will pay him. If you feel the need to fill the Hogwarts coffers on your own, Harry, you may feel free to do so."

"I see."

"How does that sound to you?"

"I'd like to work with Remus. He really was my favorite teacher."

"Good! Then that is settled."

Harry took his cup and slurped down a large swallow. "Sir, when do you think Hogwarts will be ready to reopen?"

"Well, Harry. There is a lot of work to be done. There was much damage through the Death Eater's spells. All the wards will have to be rebuilt and this is quite a tedious task. After all, it took the work of four of the greatest witches and wizards to accomplish it the first time. We can certainly use your help."

"Me, sir?"

"Oh yes. Only those truly attuned to Hogwarts can reknit the careful wards and spells. And I know that Hogwarts has been very important to you."

"So... you mean *I* can help rebuild Hogwarts? Like the Founders?"

"Precisely, Harry."

"Wow. That would be an honour, sir."

"I think you have it the wrong way round. *You* would be honouring *us*."

* * *

Harry went home to his flat that night feeling a renewed sense of purpose. He was going to be responsible for actually rebuilding Hogwarts. Not its brick and mortar, but all the magical walls and binding spells. Dumbledore had promised to owl Harry some ancient scrolls that outlined some of these spells and for the first time in several weeks, he became excited about something.

The next morning he received an owl from Remus Lupin telling him that he had been urged by Dumbledore to tutor Harry. Harry whisked up a piece of parchment to pen a reply when he tossed the page aside. "I'll just go round and see him!"

Hedwig clicked her beak in disappointment. "Sorry, girl. But I'd like to answer this one personally. I promise to send something off to...ah...to Hermione tomorrow."

The owl perked up at this and ruffled her feathers.

Harry grabbed his cloak and glanced at his broom standing in the corner. He couldn't very well ride his broom through London, even if he did disillusion it. And he couldn't Apparate in the middle of a street for the same reason. He'd have to floo somewhere close to Grimauld Place. He was sure there was a wizard tea shop nearby. He grabbed some floo powder, stepped into the fireplace and shouted, "Wizard tea shop near Grimauld Place!" and cast down the powder. Flames shot up all around him and he spun. How he hated that feeling. Finally he came to rest and tumbled out of the hearth into a tea shop he didn't recognize.

He coughed up soot and looked around. The Wizarding patrons all froze when they recognized him. Oops. Forgot to disillusion himself.

"It's Harry Potter!" someone cried and several people lurched toward him to help him up. Hands reached, dusted, and straightened.

"Thanks...er...thanks."

"Can we buy you a pot of tea?" asked several young witches anxiously. They giggled at each other.

"Oh. No, thank you. Really. I just dropped in because it was close to...to somewhere I need to be. And I must get there. So thank you but no thanks." He stumbled away from the well-wishers and heard the buzz of a cutting spell.

"I've got a piece of his cloak!" yelled a teen-aged wizard.

Wanker, thought Harry and grabbed his wand and cast a shield around himself. It wouldn't do to end up at Grimauld place starkers.

He made it outside and started up the street toward Grimauld Place. After Sirius Black died Harry didn't much feel like living there himself and he knew Remus Lupin needed a place, so he had gifted it to him, much to the werewolf's objection. It was still shielded and so he had to concentrate very hard for it to appear, squeezing between the houses on either side, and shoving them up and out of its way. He walked up to the front entrance and rang the bell, half expecting to hear Sirius' mother berate him, but he remembered that the painting—though unable to be removed—was transfigured to show a shepherdess standing amongst a flock of sheep. Now all she said was, "My, my. Isn't it a lovely day?"

The door opened and the much scarred face of Remus Lupin greeted him. He looked weary—as he usually did—with dark pouches under his eyes and his now grey hair drooped lazily over his forehead. "Harry! I didn't expect you."

Harry's heart sank. Stupid prat. Why did he think it was all right to just drop in on the man? "I'm so sorry, Remus. I'll come back another time—"

"Don't be silly, Harry. My door is always open to you. Come in, come in." He ushered Harry forward over the younger man's objections and steered him through to the parlour. "Would you care for some tea? I was just about to fix some."

"Sure, Remus. That would be nice."

Lupin waved the wand he pulled from his waistcoat and the tea things assembled, trembled, and poured.

"I'm glad you came, Harry. I don't suppose we have had time to speak three words together since...well. Since the *Event*."

Harry noticed that his close friends never actually referred to his killing Voldemort, but preferred to speak of it only in euphemisms, like *Event* or *That Day*. It wasn't a very nice thought for Harry to have killed anyone, even though Voldemort certainly deserved it if anyone had. But it still made him uncomfortable, and vaguely he wondered if his friends viewed him differently. After all, he was now a killer.

"I got your letter. And I told Dumbledore that there was no one I wanted to learn from more than you. I think it will be brilliant."

Lupin lowered his eyes. His clothes were still patched and worn, but no one was a better sight to his eyes than his old professor whom he trusted, even if he had had to do some things in the war he never discussed. Harry reckoned everyone had skeletons in their closets now about that.

"Well, Harry. It will be my pleasure teaching you, I assure you. Dumbledore mentioned that you would need to continue your Hogwarts education, and so I've been instructed to teach you some of your subjects. Besides Defense, we will work on Transfigurations and Charms."

"Potions?" asked Harry, hoping that he was done with them.

"I believe Horace Slughorn has volunteered his time for that. As well as Professor Sprout for Herbology. With private tutoring, we don't have to keep to a standard curriculum and so I imagine things will go much faster. Does that suit?"

"Sounds brilliant." Harry sipped his tea and smiled at the older man. "You don't have to be nervous around me," said Harry.

"What? Oh it's not that—"

A crash in the foyer made Harry jump to his feet, wand out. He scrambled through the doorway and spotted Tonks, her shoes in one hand and trying to right the umbrella stand with the other. She looked up at Harry and smiled. "Wotcher, Harry?"

Harry smiled and only then noticed that her robe was buttoned wrong. And, not only did she have her shoes in her hand, but her socks and what looked like panties as well. “What are you doing?” he asked, but the moment he said it, he realized that she must have been sneaking downstairs from one of the bedrooms. No. Not *one* of the bedrooms. Remus’.

Harry felt his face grow hot. Well, at least *someone* was getting some.

“Just on my way out, Harry. Remus. I’ll Firecall you tomorrow.”

Lupin ran his hand up the back of his neck and lowered his face. “Yes, Tonks. That would be fine.”

“If...I’m interrupting something—” said Harry, backing into the parlour.

“My!” said the Transfigured painting of Mrs. Black. “It *is* turning out to be a lovely day, isn’t it?” Her sheep bleated.

Tonks reached for the door knob and pulled it open. “Not at all, Harry. You’ve got business to conduct and I’ve got to...er...get home. See you, Harry! Remus.” And she gave him a lingering look which made Lupin’s face positively scarlet.

Harry felt his own face flush. Gosh. Everyone was pairing up it seemed.

Tonks closed the door and Lupin retreated hurriedly to the parlour. “Tonks was only here to...to consult about....”

“You don’t honestly owe me an explanation. Besides, Remus.” He elbowed the werewolf. “I can reckon for myself *why* she was here.”

Lupin looked at Harry for a moment before he laughed uncomfortably. He scratched his limp hair again. “Yes, well...yes.” He sat and shook his head. “What she wants with an old man like me I’ll never know.”

“You’re not old. There’s a lot of good in you. That’s what she sees. Anyway, why I am telling *you* this? You’re doing better than I am.”

“Don’t worry, Harry. Some young witch is sure to catch your eye at some point. I wouldn’t worry about rushing it.”

"Yeah," he said and returned to his seat. They both finished their tea quietly and after, Remus worked out a schedule for Harry to return and begin his lessons. By the time he left Grimauld Place and returned to his own flat an owl was waiting on his window sill.

He quickly opened the window on one side of the bay and let the large owl in. The note was from Dumbledore. He asked Harry to come to Hogwarts when convenient to begin helping rebuild the wards. Looked like his days and his weekends would be busy enough. Not enough time to think about...other things.

* * *

Lupin was patient with Harry and it was a good thing. For someone who was hailed as the next great wizard after Dumbledore, Harry sure seemed to have trouble with the simplest of spells.

"I'm sorry, Remus. Let me try that again." They had moved all the furniture out of the sitting room and used it as Defense training, but even with careful wards, Harry still managed to singe the carpet in places and crack the wainscoting.

"Harry, you are doing remarkably well for a wizard your age. You surely must realize that."

"It doesn't feel like it," he said, wiping the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve. "It feels like I don't know what the heck I'm doing."

"Some of these spells don't come easily for anyone. It takes concentration."

"Concentration," he muttered, trying to summon it, but distraction after distraction kept sweeping through his mind. He lowered his wand. "How do you teach something like this? I mean, I remember Neville and some of the others, but I was his friend and it came easier to him because of it. I can't be a friend to all of them."

Lupin relaxed and straightened his patched robe. "Well, that is certainly true. But it doesn't stop you from being *friendly* to all of them. When I was teaching," and he seemed to say this wistfully, which gave Harry a funny feeling in his gut, "I tried to put myself in the shoes of all of the students, trying to remember myself how it felt at that age, realizing how hard it was with all its...distractions."

"Yeah." Harry sighed. "Hormones raging and all."

"Indeed. Perhaps...we are both distracted today?"

Harry smiled. "Maybe."

"I understand there was something between you and Miss Weasley."

"What?" Harry whipped his head up. "Me? And Ginny? No! It's...I mean *she* may have...but not me."

"Relax, Harry. I'm not dragging you two to the altar. Perhaps it's something you'd like to talk about."

Harry stared at Remus, studying his lined and scarred face. How would he take it if Harry came out to him? Harry was sure he would be sympathetic and not judge. That was the kind of man he was. He didn't have to tell him about Draco and he knew he had to come out sometime. He tucked his wand away and turned toward the room. He grabbed a chair from against the wall and sat in it. "Well, it would be nice to talk about it, I guess."

Remus followed suit and found a chair to sit in. He gazed at Harry neutrally. Harry took a deep breath.

"Not many people know this. Well...I think only two. Hermione and Ron. So I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell anyone else. I don't want to see it splashed all over the *Daily Prophet*."

"Of course, Harry."

"No, I mean it. Not even Dumbledore. It's really no one's business but mine."

Despite the neutral expression, Lupin was starting to look interested. "You have my complete confidence."

"Okay. Well. I'm...blimey. This is just as hard as the first time." He cleared his throat and settled on his chair. "The thing of it is, I'm...I'm..."

"You're gay?"

Harry's eyes widened. "How did you know?"

"Lucky guess. The way you were hesitant about saying, your reaction to Miss Weasley, your lack of female companionship."

"Oh God. I hope no reporter gets the same notion."

"They don't know you like I do, Harry. It isn't likely, so don't worry."

"I really can't have people knowing."

"Doesn't that make it awfully lonely?"

Harry lowered his face. "Yes. And I'm still so...inexperienced."

"I can see how that can be particularly true for you."

It was a relief releasing this information to Lupin. All the things he had wanted to talk with Hermione about but couldn't because she wasn't a man all came out in a rush. "I mean, what can I do? I wouldn't even know how to approach a wizard. And I'd be scared out of my wits that the whole thing in lurid detail would end up in the *Prophet* the next morning."

"Then I wouldn't mingle with wizards. There's always Muggles, you know."

Harry lowered his brows in thought. "Muggles? I never considered them."

"Perhaps you should. No reporters. No ugly stories. No wizard expectations. Seems to me you can be just Harry."

Just Harry. Isn't that what he longed to be? He smiled up at his former professor. "Thanks, Remus. That really helps."

* * *

After a month of lessons, Harry sat in the kitchen at Grimauld Place and brooded over the many books opened before him. Not only was he immersed in studies to finish his Hogwarts schooling, but he had hours of extra Defense lessons ("Sure could have used these *before* I faced Voldemort!"), but he also had lessons on how to teach—as he was doing now.

The book by Eustace Doctrina was especially helpful. "*Be patient*," it said. "*Learn what the students already know and build on that. Don't force learning down their throats*."

Good advice. If Snape had only been that way in Potions he might have enjoyed it more. And it all perked up for him when Horace Slughorn taught the class. But that wasn't quite true, because it was really due to the Half-Blood Prince that he got along in Potions, and that was really cheating. So he guessed Snape really did teach him something after all. Even today it was hard relating the helpful Prince to Snape. Snape had not been the villain like they all thought. He was a spy doing the hardest job of them all. Voldemort never trusted him, really, and he was in constant danger. Harry supposed that could make anyone pretty sour. Except that Snape seemed to enjoy tormenting his students so much.

"'*Build on what the students already know*,'" Harry muttered. Yes, good advice.

"How are you doing, Harry?"

Harry looked up at Lupin just coming through the kitchen door. "Good. Better than good, actually. Is it time for my Potions exam?"

"Are you nervous?"

"Of course I'm nervous. I've never done well in Potions on my own before."

"Well Horace said you aren't doing badly."

Harry rose to clear off the table. "It's a good thing I'm not teaching Potions."

"Quite," said Lupin with a smile to his voice.

They both moved the books from the table in order to leave room for Harry's cauldron. After making the space ready, Harry stood beside Lupin tapping his wand against his thigh, waiting for the examiner to arrive.

The fireplace whooshed and out popped the diminutive Professor Flitwick. Lupin seemed just as surprised as Harry. "Filius," said Lupin,

stepping forward and bending down to shake his hand. “It’s good to see you.”

“Remus. It’s good to see you as well. And Harry! Look how you’ve grown.”

“Hi, Professor. Are you here to give me my potions exam?”

“Yes, indeed. There is still so much to do to fix the Wizarding world that I was the only one available to give you your exam, Harry. But you know, I wasn’t bad in Potions in my day, young man. Took to it rather well, in fact.” He looked around at the kitchen and spied the cauldron. “Well, enough chit-chat. We’re supposed to get down to business.” He cleared his throat and conjured a roll of parchment. “Mr. Potter, you are to brew a Simpering Solution. Here are the ingredients. You have two hours.”

The ingredients appeared on the table beside the cauldron and Harry looked at them forlornly. Simpering Solution? He racked his brain trying to find it in the maelstrom of his nervousness. He approached the table and looked at the ingredients. Yellow-bellied Sap Suck feathers, Hiding Toad’s foot, Slithering Root...of course! This was the potion to sap a person’s bravery. Given to one’s enemies, they would run away in fright...of *everything*.

The Potion formed in Harry’s mind and with a little more confidence, he took up the toad’s foot and began chopping them on his little wooden chopping block.

After an hour he had the potion on a slow simmer and it had turned the requisite lime green. He gave it one clockwise stir, one anti-clockwise stir and it instantly turned yellow, just as it was supposed to. He set the spoon down turned the fire even lower and let it cook down.

Flitwick climbed up onto a chair and peered into the cauldron. He smiled. “Very good, Harry. We’ll only need to test it in one hour, but I can see that it is nearly perfect. Very well done indeed. Professor Snape would have been proud.”

“No he wouldn’t have,” said Harry without malice. It was hard to conjure malice for his former potions master. “He would have made me so nervous I would have messed it up at the beginning.”

Flitwick twitched his mustache but said nothing. He retreated to where Lupin was standing in the corner and they talked together in low tones.

Harry watched the yellow potion bubble. He knew he'd passed. And with this he had officially completed his sixth year. Now all he had to do was study for his seventh and he will have completed his Hogwarts education. Just in time to teach there. He chuckled to himself. However his life had played out, he never expected to become a teacher, of all things. He fancied himself a famous Quidditch player when he was younger and just discovered the Wizarding world and all of its strangeness. But that was before he realized all the danger to himself. Once he realized he was Voldemort's ultimate target, he reconciled to becoming an Auror. No one was ever going to terrorize the Wizarding world again. Not on *his* watch. But that was a vague expectation. It seemed heroic and noble. Once the reality set in of what it was like to really fight a Dark Wizard, the glamour had worn off. Harry didn't want to spend his life chasing maniacs and killing them. He hadn't enjoyed killing Voldemort. It had been a necessity. Harry wasn't the killing kind. So after the excitement of that whole thing blew over, he found himself reluctant to do anything. What was there left for him to do? He hated being famous. Always had. He just wanted to sink into obscurity. But nothing and no profession would seem to allow him to do that.

Until Dumbledore's call. "I need a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Harry. How would you like the job?" he had asked. First confronted with it, Harry had balked. He hadn't known what to say to the Headmaster and so stuttered his way through a few lines to stall him. But when he was alone in his flat and really had time to think about it, it started to seem like a good idea. He could have the chance to teach young witches and wizards the tricks he knew. He could mold them and give them a philosophy of camaraderie. He could make certain that no new Dark Lords rose amongst their ranks because he never wanted the world subjected to the likes of Voldemort again. He could do that if he taught. He could. And the idea grew so much that he became eager to do it. But he really didn't seem to know enough to teach.

He glanced back at Remus Lupin bent low to talk to Flitwick. He was glad Remus was around to teach him. He trusted him. He knew what he learned from Remus would be worth it and that his future students—whoever they were—would benefit.

He gazed at his reflection in the cauldron's solution. *Professor* Potter. He smiled. Yes, he liked that idea a great deal. I might even help him forget—

His image lost its smile and when he looked into his own eyes, they seemed less determined and a little more forlorn. He had to get Draco Malfoy out of his thoughts. And if it meant seeking out a Muggle...well. He had to try. He was damned tired of being alone.

Chapter Four—Draco's Lessons

Draco awoke slowly. His head was pounding and all he could remember was drinking a great deal the night before. "I need a Hangover Draught," he muttered, tasting the foulness of his mouth. He pulled his goosefeather duvet over his shivering shoulders. But it didn't feel like his duvet. It felt hard and stiff and more like cardboard—

His eyes flew open and he sat up with a jerk. Gone were the friendly bedroom walls of Malfoy Manor. He wasn't in his bed. He was on the street under a bridge and a stained piece of cardboard served as his blanket.

He leaped to his feet and stared about him. Dreary grey men were just awakening in the misty morning light. They, too, were sloughing off their cardboard cocoons and wrapping their dingy coats about themselves.

No. No, it had to be a nightmare. It *had* to be! But amid the pounding in his head, the memories were flooding back. He had been banished from the Wizarding world. Kicked out. Orphaned. There would be no Hangover Draught. There would be no warm duvet. There was no wand to conjure a morning cuppa, no cloak, no *wizards*. Only Muggles. Forever only Muggles.

His breath caught and his eyes began to sting from tears. He had survived his one night as a Muggle but what of the next? What of the day? What was he to do? He began to feel hungry. How would he eat? *What* would he eat?

The men began to drift in the general direction of the street as the traffic began to hum for the day. Where were they all going? Did they know something about being a homeless Muggle that Draco did not?

He hugged himself to try to keep warm and took a halting step toward their exodus. Might they be heading for a rubbish bin? He'd heard that

the homeless often ate from bins. But he had dismissed that as one of the many tall tales about Muggles he had heard over the years. Only now it looked to be true. He couldn't eat out of a rubbish bin! He was a Malfoy! But even as that thought formed and almost straightened his shoulders, they drooped again. Malfoys were nothing. They were all dead. Just as he appeared to be to the world. He was nothing. Being a Malfoy was almost as good as being Voldemort. He was now the stuff under one's boot to be scraped off onto the kerb. Ignored. Cast aside.

He ran a finger under his nose to catch the drip. Well, he'd at least *see* where these Muggles were going. Maybe he could find some money somewhere, though he couldn't quite fathom Muggle money.

The men seemed to be drifting toward a building with a large sign that read "Cheapside Mission." What by Merlin was that?

Out of the propped-open door, Draco could smell coffee brewing and the aroma of food. But he wasn't a Muggle. How could he go in there?

One by one the men disappeared in the door until Draco was the only one left outside. It seemed warm in there. And the food smelled heavenly. He looked up and down the lonely street, brightening with the morning sun. The pavement was damp and reflected vague images of the buildings marching down the lane. Cars and lorries splashed down the street, their headlights blinding him. He looked up to the sign again and hugged himself tighter.

"Oi!"

Draco whipped his head toward the entrance. A young black man with dread locks was looking right at him. For a while Draco began to feel as if he were invisible, but this man was clearly motioning to him.

"Oi!" he said again. "Ain't you coming in?" He approached Draco and in a panic, Draco considered bolting. But his aching limbs just shook instead and he stared forlornly at the man as he got up next to him. He was wearing a nametag that read "Chad."

Some of his Malfoy dignity came back to him and he shook his head. "That's for lads down on their luck."

Chad looked him up and down. "And you ain't?"

Draco shivered. He couldn't help it. It was fucking cold!

Chad drew on a softer expression. “Been thrown out of the house?”

Draco's throat closed. He could only nod.

“Any chance they’d take you back?”

A tear fell. He thought of hiding it but didn’t bother. He shook his head again. “None,” he managed to croak. “I’m out for good. I’ve got no m-money. No h-home.”

“No friends?”

Draco couldn’t stop it. He suddenly burst into tears and hid his face in his hands. This isn’t how it was supposed to be. This isn’t how a Malfoy was to end his life. Draco couldn’t stop sobbing even when the Muggle put his arms around him and held him fast. It felt good to be held and he didn’t even mind for the moment that it was a Muggle. At least someone was being sympathetic and kind.

He cried into his shoulder a long time before his embarrassment intruded. Draco tried to pull away but the man held him. He repositioned his arm across Draco’s shoulder and slowly steered him inside.

Okay. So what. Let him. I’m done for no matter what I do. Might as well let this Muggle have his will of me.

But it was warm inside and it felt so good. Better than anything Draco had ever felt before. Chad never let go of Draco, but he managed to get him a tray with bread, a steaming bowl of oatmeal, and a mug of tea and directed him to a table in a far corner all alone. He set the tray down and then gently pushed Draco onto the bench and sat opposite him, leaning forward on the table.

“Eat up, man,” he said in a Jamaican lilt. “Go on. No hurry.”

Draco slowly picked up the spoon and dipped it into the grey porridge. He ate it and felt instantly better. He drank the tea—a marvelous sensation—and devoured the warm roll.

Chad talked while Draco ate. He talked about the shelter and how men who have difficulties sometimes need to come here. He told Draco that

he could get a hot shower and maybe ring someone on the phone—whatever that meant—and stay out of the cold for a bit.

Draco ate and listened. So. They had facilities like this when other Muggles were in the same straits as Draco. It made him feel better that Muggles were sometimes in the same situation. But it surprised him that Muggles could be so caring of one another. Of strangers. He hadn't known that about them.

Draco was nearly finished with his meal and deliberately slowed his eating. As soon as he was finished, he reckoned he'd be out in the cold again. After all, he wasn't like these other Muggles. They looked raggedy and he was still in fairly clean clothes of a much higher caliber than the lot of them.

Chad smiled. His teeth were gleaming white against his darker skin. "You don't look like this lot," he said confidentially. He looked around and leaned into Draco. "I'm not supposed to do this, but like I said, man, you ain't like these men. I can tell. You are smart man, no? How'd you like a job? Not like you're used to, I bet. But if you want a job, we need someone to wash dishes. 'Tain't much pay, but there's a cot in the back to go with it. Just something to get you off the street and back on your feet"

Draco stared at him and dropped his spoon. No one, but *no one* had ever been this nice to him. And the man didn't even know him. Didn't know what Draco had done, what he was capable of doing.

It was then that Draco realized the man must be toying with him. He sneered his best Malfoy sneer and started to move away from the table. He didn't need this. He didn't need more mocking.

But before he could get away, Chad grabbed his arm. "This way, man." He dragged Draco to a door into the kitchens. And instead of house elves all around, there were men—black, white, foreign—working side by side, stirring large pots, making coffee in large urns, and mopping the floor. Then he led Draco into a small back room with a cot and a basin. "This would be your room, mate. Not the Savoy, but not cold and damp neither. Food and board and a salary. Not bad for a homeless man, eh?"

Draco looked around the filthy little room. But he thought again of the bridge, the cold, the loneliness. Thought again of the Wizengamot who

declared he was now a Muggle and he slowly nodded his head. If Muggle he had to be, then he would start at the bottom and work his way up. He wasn't stupid. He could manage to do *something*. If this was his start then so be it.

"All right. I'll do it. And...and...thanks."

Chad smiled broadly. "Then you start now." He ushered Draco back to the kitchen and showed him the sink. He handed Draco an apron and then Draco froze. He didn't know the first thing about doing dishes. The closest he had ever come was cleaning his cauldrons in Potions. But that had been with the flick of his wand. There were taps and long hoses and all sorts of things he didn't understand at all.

"I…I don't know how to wash dishes," he said lamely.

He looked at Draco as if he'd turned green. "What the bleeding hell do you mean? Everyone knows how to wash dishes!"

"*I* don't. I've never done it. We had…had servants."

He laughed. Loudly. "Well, your majesty," he said with a flourishing bow, "as you can see, things are a bit different now."

"I can see that!' he snarled, a bit of the old fight coming back. But Chad ignored it.

"This is the soap, this is the sponge, there's the tap. And it's hot, so mind it. Clean goes there, dirty there. Anything else?" Draco shook his head, feeling like the biggest fool. "What's the name, mate?"

"Draco. Draco Malfoy."

"*Draco*? What sort of name is that? Sounds spooky."

"It's a very old family name and I rather like it!"

"Don't get all hairy. If you need me, *Draco*, I'll be out in the dining hall."

Draco waited till he left before he donned his apron. He approached the dishes as if he were staring at a Hippogriff. He slowly took a dish and placed it into the sink. He took the nozzle in one hand, turned the tap, and it sprang to life like a large snake. It sprayed hot water at the

dish, on the wall, and on Draco before he managed to subdue it. He picked up the sponge, frowned at it, and then silently began to scrub the dish.

It took hours. And after, his hands were raw and red. His feet hurt from standing so long, but the other blokes in the kitchen all grabbed plates and made sandwiches so Draco felt he could do it too. He followed them as they made their way to one of the long tables in the dining hall, a mocking memory of those fine tables in the Hogwarts Great Hall.

The men talked together and after they ate pulled out little white sticks, thrust them in their mouths, and lit the ends until they smoked. They inhaled the smoke and blew it out their nostrils. Draco stared and stared until they turned to him with menacing expressions. He lowered his face and said nothing, until the man across from him looked up. "Oi. What's your name, mate?" His accent was thick and low.

"D-Draco."

Another laugh and the man told the others Draco's name. They looked at him curiously.

The man across from him nudged him with his foot. "What's your problem? Mummy and Dad not paying for Cambridge no more?"

"Yeah, kicked out of University?"

He didn't know what they were talking about. He decided shaking his head was best. "No. Just kicked out. Of...of the house. No family anymore, all right. Can't you leave me alone?"

Chad showed up and the others ceased their prying. He sat down next to Draco. "Going all right? These lads getting friendly?"

"Oh yeah," Draco sneered. "Friendly."

"Mustn't mind them. They'll most likely stay here. Not much growth, if you know what I mean. Not you, though. You're not the type. I bet you can get a better job in no time."

"Yeah?" For the first time in twenty-four hours, Draco's hopes grew.

* * *

Over the next few months, Draco's skill level rose. He learned what a telephone was and how to use it. He learned how to do the dishes properly and did it swiftly with little breakage. He even learned how to smoke the white sticks which he learned were called "cigarettes" or "fags" but he didn't much like it. His hands were still raw and red but he used lotion on them he bought at a place called a "chemist" and learned to make coffee in the big urns. He learned how to cook for himself—and that the little switch below the burner actually made the flame come up or down; that the oven also required the turning of a knob; that hot water could run out when one was in the shower; that messes were much harder to clean up without a wand but that a mop could be employed with alacrity if one was careful.

Draco lay on his cot smoking a cigarette and reading the *Guardian*. He was looking in the adverts for jobs. He *had* to get out of the shelter. Not only because it was depressing, but he actually felt he owed it to Chad to make room for some other unfortunate. After all, it had been his salvation, his start. It was time to give some other bloke a chance.

He saw an advert for a tea shop and pulled out his mobile that he had saved up for. It had taken almost all his last pence to get it, but it seemed like the essential thing to have if you were to be a Muggle. Everyone talked about being connected; they talked of something called "computers" and "the internet" but he still wasn't certain what that was.

He snubbed out the cigarette against the basin and tossed the butt in the bin. "Well, Potter, what have we today?" He really didn't know when it started—possibly it was brought about by his loneliness or his missing the Wizarding world—but Draco had started talking to his Chocolate Frog card. His eyes scanned the adverts. "Here's something." The card lay on the bed beside him and the picture of Harry Potter looked up hopefully at him. Draco vaguely wondered if that image of Harry Potter was different with different people, because with him, the Boy Who Lived Again never drew his wand anymore to send his killing curse to Voldemort, but instead always smiled upon greeting Draco and always looked interested in what he had to say. Potter only looked like that in real life when he was with his Muggle-loving friends—

Draco sighed. He guessed that he was a Muggle-lover now, too. After all, he didn't feel the same way about them anymore. They were no

longer like an exhibition in a zoo or distasteful creatures little better than chimps. For the most part—at least in the shelter—they had been kind to him and gave him much more leeway than wizards would have. He guessed—all in all—they weren't so bad. Not really.

"Here's something," he said to the card. The image of Harry Potter scooted closer to the edge of the card and strained to see. It still bothered Draco that the photos in the paper didn't move. Every time he looked at them it gave him the creeps that they would remain stubbornly motionless. The first time he picked up a paper he thought that something had gone wrong. He had shaken it until his mates at the shelter eyed him strangely and it was then that Draco figured out that they weren't supposed to move. After a few months, the other blokes got used to his strange ways and knew he liked being on his own. After his unsuccessful attempts to accumulate a cadre of henchmen as he was used to with Crabbe and Goyle, he gave up. After all, there was nothing to back up his power with now. He hadn't any riches, hadn't any magic, no father to threaten them with. They were more amused by him that frightened.

"Look, Potter. A tea shop and within walking distance. I can get a job there, talk Chad into letting me stay until I can scrape up enough for my own flat, and go on from there. Sound like a plan?"

Harry Potter nodded. Draco smiled down at it. He liked this Harry Potter. He couldn't talk, after all, and always looked at Draco with a smile instead of that frown Potter always wore when looking at him. Of course he couldn't really blame him. Draco was always rather beastly to him. Draco himself frowned at that thought. Deep down he sort of wished they had been friends instead of on opposite sides of a war. If Potter had been a sport and took his hand when he introduced himself in the train in their first year maybe none of this would have happened... Draco snorted. Who was he kidding? Draco was still Draco and Potter was still Potter and never the twain shall meet, right? Some people were just destined to be heroes while others... Well. What did that make him? Villain, he supposed. And villains never triumphed in the end. Every hero saga told him that. Tyrants are deposed, the good shall overcome, etc, ad nauseum. Potter was probably living the high life now. Honours, riches, trophies, medals. Girls hanging from each arm. Probably one of them was that Weasley girl. She should have died in the Chamber of Secrets, if there was any justice in the world, but there was Potter again, being a hero.

He glared at the card and Harry Potter cringed back. Draco managed a smile. "Sorry. Just reliving my past." He picked up the card and looked at it. There was seventeen-year-old Potter. Probably the youngest hero on record. Of course, didn't it start when he was only a baby? Draco turned it over and read the cv again. He didn't know why he bothered to read it. He had it memorized at this point. Except something had changed. At the bottom, instead of it saying "...*Currently studying for a* possible *teaching position at Hogwarts" i*t now read, "*Studying to take up his post as teacher at Hogwarts*."

"Well now. So you're going to be a teacher. I'll bet every last knut I ever owned that it's Defense Against the Dark Arts. Well, at least I have the satisfaction of knowing you won't last a year." Had anyone? Not one teacher of Defense in his memory had stayed for more than a year.

The Harry Potter on the card sneered at Draco, crossed his arms over his chest, and marched out of the picture.

"Hey!" He shook it but the image would not return. "Don't leave me, too," he said, voice with more emotion than he thought merited it. But he couldn't stand the idea that this "friend" would abandon him as everyone else had.

A head poked back in the picture. Harry Potter looked distressed and he suddenly came back into the picture and smiled a conciliatory smile.

"I'm sorry I said that, okay? You'll stay, won't you?"

The image nodded and sat on the ground.

Relieved, Draco went back to looking at his paper. He found the advert with the nearby tea shop and picked up his mobile. He punched in the number and made an appointment for later in the afternoon.

Dressed in his new Muggle clothes, Draco thought he cut an impressive figure. He smoothed out his white blond hair, tucked the Chocolate Frog card into his wallet, and started down the street to the tea shop.

It was warm inside and smelled of scones. He walked right up to the fat shopkeeper at the cashier and turned on the Malfoy charm.

"Pardon, miss," he said, when she was clearly someone you'd call "madam", "but I had an appointment with Mrs Roster."

The old bat widened her eyes and blushed. She giggled—something reminiscent of Delores Umbridge—and Draco knew his flattery had worked. "Oh! *I'm* Mrs Roster. You must be Mr Malfoy. Aren't you the well-mannered young man. Please. Do sit down."

She led him to a table by the window which was smudged with dirt. "Now I don't know if the position would be beneath you, a young man such as yourself."

Uh oh, Draco. A bit too refined? "Well, Mrs Roster, don't let my manners fool you. I was brought up properly by my mother and father. But I have little experience. I don't mind starting at the bottom. Currently, I am washing dishes for a living. Schooling didn't work out, you see." She looked as if she did see and nodded sympathetically. "Thinking about owning a tea shop myself someday." And even though the lie was easy it also had an astonishing ring of truth. Perhaps he would someday. It wasn't all that far-fetched. He had to do *something* with himself. "So it would be a pleasure making tea and serving your customers. Must learn to do it myself."

But then her face took on a calculating expression. Perhaps she imagined Draco would take her customers away. "That's far in the future, though," he said hastily. "Haven't two knu—er—farthings to rub together at the moment." She seemed mollified by that and Draco plunged on. "What would the job entail?"

"Well, just as you said. Work in the kitchens a bit, make the tea, serve the customers, clean up. Eventually you might work up to the cashier's job."

"I see. Well, when do I start?"

She giggled again. "I have other applicants, Mr. Malfoy."

Oh. His face fell. Other applicants? He hadn't counted on that. He was about to get up when she gestured him back down.

"But that would seem foolish when you are clearly perfect for the job." She batted her eyes at him. Draco cringed inwardly. "I tell you what, dear, you come back at eight tomorrow morning, and we'll get you started."

“Really?” Draco couldn’t believe it. He was so surprised he reached across the table and planted a kiss on her powdered cheek. “Thank you, Mrs. Roster! You won’t regret it. Eight sharp!”

He left the shop whistling. Things were finally beginning to look up. A new job in a not-so-depressing place, more money, soon a new flat. He was coming into his own again. He felt one hundred percent better. He strolled down the other direction away from the mission. He wanted a little time to himself and some fresh air. He looked in the shop windows, missing shopping for trinkets terribly and even worse for clothes. He and his mother used to have some truly momentous shopping sprees much to the chagrin of his father, but he would always flatter Narcissa as to how good she looked and would brush off the imaginary dust from Draco's shoulder when he showed off his new purchases and say, “My! What a handsome son I have.”

Draco stopped before a shop window, feeling the tightness in his throat and the sting at his eyes. How he missed them! Would they be proud of him, he wondered. Would they think he had given up? Or did his best under the circumstances? “A Malfoy always perseveres. Remember that, Draco,” his father had said many a time. Well, he was persevering the best way he knew how. Yes, he decided, swallowing the thickness away. They would be proud. He was being a Malfoy. He was persevering. And he would rise again. He knew he would.

He looked up into the shop and his heart began to hammer. He dived out of the way of the window and cringed against the wall. “Potter,” he breathed. There he was in the flesh. Harry Potter himself in a Muggle shop, if you please, merely conducting ordinary business. Harry frigging Potter! Draco leaned toward the window again and peeked in.

His hair was a little longer than in the Chocolate Frog picture and he was a little more muscular, filling out. But there he was; that same messy hair, those awful glasses, that attitude that nothing in the world mattered but what he was doing. And what was he doing? Buying himself some Muggle paper and pencils. Idiot. Why didn’t he just go to Diagon Alley? He’d probably get a lifetime supply of parchment and quills for free!

“Stupid Potter.” Draco’s rage at his situation blossomed in his chest and he suddenly wanted to confront the Gryffindor. His hands tightened into fists and his face screwed into a sneer. But almost as soon as these feeling emerged, they vanished. No. It wasn’t Potter’s fault. Not

any of it. Draco had done it to himself, hadn't he? *He* wanted to follow the Dark Lord, and he rubbed his left arm where the Dark Mark still throbbed now and again. It was he who wanted to torment Potter, and the boy had only reacted in a perfectly natural way. Something like Draco would have done. When he had surrendered to Potter, the boy had been perfectly reasonable, too. He didn't hex him or hit him or anything that that Weasley told him to do. He had quietly put a binding curse on him and told him, "We'll have to wait for the authorities to come, Malfoy. You do understand that, don't you?"

He'd been civilized. Draco hadn't been. Not for months. He'd been too scared to be civilized. Only Snape had kept him sane. And when he saw Potter wield all that incredible power and utterly destroy the Dark Lord, Draco had been so relieved he had wept and jumped out of his hiding place. He threw his wand at Potter's feet and Potter seemed surprised to see him. He fell to his feet and he would have worshipped him in that moment. He had tears in his eyes and streaming down his dirty face and Potter hadn't thrown any of it back at him. He had been...well, a gentleman. There was no other way to describe it.

Draco drew out his Chocolate Frog card and looked down at it and the old picture of Potter. "You were nice to me and I didn't deserve it." He snuck a peek back into the window. What if he got Potter to sign the card? That would make the card that much more valuable just in case he had to part with it. He could get a few galleons for it, he reckoned. It was probably the most valuable card in the bunch now, and with it signed he could probably demand much more. If he *had* to sell it. Which he hoped he didn't. Sheepishly, he admitted he rather liked talking to the card. It was the last thing he had from the Wizarding world and he was loath to part with it, even if it did have Potter's face on it.

Two boys emerged from the shop and Draco saw his chance. He looked at the image of Potter on the card and told it, "Don't move!" He chased after the boys and shouted, "Oi! You! Come here."

They stopped and looked at each other. "Yeah? What?"

Draco showed them the card. "Would you mind going in there and asking that bloke for an autograph?"

They looked down at the card curiously. "What is this?"

“Oh, it’s just a lark. A joke. But he’ll really be amused. I’ll give you each a pound to do it.”

They brightened at that, took the card, and went into the shop. Draco crouched by the front window, looking in.

The boys approached Potter and tugged on his coat. He turned and looked down at them with a smile. But his smile vanished when they showed him the card. He didn’t look as if he would take it at first, but the boys urged it on him and someone offered him a pen. Potter raised his head and looked around but at last he took the card, turned it over to the picture side, and signed it. He handed it back and the boys ran out. Potter watched them go and then blushed before he ducked his head and finished his transaction.

The boys came out and Draco handed them each a coin. “Thanks, boys.” He took the card and stared at it. There across the top of the picture was Potter’s scrawl. “Harry Potter.” Draco wasn’t certain what he expected him to write. “Slayer of Voldemort” perhaps. But Potter hadn't seemed amused by it. Looked embarrassed, in fact. Wasn’t that just like him? Couldn’t appreciate the fame he had. What an idiot.

He tucked the card back in his wallet just as Potter came out of the shop. Draco ducked behind the building and hoped the man hadn’t noticed him. Certainly the last thing he wanted was an encounter with the Famous Harry Potter. He heard his steps getting closer and Draco pressed himself harder against the building. Potter walked past him. There was a spring in his step Draco didn’t remember seeing before. Probably feeling good. Feeling free. Draco wasn’t the only one persecuted by the Dark Lord. He supposed Potter had his freedom coming to him...just as Draco had had his just deserts coming to him.

It was a strange world indeed when Malfoys end up on the streets and Potters become heroes.

Chapter Five—Everyday Life at Hogwarts

Harry awoke in his flat and looked around the blurry bedroom. Another day ahead of lessons and books. Except today he’d be going back to Hogwarts to rebuild it. That was certainly something.

He looked at his tented blanket and sighed. Morning wood. What to do about it? He pushed the blanket down and grabbed his hard prick through his pajama bottoms. He wanted to masturbate but the only

thing that set him off was dreams of Draco Malfoy. And he was trying not to think of the Slytherin any more...in *any* capacity.

Harry rolled his erection over his belly. But he sure needed to let off some steam. Maybe it wouldn't hurt anything just one more time.

He pushed his pajama bottoms down to his thighs, releasing his stiff cock. He dropped his hand and cupped his sac, trailing fingers lightly up to his shaft where he wrapped his fingers around it. He closed his eyes and drifted into thoughts of a white-blond man, smiling and smirking at him.

You want this, don't you, Potter, the dream Draco said.

"Yes," Harry moaned.

Dream Draco leaned forward and licked just the straining head of his dick. He smirked again. *You want more?*

"Oh yes, Draco. Please."

Dream Draco lowered his lids to dreamy slits. *I know, Potter. I'm going to take that gorgeous cock of yours in my mouth and suck it for all its worth*.

"Oh yes!"

Harry began to stroke it, imagining Draco's pink lips stretched over it, imagining his tongue swirling over the head and licking in long strokes up and down the shaft, squeezing the base, licking his balls. Draco always looked so content to be sucking Harry, his cheeks hollowed with sucking, harder and harder. Harry lifted his hips, imagining pushing them into Draco's face. Dream Draco pulled back, licked his cock and sac a bit, wet a finger between his lips, and thrust one digit into Harry's tight puckered entrance.

Harry lifted his hips again, receiving Draco's thrusting finger. Draco added another and began thrusting inside Harry faster and faster.

Are you tired of my fingers yet, Potter? Do you want my cock, because it's nice and hard for you.

"Oh yes, Draco! Fuck me. Now!"

Harry's fingers worked in his anus faster while he sped his wanking but he imagined Draco positioning himself over him and shoving his hard prick inside. *Oh yes, that's a tight Gryffindor! Oh Potter. You are so hot.*

"Fuck me, Draco! Fuck me!"

Harry's hips jutted forward, thrusting along with his fingers, imagining it was Draco, until Draco couldn't stand it and finally howled, *Harry!*

It didn't take long for Harry to come and he spurt his white cream over his hands and thighs.

The fantasy dissipated and Harry opened his sticky eyes to an empty room. And instead of the after glow he longed for, there was only emptiness.

* * *

Harry Apparated to Hogsmeade and sighed at the familiarity of the place. When he turned, he looked up the hill to the stately silhouette of Hogwarts. He hurried up the hill and got to the gate where Argus Filch was checking the iron bars. He looked up and spied Harry and grimaced.

Gods, even after all I've done he still looks at me like a delinquent schoolboy. I'm eighteen, for Merlin's sake.

"Good morning, Mr. Filch," said Harry in the politest tenor he could manage.

"Potter," he snarled, almost like Snape would have done. "I suppose you'd be wanting to come inside, eh?"

"Well, I was invited by Headmaster Dumbledore."

Filch grumbled and stuck his key in the rusty lock. Harry wondered if it was a magic lock but he also recalled that Filch was a Squib. Could Squibs use magical objects? He felt so ignorant of magical things. What made him think he'd ever be qualified to teach let alone rebuild Hogwarts?

The gate squealed open and Filch stepped back, allowing Harry through—but just barely.

Harry looked back at the gate and the caretaker, who scowled at Harry as he made his way up the path to the main doors. Harry had received Dumbledore's scrolls months ago and had pored over them, trying to make heads or tails. He even showed them to Remus, but even Remus said that they were written in an ancient language he wasn't aware of. If an experienced wizard like Remus couldn't figure it out, how was Harry to do this?

The doors were closed but the stone around it was still blasted away, its crumbled spires blackened from spells. He pushed the door opened gingerly, but no new stones fell. There was still debris in the corridor and his footfalls sounded that much more hollow walking through the solitary passageway. He hadn't been back to Hogwarts since That Day and then it was a quick run to the trophy room where You-Know-Who was waiting for him. Harry shivered. Months had passed now since That Day but the memory was just as clear, just as fresh as if it had happened yesterday. He recalled how Voldemort had laughed and taunted him though he was surprised that Harry had known where to find him. They cast spell after spell and Harry was certain he was losing. Voldemort was much stronger than he was, knew more magic. But Harry had relied on what Dumbledore had said—about *the power the Dark Lord knows not*. Love. The stupid sod certainly knew nothing about that! If it hadn't been for Ron and Hermione...

Harry girded himself and walked past the wide open doors of the Great Hall. The timbers of the roof still lay on the broken tables. The hour glasses containing the coloured beads of the house points were shattered and lay like spilled marbles across the floor, mixing with dead leaves and feathers. Scorch marks burned a trail across one wall, and the fireplace lay in ruins. It was going to take a long time until Hogwarts was ready for children again. Harry hoped that none of them would have to grow up in the shadow of a curse ever again. He would make it his mission to see that this was so.

He entered the staircase corridor but none of the staircases were positioned for him to climb them. He put his hands on his hips and stared at them. "How am I going to see Dumbledore if you won't cooperate?"

As if they heard him, one staircase swung down into place right in front of him while others higher up, moved and formed one continuous trail up to Dumbledore's tower. "Oh. Well, that's more like it," said Harry, wondering if indeed they *had* heard him.

Harry climbed, feeling the stone railing under his hand. He had to admit it. He really loved Hogwarts. It was like an old friend to him. True, in his sixth year when everything seemed to have come apart at the seams, he was happy to leave Hogwarts behind, but now he didn't feel that way. He supposed enough had transpired that he was willing to come home. Yes, Hogwarts was home to Harry as nothing and no place else had ever been. Perhaps the Burrow was a close second, but nothing had been more welcoming to him than Hogwarts.

He caressed the stair rail like it was some great beast. "Yes, old friend, I'm happy to be here. And I get to live here once your old bones are set to rights. At least you won't have to swallow Skelegro. Lucky you."

The gargoyle statue glared at him and he spoke the password, "Custard pie!" loudly. Was it his imagination, or did the gargoyle smile before it slipped aside?

Harry rode the griffin stair upwards and Dumbledore's door was already open. At once he spotted the enchanted portrait of the old wizard still dozing in his chair. He wondered since Dumbledore had been sort of dead if the portrait ever came to life and the old wizard could converse with it in that mad way of his.

"Ah Harry! Welcome, welcome. I must say, I am not surprised you were able to make it up the stairs."

"Er...why is that, sir?"

"Do you think they would cooperate for just anybody? Poor Mr. Filch has been trying to get up the stairs for weeks now, but they won't change for him. Did you ask them, by any chance?"

"I...didn't know you could. I just wondered aloud if they would cooperate so I could go up to see you. And...well. They did."

Albus smiled and came around his desk. He put his arm paternally around Harry's shoulders. "You see. I knew you were the one to come and help. Hogwarts has meant a great deal to you and the castle is fully aware of that. I'm certain it will listen to you as you help with the wards."

"Th-the castle itself? It's...alive?"

“Not so much alive as...aware.” Dumbledore led Harry to the alcove by his window. A book stand stood in the bright light showering the space and the open book upon it positively glowed. “Let me show you something, Harry.” He directed Harry in front of the book and the old wizard, still taller than Harry, stood behind him. He touched his gnarled and blackened hand to the open pages and the words leapt off the leaf and into the air, humming with magic.

“We, the Founders,” it chanted aloud in a chorus of voices, “give Hogwarts to the generations to follow. He who loves this place as we have loved it, will be welcomed. He will be honoured. He will speak for us.”

The letters fell to the page again and Harry turned breathlessly to the old wizard. “Was that...was that really their voices?”

“Yes, Harry. This is the great book of Spells. This *is* Hogwarts.” Harry stared at the book as Dumbledore closed the cover. Etched in bas relief on the leather was the image of Hogwarts. Its pennons flying from the tall pinnacles, waved with an unseen wind. It moved, even though it was neither picture nor photograph. But of course it would. It was the book of Hogwarts, but as Harry studied it, he realized it was more. Just as Dumbledore had said, it *was* Hogwarts. All its spells, all its secrets.

But something occurred to Harry. “Sir, if you had this book, why couldn’t you use it to find the Chamber of Secrets?”

Dumbledore chuckled. “You *would* think of that. Two reasons, Harry. One, the book did not make itself known until Hogwarts was ruined beyond simple repair, and Two, even if we had found the Chamber, we couldn’t have gotten inside without a Parselmouth.”

“Oh.”

Harry ran his fingers gently over the cover. The leather seemed almost to sigh at his touch. “Does this tell us how to repair Hogwarts?”

“Yes, Harry. Did you study the scrolls I sent you?”

“Er...well. They were sort of written in a language I didn’t understand.”

"Really?" He took them from Harry, who offered them up to the old man. Dumbledore unrolled them and looked them over. "It is quite plain to me," he said, showing Harry.

"Wait a minute!" Harry could read all of them now. "They were in this weird language before. Even Remus couldn't read it."

"Ah. I think I understand." Dumbledore chuckled as he sat on the window seat. He gestured for Harry to join him there. "Since they are for Hogwarts alone, I suppose they are spelled to be gibberish anywhere but here. My apologies."

"That's okay. I felt like a complete idiot, is all."

"No, Harry. You mustn't feel that way. While it is true you have had a lot of catching up to do, you have come along marvelously. Better than I could have expected."

"But I was such rubbish in a lot of my classes. Hermione did most of my homework..." He cringed upon looking at Dumbledore's expression. "Oops. Well, I guess it had to come out sometime."

"Of course, you took your O.W.L.s yourself, remember," said the wizard. "And so you must have learned something."

"Yes, sir. And I am doing all my own work now. So if I fail completely it's all my own fault."

Dumbledore chuckled. "Ah, Harry. I do regret not spending more time with you. That is a fault I shall correct. We will be working with one another, after all, once you've started teaching here, won't we?"

"I hope so, sir. When I thought you'd...." A lump chocked his throat for a moment. "When I thought you'd died, sir—"

"Yes, Harry. I deeply regret hurting you in this way. It was certainly not my intention to do so."

"It was to make me go after him, wasn't it?"

"Partly true. Mostly, it was because I did not want you to have killed me."

Harry jumped up. "*What*?"

"The potion in the cave, Harry. Poison. I was near death as it was. Fortunately, Professor Snape and I had agreed earlier on this course, in case it should come to this. Of course, I was certain it would be Draco Malfoy who had to be saved from that fate."

With mention of Draco, Harry faltered completely. Tears coursed down his face. "I almost killed you."

"Nonsense, Harry. I made a most unfortunate pact with you before we left, you will recall. I told you to follow my orders however unpleasant they would be. And you, a young boy of sixteen. I had no right forcing you to it."

"I wanted to go," he said softly, sniffing.

"I know. It was important that you did. We learned what we needed to in that cave. And Professor Snape saved both you and Draco from becoming murderers. That was very important to *me*."

"I came out a killer in the end, though." Harry realized it came out sullenly, but he didn't care.

"But this time, Harry, it was your choice. And you did it to save others. *All* the others. That is far different from the killing Voldemort did. Surely you see that."

"Yes, I know." Harry stared out the window. He remembered flying on Buckbeak passed this window once.

They sat in silence for a time until Harry realized the old wizard was waiting for him. He sighed. This growing up business was for the birds.

"Professor, I don't blame you for any of it, if that's what you're thinking. I'm not going to smash your office again. It all worked out. And you're not dead. Which was very good news indeed." Harry turned to him and smiled while wiping the tears from his face. He noticed with some surprise that Dumbledore was wiping away his own tears.

"I am very gratified to hear that, Harry."

* * *

Dumbledore took Harry on a tour of some of the dungeon areas. Apparently, they would have to start from the ground up in their magical repairs. Harry discovered that only he, Dumbledore, McGonagall, and Professor Flitwick would be doing the repairs. It made Harry very proud and a little intimidated that he would be the youngest one, but Dumbledore assured him that the castle would respond to him.

It was strange thinking of the castle as an entity, but he supposed he always had done at the back of his mind.

As they entered the Slytherin area, Dumbledore easily entered the common room. Harry hung back and Dumbledore looked back at him. "It's all right, Harry. No Slytherins here to harass you."

"I wasn't worried about that," he muttered under his breath and ducked inside. It was much as he remembered it back in his second year when he and Ron had posed as Crabbe and Goyle to discover who the heir of Slytherin was. Except that some of the plaster had broken off the walls, and a ceiling beam had cracked.

"My, my," said Dumbledore, ticking his head. "Quite a mess here, as well. And this furniture. I think it time we replace a few items." He walked over to a green wing-back chair and tutted at the rip on the seat. "I suppose we should dispose of this old thing."

Harry flashed back to his second year when he saw Draco sitting in this very chair, chatting with what he thought was Crabbe and Goyle. He had been so comfortable in that chair, one leg thrown over an arm. Like he belonged there, much like a throne. That was the year Harry had realized he had a crush on the Slytherin.

"Sir! I'll take it. If...that's all right."

"You want a chair from Slytherin, Harry?"

"Um...sure. Why not? I'm part Slytherin. And I like the chair. It would go well in my flat. Oh. It's not cursed or anything, is it?"

Dumbledore stepped out of the way. "Why don't you tell me?"

Ah. A test. Harry took out his wand and waved it over the chair, incanting the spell for curse detection. There didn't appear to be any on it. "It...looks okay, sir."

“Yes. Well done, Harry. You may move it to the front doors, if you wish.”

Another test. Harry concentrated. He vanished it and concentrated on making it reappear by the front entrance. He felt his magic pop, and he hoped the chair was still in one piece. A stupid thing to do, taking that chair home. Probably a bit destructive on his part, but he suddenly wanted it. He pictured Draco so perfectly there...which was probably why he shouldn’t take it, but he couldn’t turn it away now.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Not a bit of it, Harry.”

They continued to examine Hogwarts, into rooms Harry had never seen before, up staircases, into niches and corners. Everywhere something had gone wrong. There was a lot of work to do.

Dumbledore gave Harry a book of spells about wards and such, and told him to come back in a fortnight after he’d mastered the text. He looked at the thick book doubtfully, but nodded, listening to all that Dumbledore told him. Once back in Hogsmeade, he Disapparated and Apparated near his flat, where he unlocked his door and removed the reduced chair from his pocket. He enlarged it again with a flick of his wand and put it in several places in the small room before he settled on a sunny spot before the bay window. He looked at it a moment, satisfied, before he moved to sit in it, thinking of Draco. He shook his head at himself, and opened Dumbledore’s book into his lap.

* * *

On his days off, Harry liked to take walks in Muggle London and he found himself in the park in the afternoons. It was a pleasure going where he liked, staying out as late as he liked, without worrying about what the Dursleys would do to him. He had transfigured the large tome that Dumbledore gave him to look like a simple paperback and found a favorite bench on which to sit and read.

Harry looked at his watch. Precisely at three, a handsome bloke with strikingly white-blond hair and walking a small dog, appeared on the path. Everyday that Harry was there, there was this bloke. Harry noticed him the first thing when he began reading at the park. At first, his hair had startled him, he thinking it was Draco. But it clearly

wasn’t. Just some rather slight man with light-coloured hair and a brisk pace. Harry always watched him over the edge of his book. The man was gorgeous. He had light, hazel eyes and a pointy nose and chin, and he always gave Harry a quick glance when he walked his little dog past.

But today was different. As Harry studiously worked on watching the man without the man’s knowing it, the man walked a few paces before he stopped right in front of Harry’s bench. Harry looked up from under his dark fringe, hiding his eyes behind his glasses. The man looked back at Harry, moved toward the bench, and sat. Harry stared at his book, petrified.

“Mind if I sit here?” asked the man. His voice had a pleasant timbre. The dog jumped up beside him and panted over his lap, something Harry longed to do.

Harry lowered the book. “No. I don’t mind at all.”

The man smiled. He had very white teeth. “I see you everyday. You read a lot. Is it a good book?”

Harry looked at his transfigured book cover. It was the cover of the latest bestseller. “Er...yeah. Hard to put it down.”

“You haven’t gotten very far,” said the man. “I mean, you’re here everyday, reading the same book.”

“Oh. Well...I only get to read when I’m here. Have loads of work to do in the meantime.”

“Yes. Me too. George and I only get a little freedom in the afternoon, don’t we George?” The small dog jumped up and down and licked the man’s nose.

Harry smiled. “He’s cute. What kind of dog is he?”

“Pekinese. He’s adorable. And he knows it, the rotter. So.” He turned to Harry and put out his hand. “I’m Roger Garrett. And you are--?”

“Oh.” Harry took his hand and shook it. Here it was. The moment of truth. If he were a Muggle then no recognition should pass over his eyes. “I’m Harry. Harry Potter.”

“Nice to meet you, Harry.” He released Harry’s hand and ran it over the dog. Harry sat back, relieved. The man didn’t know who Harry was! This was the greatest day of his life!

“Nice to meet *you*. So you and George are regulars?”

And it happened like that. Not with a thunderclap, but with the odd meeting in the park. They talked for a bit and then Roger had to move along. But he was there the next day, too, and each time he’d sit with Harry and they’d natter about anything and everything. Except they never talked of evil wizards or spells and hexes. Because Roger was a Muggle. As Muggle as they came. And Harry was very pleased with that.

On the fourth day of their meeting, Roger didn’t have George with him. Of course, Harry asked about him right away.

“Oh he's off to the groomer’s today. Lucky dog. Gets to be pampered and washed by some of the best looking blokes in town.”

Silence followed that pronouncement. Harry didn’t quite know what to say. Roger rescued him.

“And here’s where you either politely pretend you didn’t hear me say that, *or* you show immediate interest and I ask you to tea.” Roger turned pointedly to Harry and blinked his light eyes at him.

A slow smile curled Harry’s mouth. “Tea sounds good,” he said.

* * *

Harry and Roger took tea in a little shop not far from the park. Harry couldn’t help but recall the last time he’d had a date in a tea shop. It was in Hogsmeade with Cho Chang and it was such a disaster. But this time, instead of being at a loss for words, words simply spilled out of him as if he had bottled it all up for years. He guessed he had.

It was easy to talk to Roger and Roger was funny and sweet and devilishly handsome. There was no nervousness at all when Roger asked Harry for his number and asked him to dine with him the next evening. “There’s this little Nepalese restaurant not too far from here I’ve been dying to try,” he said. And just like that, Harry had his first *real* date.

Harry was ready for many hours before Roger was to show up. And it was a good thing because Hermione Flooed in.

"Hermione! What are you doing here?" Harry checked out his clothes, even though he knew he was perfectly dressed. It was still a little disconcerting how his friends simply showed up, whether he was dressed or not.

But he could tell right away that Hermione was upset. "Hey. 'Mione. Sit down." He took her shoulders and steered her to his leather sofa and sat beside her. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. It's just Ron."

Harry couldn't help slip an eye to the clock. A Ron problem was likely to take a while, but Roger was due in half an hour.

"What's he done this time?"

In answer, Hermione thrust her left hand at Harry. Harry looked. What was he suppose to—A ring. An engagement ring? He smiled from ear to ear. "Hermione! You're going to get married. That's great!"

She shook her head. Her mouth was a tight line.

Harry slumped. "You're *not* getting married?"

"Ronald has it all settled in his mind. Married and right away start having children. Never mind that I've just got my career going. He says he wants a wife who stays at home with the children. He wants a herd like he was used to."

Harry sighed. He looked at the clock again.

"It's insane. I told him we should wait. But he didn't want to hear any of it. Got it in his head that another Voldemort could come along and we should—in his words: 'make hay while the sun shines.'"

Romantic, Harry thought with sarcasm. "Well, he's just concerned. You know how he is. He'll see reason." Harry looked at the clock again.

"I know he will but—why are you looking at the clock?" She suddenly noticed what Harry was wearing—not his usual jeans and t-shirt, but a

button down-shirt and trousers. "Harry? Are you expecting someone? You look nice. And smell even nicer. Is that cologne?"

He felt his face flush. "A little. I'm sort of expecting a...a...a date. Of sorts."

"A date?" Hermione's tense expression melted, replaced with a smile. "Oh Harry! A man, I take it?"

"Of course a man!" He rose and paced a bit. "And he's due any minute. I'm sorry Hermione."

She rose and hugged him. "That's okay, Harry. Ron and I will work it out. I just needed to let off some steam. So. Is it anyone we know?"

"What? Oh, no. He's a Muggle."

"A *Muggle*?"

"I just couldn't take the publicity from the press. And...well. Who could I really trust in the Wizarding world?"

She nodded. "You're quite right. Have a good time, Harry." She kissed his cheek, walked to the Floo, and ducked into the hearth. She turned to him and smiled. "Have a really good time. But don't rush into anything. Don't feel pressured to do anything you're not prepared for."

He blushed furiously. "I *know*, Hermione."

"Just take care of yourself. And if you do decide to...um...do something, make sure you use the proper spells."

"Er...the proper spells...for what?"

She stepped out of the hearth and looked at him sternly. "He's a Muggle, Harry. There are certain precautions you need to take."

"What do you mean? I won't tell him anything—"

She waved her hand at him, dismissing his statement. "I don't mean that, Harry. I mean...*precautions*. *Sexual* precautions."

"*What?*"

“There are diseases to be avoided. I don’t suppose you have any condoms here.”

“No. Why would I need that?”

“Honestly, Harry. You *were* raised as a Muggle, weren’t you?”

“Yeah, but...Oh. Oh, I get it. No, I don’t have any con—I wasn't going to *do* anything--”

“Well you never know. Always best to be prepared. Perhaps he's got some—”

“What makes you think—?”

“Well, ever since you told us you were gay I’ve been reading up—”

“Is there nothing you can’t find in a book, Hermione?” he said, crossing back to the sofa and sitting. Why didn’t she just go already? He was nervous enough without talk of sex. Of course, he’d been reading up, too. He tried to hide the bulge growing in his crotch.

“It’s in your best interests. Anyway, the homosexual sex drive is supposed to be greater than that of heterosexual males, only that may not be entirely true as you put two perfectly healthy males together with a normal sex drive and you get *over*drive, I suppose....”

“Hermione! Please, can we not talk about this! I’m nervous enough.”

She looked at him sympathetically. “I’m sorry. I’ll go. Have a good time, Harry. But only as good a time as you’re ready for.”

“Thanks, Hermione,” he muttered. And with that, she whooshed away.

Just then the doorbell rang. *Not a moment too soon*, he thought. He patted down his hair and went to the door, took a moment to breathe, and pulled it open.

Roger stood there...with a single red rose in his hand. “I hope this isn’t too forward,” he said, extending his hand to Harry.

Harry stared at the flower. He didn’t know what to do with it. But he was terribly touched. No one had ever given him flowers before. Was it too girly? He looked up at Roger. He really was quite handsome. He

smiled and took the flower. “Er...thanks. That’s...really nice of you.” He held it and stepped aside so the man could come in.

Harry offered him a chair and then a drink while still holding the rose.

Roger laughed. “You don’t have to hold that all night, you know. Perhaps a bud vase? Or a glass?”

Harry felt stupid already and went into the kitchen in search of a glass. He took one from the cupboard, filled it from water from the tap, and stuck the long stemmed rose in it. It looked a little sad and a little top heavy, so he leaned it against the wall by the sink.

“Silly idea,” said Roger. “It just seemed the thing to do.”

“That’s all right. I’m just not used to this.”

“To dating? Or to men?”

“Well...um...both, I guess.”

“Oh dear. You’ve just come out?”

“Mostly to myself. And to a few friends. But that’s it.” Harry chewed on his bottom lip. Honesty was the best policy. “And so I don’t have any experience, you know. *Any* experience.” If Roger wanted to back out, this was the time. Would he take his flower back?

Roger’s expression turned to something rather tender. “Well, everyone’s got to have a first time, Harry,” he said gently. “Why don’t we start with dinner? I’m starved.”

But all Harry heard was “*start* with.”

* * *

The food was good and quite different from what Harry was used to. He decided that he would try something new each week, starting with that curry place just around the corner from his flat.

Roger was an engineer and a consultant, so he didn’t have regular hours. Harry told him he was a teacher-in-training and didn’t have regular hours at the moment either. They talked easily, and though

Harry was woefully inept on current topics in the Muggle world as well as their entertainment, they found lots of common ground, and it filled the evening.

Harry rested his chin on his hand as he listened to Roger talk about his next big project. Harry was only half-listening. He was thinking how nice the man's mouth was and how very much he wanted to kiss him. Kiss any bloke, really, since he never had. Roger kept brushing his blond hair out of his eyes and that was really very sexy, his hair. Harry liked the way the candlelight caught the strands and made them glow golden. He liked his light grey eyes and how they always seemed to be smiling and alive.

He thought he'd very much like to go to bed with him.

The check arrived and Roger reached for his wallet first. Harry awoke long enough to put his hand out to stop him. "Oh no. Let me."

"Don't be silly, Harry. I asked you out."

"No. It's no problem."

"Really, Harry—"

"We could split it."

He put his hand on Harry's and Harry noticed how very warm it was. Roger looked him in the eye. "It's all right, Harry. I've got this one. Next time, you get it, all right?"

Harry smiled. "Okay."

It was strange someone paying for his dinner and bringing him a rose. But it was nice walking back to his flat and just feeling the companionable silence beside him.

It wasn't comfortable, however, once they climbed the steps to Harry's flat, went inside, and looked at one another. "Well," said Harry. "Thanks for a great dinner."

"You're very welcome." But Roger made no move to leave.

"Would you like...a coffee?" asked Harry. He felt his palms getting sweaty.

Roger took a step closer. “No, thanks.”

“Tea?” asked Harry, swallowing loudly.

Roger stepped even closer until he was only a few inches from Harry. They were the same height. “No. Thanks.”

“Is there...anything...you want?”

Roger took hold of the lapels on Harry’s jacket and pushed them gently over his shoulders until the jacket slipped to the floor. “A few things, I guess,” he said softly. And then he leaned forward and touched his lips very gently to Harry’s.

Harry’s eyes swept closed. Roger’s lips were warm and soft and the man started by simply pressing his lips to Harry’s and rubbing them a bit. But then Harry felt the swipe of a wet tongue across his mouth and his lips just fell open and allowed him in. The kiss deepened from there. Roger clamped his mouth tightly over Harry’s while his tongue explored his mouth. The sensual feeling shot right down to Harry’s groin and his prick hardened.

Roger’s hands were on Harry’s shoulders, but now they were snaking around him completely and pulling him into an embrace. Harry leaned into him, his arms automatically encircling the man’s waist. He moaned into Roger's mouth. He just couldn’t help it. He’d never experienced anything as good as this. When he kissed Cho and even when he kissed Ginny, it was never like this!

Roger drew back, but it was only to cock his head and press his lips the other way to Harry’s mouth. Harry slipped his tongue between Roger’s lips experimentally and Roger reacted with more lavish licks, almost chewing on Harry’s mouth. He pulled Harry tightly against him and Harry felt that marvelous hardness pressed against his belly. Roger was hard! For *Harry*! It was an incredibly heady feeling to make someone else as aroused as he was. Harry clutched at him, kissing with all the fervency he had bottled up for all those years.

Breathlessly, Roger pulled back and looked at Harry with a glazed expression. “Wow, Harry. For an inexperienced bloke, you do that rather well.”

“So do you.” Harry could feel the man's breath on his moist lips. They were still pressed together below the waist and Harry couldn’t resist pushing his hips into Roger’s, pressing their groins tighter.

“Harry,” he moaned.

Harry had made him moan! This was incredible!

Roger moved his hands to Harry’s face and held his cheeks, brushing his hair from his face away from his glasses. “I’m sure you must be tired of hearing this, but you have the most incredible green eyes.”

“I like yours, too,” he said, looking into those silver eyes. They weren’t smiling anymore. Now they seemed filled with...lust. “Do...do you want to...stay?”

“This is your first time, isn’t it Harry?”

Harry licked his lips. He couldn’t remember the last time he was so aroused. “Yes, but that doesn’t mean I’m not a fast learner. And...I’d like you to stay.”

“I want to. But I want you to be sure.”

Harry nudged him toward the bedroom. “I’m sure. I’ve been waiting for this for a long time.”

Roger smiled. He slipped his other hand off of Harry’s back and left his arm around his waist. He led Harry to the bedroom and stopped beside the bed. He turned to Harry, reached up, and plucked off his glasses. The room was dark, but there was enough light from the streetlamp just outside his window. Roger’s hair looked blue and his face was mostly in shadow though it was blurry because of Harry’s poor eyesight.

Roger leaned forward and planted his lips on Harry’s neck. Harry raised his head to give him more access. A tongue made a leisurely path down his throat with occasional nipping from teeth. One hand was at the buttons of his shirt while the other was making lazy circles on his chest. It all felt so good.

Once Harry’s shirt was unbuttoned, Roger's hands trailed over his chest, pushing the shirt down his shoulders. His fingers lightly caressed, until they came to his nipples and gently pinched them.

Harry hadn’t known before that his nipples were erogenous zones—but he did now! He arched into it and soon felt lips clamped onto him, gently nipping and sucking.

“Oh God!” He couldn’t move. Roger seemed to have him under some sort of *Petrificus*, except that the only magic he was using was his tongue and lips.

Harry’s shirt was off and his belt was somehow unbuckled, his trousers unbuttoned and unzipped and hanging open loosely on his hips.

Roger's hands were everywhere. They massaged, touched, groped, with fingernails and without. And when he cupped Harry’s bollocks and stiff cock over the material of his smalls, Harry gasped and nearly fell forward.

“No one's ever touched you like this,” Roger whispered in his ear, making it tingle.

“No,” Harry groaned.

“Harry. I’m glad it’s me. You are so beautiful.” He pushed Harry’s trousers and pants down and Harry felt the cold air of the room on his erection. His eyes snapped open and he looked at Roger. He had somehow managed to drop his own trousers and pants. His shirt was still on but it was unbuttoned and Harry saw the reddened tip of his cock jutting up between the fabric.

“Oh boy,” murmured Harry. He’d never seen another erect cock in the flesh before. Plenty of wizard magazines, which were much better than the Muggle variety because in the Wizard mags the men *moved*. But this was not a picture, moving or otherwise. It was a living, breathing, *erect* bloke. And he instinctively reached out with his fingers and touched it. “You don’t mind, do you?” he asked belatedly, thinking that it maybe wasn't quite polite touching another chap’s dick without asking, though in their current state of undress and present activities, he didn’t think it was all too untoward.

“Not at all,” came the breathless reply. He moved closer so Harry could wrap his fingers around it. It felt velvety but hard, not unlike his own. Harry stroked it a bit and ran his thumb over the slit which was leaking a bit. Harry’s hips jutted forward in an involuntary thrust. God, how he wanted...wanted...he wasn’t sure.

“Roger, what...what do you want me to do?”

He was still holding the other man’s prick and Roger shrugged out of his shirt. They were both naked and panting.

“What do you feel comfortable doing, Harry? I’ll do anything you want.”

“Then, if you don’t mind, I want it all.”

Roger chuckled, a funny sensation when holding on to his dick. “’All’ in what sense?”

“’All’ as in everything. I want to suck you. I want you to suck me. I want to be inside you. All of it.”

Roger gasped as Harry gave a particularly hard tug on the man’s cock. “Okay. You first then.” Roger pulled reluctantly away from Harry’s embrace and sunk to his knees. He kneaded Harry’s thighs for a moment before he kissed the head of Harry’s cock.

Harry gasped and fisted his hands to his sides. He wanted to grab Roger’s head and shove it into his groin but he held back with all his might. And it was a good thing, too, because Roger began with some agonizingly slow licks up his shaft, swirling his tongue around on his glans. Harry shuddered and threw back his head in a soundless scream. This was too good. He wasn’t going to last, he just knew it. “I...I may not be able to hold it in,” he warned, thinking it the gallant thing to do.

Roger looked up his torso at him and Harry’s erection bobbed in his face. “That’s okay, Harry. I want to taste your cum.”

That almost did it right there. But Harry bit his lip and curled his toes, and just as he did, Roger swallowed his cock. Harry never felt anything as mind-blowing as that. His cock was cradled in a hot, moist cavern while the tongue still played at it, lapping the shaft and the ridge of his glans.

He was not going to last. He tried, but he couldn’t help thrusting forward and grasping Roger’s head, fingers clutching his hair. He thrust again and came, thrusting again and again until he had unloaded completely into Roger’s mouth—*his mouth*!

Harry opened his bleary eyes and watched Roger swallow it all, lick his lips, lick Harry's cock once more, and smile up at him.

"*That* was brilliant!" said Harry.

Roger laughed. "Yeah. Thought it might be." He rose and rubbed his body against Harry's limp one. If he didn't hold the dark-haired man up at this point, Harry might have fallen over. "What do you want now, Harry?"

Harry felt a warm euphoria spread throughout his body. If it was Voldemort standing there right now, he would have let him do anything. "I want you to shag me," he said without a care.

"You do? Really?" He embraced Harry again, kissing him and running his tongue down his chin to his neck. "Are you sure?"

"Uh huh," he said lazily. Harry was smiling from ear to ear. He was determined to explore the whole pantheon of gay sex in one night. He hoped Roger had the strength for it.

"Okay," he said gently, leading Harry to the edge of the bed. "Do you have lube and condoms?"

Lube? Crap. "No, I don't," he said, feeling disappointed. "Neither of those things."

Roger smiled. "That's okay. I came prepared." Roger sank to the floor to rummage in his trousers and pulled out several silver packets and a tube of something. He smiled sheepishly. "You never know."

"...When you'll come across a clueless virgin?" Harry was the one who felt foolish.

Roger smiled kindly and sat and put his arm around Harry. His reddened cock jutted up from his lap and Harry couldn't help gawking at it. "I sort of thought you might be. Not clueless, just a virgin. I've never met anyone as sweet as you, Harry. You are just naturally that way. I wanted you the moment I laid eyes on you."

Harry blushed. Funny thing to do when you were starkers with a veritable stranger sitting equally starkers on your bed. "Really?"

He kissed Harry's cheek. "Of course. You are irresistible, Mr. Potter."

“You don’t know how funny that is,” said Harry, feeling for the most part, pretty *re*sistable. “Why else do you think I’m still a virgin at eighteen?”

“You just hadn’t run into the right bloke, is all. Like I said, I’m glad it’s me. We’ve a long night ahead of us.”

“Yeah.” Harry gathered the courage to lean forward and kiss him. He put his hand on the back of Roger's head and pulled him in. It was sloppy, in Harry’s estimation, but it didn’t seem to diminish the man’s stellar erection.

“Lie on your stomach, Harry. It will be easier that way the first time.”

Harry felt a pang of nervousness knife through his belly. But his limp prick also gave a twitch and he felt that all too familiar feeling creeping back into it. He moved and lay down as instructed, and by the time he was prone, his dick had hardened again and was mashed between the mattress and his belly.

He turned his head and laid it on his arms. He watched with his blurry vision as Roger tore open the condom wrapper and took it out. Even though Harry had charmed himself earlier when he had excused himself in the loo (just in case) he was fascinated by what he observed. Roger took the ring of latex and slipped it down his hard flesh. And just like that, he was ready. Harry felt the bed dip as the man positioned himself above and behind him. A kiss pressed to his shoulder. “I’m going to use the lube now, Harry. It’s going to be a bit cold, I’m afraid.” He was right. Harry felt the cold substance slide down his cleft. Roger’s hands grasped his bum, kneading each cheek gently. “Spread your legs, Harry.”

Harry felt the warmth of embarrassment colour his face as he opened his legs. He was exposing his arsehole. But of course, he’d have to, wouldn’t he? Still, it was a different thing altogether actually doing it than merely thinking about it. And then a gentle finger slipped between his crack and drew down until it reached his entrance. It teased the furled flesh and Harry couldn’t help but clench down. “You have to relax, Harry. Try not to clench. I know it’s going to be difficult, but it will hurt less.”

Hurt *less*. It was going to hurt? Harry hadn't bargained on that. Of course his hole was small. He'd fingered it himself but it hadn't hurt. But it was different when someone else—Merlin! *Someone else!*

Roger's finger slipped inside him and just rested there. Harry was surprised at how quickly it had happened. It was odd but not uncomfortable. Roger eased in further and Harry wriggled his bum a little to help it along. But then, Roger curled his finger and Harry almost bolted up from the bed. *Oh my God!* That was spectacular! What was that? That must be the prostate thing he read about. But oh! Roger did it again and Harry nearly bucked off the bed. "Blimey!"

"Blimey, indeed. You like that, Harry? It's even better when my cock hits it over and over. Want to give it a try?"

"Yes!" he moaned.

Roger kissed his neck and withdrew his finger. Harry felt him add more lube and then something else pressed against his hole. Immediately he tensed but then forced himself not to. That was most certainly the man's cock against him now. And he wanted to feel him enter him.

The cockhead pressed firmly to his entrance and then pushed. Harry tried to relax, to let it happen, but it felt as if he was going to be split in two. It hurt, all right, but he forced himself to get the proper perspective. It wasn't like a *Cruciatus*, now was it, he admonished. Yes, it hurt, but nothing like a curse. And with that thought, he was able to relax enough and felt that delicious slide of a cock in his arse.

Oh my. It felt full. Odd. Sexy. Naughty. But as Roger stayed still within him, Harry got used to the thickness of it and relaxed even further. He spread his legs wider.

"That's my boy," soothed Roger. "Feeling okay, Harry?"

"Mmm...yes. More than okay."

"Can I move now?"

"Yes, please!"

If that cock felt sexy immobile, it certainly kicked it up a notch when Roger moved. He pulled back slightly and then eased in again. Harry felt giddy. This was marvelous. He was being shagged. How very cool!

Roger began to thrust and Harry felt himself wanting to lift his hips into it. He followed his instincts and was rewarded by a moan of contentment from his lover. Roger changed angles slightly and Harry felt his head exploding. Roger had found his prostate, all right, and Harry bucked harder into it. The harder he bucked, the harder Roger thrust until they were really moving the bed and moaning aloud to one another.

Harry felt his cock growing harder as it rubbed against the duvet with each hard thrust. He was going to come again, with someone's cock in his arse. Just that thought was enough to tip him over the edge and he exploded with pleasure, coming hard into the duvet. He clenched his arse over the cock inside him, and *that* feeling only made him come harder.

Roger cried out and pumped furiously into Harry, jutting his hips forward again and again. He slowed and grasped Harry's arse, clamping with his fingernails and digging deeply. Finally, he heaved a great sigh and fell atop him, panting into his neck and kissing wherever his lips fell.

Harry laughed. "That was...that was—"

"Too right," gasped Roger and carefully pulled out of him. He slipped off the condom, expertly tied the end, and dropped it into the bin beside the bed. "You, Harry, were absolutely wonderful."

"It was all wonderful." Harry rolled over onto his back. He would have liked to clean himself with a *Scourgify* but knew he couldn't with a Muggle present. He relished instead the cold wet feeling of his own cum on his stomach. He turned his head to look at the blond man lying beside him. Without his glasses, he almost looked like another blond man he wasn't supposed to be thinking about anymore. Harry shook his head. No. That was the past. It was over. This was the present. And a very pleasant present it was.

* * *

After a rest, Harry and Roger went at it again, this time Harry plunging into the other man's arse. What a feeling *that* was! He slammed into him hard and harder still as Roger groaned for Harry to fill him. Later, he sucked Roger's cock, admitting to himself that he needed a lot more practice at that. Roger heartily volunteered to be the guinea pig.

In the morning, quite exhausted and quite sated, Harry looked over at his bed partner just waking up. “Blimey,” said Roger. “It’s morning.” He looked at Harry and smiled. “Good morning, Harry. How are you this fine day?”

“Sore as hell, as you warned me I’d be. But all in all, pretty damned happy.”

He rolled over and took Harry in his arms, kissing his mouth. “Me too.”

They went at it again, Harry topping once more—seeing that he preferred that—and then they took turns in the bath. Harry made them breakfast and Roger kissed him before he left, promising to ring and giving Harry his number and telling him to ring him as well.

Harry watched the door close and felt happier than he had in a long while. He finally felt *right*. He realized that this is the way one is supposed to feel all the time. Normal. Loved and normal. Not that he had any illusions that Roger loved him, but there was always that possibility. At least a boyfriend. Wouldn’t that be something?

Roger rang Harry the next day and they almost got out the door to try that curry place Harry mentioned, but they never quite left the sofa and ordered delivery from the curry place after all.

After several more dates, Harry came to realize that he indeed, had a boyfriend. Even if he was a Muggle.

It was time to introduce him to his friends.

* * *

Harry made sure his Floo was closed so that Hermione and Ron couldn’t forget and accidentally use it. That would be disaster. He glanced at the clock and realized everyone was to arrive in about ten minutes. When the doorbell rang he was happy to see that it was Roger. He kissed him and let him in.

Roger looked around at the flowers and how neat the room was. “Nice, Harry. Are you nervous?”

“Yes! Aren’t you?”

He shrugged. “I guess a little.”

"Want a drink?"

"Absolutely." He fixed Roger a gin and tonic and tried to sit but felt too fidgety.

"What's the worse that could happen?" asked Roger. All the possibilities went through Harry's head, including Ministry officials knocking down his door. "I mean," Roger went on, "worst case scenario, they won't like me, right? But I'm sure we'll get on. Should you put some music on?"

Harry clutched his beer. "I don't have a player."

Roger laughed. "No telly, player, or computer. You are something out of the dark ages, all right, Potter."

"Um...do you mind not calling me 'Potter'? Sort of brings up bad memories from school."

"Oh. Sorry, Harry." He leaned over and kissed the dark-haired man. "Anything to please. And later when your guests leave, I plan on doing a lot of pleasing."

Harry smiled, feeling a little embarrassed. But he was saved by the chime of the doorbell. "That's them," he said unnecessarily.

He opened it and he was embraced by bushy hair. "Harry!"

"Hi, Hermione. Hi Ron."

"Hey, mate."

The both entered, spotted Roger who had his back to them while lifting the pot lids, and they froze. But as soon as Roger turned they thawed, wore what he might call relieved expressions. Where they expecting someone else?

"Hermione, Ron, this is Roger Garrett. He's my...partner."

Roger wore a wide welcoming smile and stretched his hand out to shake. They each took it in turn, still staring at him apprehensively. "Harry's told me a lot about you two."

“Has he?” said Hermione with a stern look at Harry.

“Er...you know. The normal stuff. How we were all best mates in school and how we always got up to trouble. That sort of thing.”

“Oh,” she said.

“Can I get anyone a drink?” Roger asked.

They sat while Roger stayed in the kitchen and poured their drinks. Hermione took Harry aside. “You didn’t tell him—”

“Of course not, Hermione!” he whispered back. “I don’t want the Ministry breathing down my neck.”

“I must say,” said Ron, hand on his heart. “Gave me a scare. For a moment there I thought he was M—”

Hermione elbowed Ron hard. He doubled over. “Hermione! What was that for?”

“Just never mind. And don’t forget the small talk. *No* talk of Quidditch, you two.”

They both said, “I *know*, Hermione!” at the same time, looked at each other, and laughed.

Roger came over and handed them their drinks. “What’s the joke?”

“Oh...,” said Harry. “We were just talking about their engagement.”

Hermione shot her hand out and showed her ring.

Roger beamed. “Well now! Congratulations. Here’s to you.” And he raised his glass.

Everyone toasted and drank. They fell into a lull. Harry realized that if they couldn’t talk of Wizarding things there was little left to talk about. Better to get Roger to start some conversation. “Tell them about what you do, Roger.”

Roger explained cheerfully about himself, his dog George—which made Ron snicker—and how wonderful he thought Harry was.

Harry blushed and jumped up. “I think dinner’s ready,” he said, and went into the kitchen to lay it out.

They all ate, making the lightest of conversation. Hermione had just gotten a job at the Ministry in research and since she was raised as a Muggle, she knew how to couch it in Muggle terms, talking of a job in government. But Ron wasn’t quite as good at describing his new job at the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office and Hermione had to keep rescuing him by interjecting with non sequitars. Roger was a little confused but didn’t comment on it.

The evening ended early with Hermione and Ron saying their good-byes a little before ten. Once they left Roger fell back on the sofa. “Whew! They seemed nice enough, Harry, but I could tell they were holding back *something*.”

“They’re just not used to you,” he said, but feeling funny himself.

Roger sat quietly, his arm around Harry, until he finally spoke. “I always meant to ask you, mate. What is with that odd broom in the corner? Plan on going witching or something?”

Harry’s wide eyes locked on the Firebolt and he jumped up from his seat and grabbed it from its corner. “Oh...this? Well...it’s a sort of...sort of joke, I guess. A present.”

“It’s a good one,” said Roger. “I mean, it looks fairly well made.”

Harry wanted to shout that it was the best ever made, but he knew that wouldn’t go down well. He looked at it a moment before he stuffed it in the closet. But as soon as he shut the door on it he knew it was hopeless. There was no way this was going to last between them. If Harry couldn’t be honest with himself about himself to someone else, it was doomed.

He looked sadly at Roger. As much as he wanted to spend one more night with the sexy man, he knew he had to end it first. It just wouldn’t be fair. A mocking voice in the back of his head with the same tone as Draco Malfoy, told him to shut up and get shagged first. But Harry wasn’t the type. He sat down next to Roger and drew the man’s hand into his.

* * *

Roger was nice about it and even seemed to understand, but he had a pretty sorrowful expression when he left that evening. Harry felt rotten. He felt nauseated and even vomited up all that dinner into his toilet. He and Roger seemed so good together. He almost rang him but reason finally took hold. What would be different? He wasn't in love with the bloke. If he were, things might be different. He'd have to tell him about the Wizarding world then. But he wondered how one was to do that. Did you have to get permission from the Ministry first? And what if they didn't give permission? What did other couples do? Certainly families like his mother's grandparents would have to be told in some way. Aunt Petunia in one of the very few times she mentioned Harry's mother had said that his grandparents sounded excited when Lily Evans showed Wizarding signs. "We have a witch in the family," Aunt Petunia had said. The grandparents had seemed proud but Aunt Petunia had said it with malice. Perhaps she was jealous of not possessing the same talent. She certainly wasn't as pretty as his mum and that must have caused a rift between them in the first place.

Harry sighed, rinsed his mouth out, and got ready for bed. He slid under the covers and stared at his ceiling. He supposed the only way he could be really happy was to have a wizard as a boyfriend. And his heart could only think of the one wizard—who wasn't a wizard anymore. If he was even alive.

He sat up. *Don't think that, Harry. He has to be alive.* He concentrated very hard to see if he could *feel* Draco somewhere, but he couldn't. Wasn't capable of that kind of magic. He just had to rely on hope that everything was all right. He was sure it was. Draco was a survivor. He was really the only one of the inner circle to remain alive. He must have more moxy that Harry gave him credit for.

He settled back down and tried to fall asleep. And when he finally did, he dreamed of Draco.

* * *

It was time to get back to work. Hogwarts awaited and Harry Flooed back to Hogsmeade to begin the work of restoring the magical wards. He knew that spell book backwards and forwards, but he was still nervous standing with Dumbledore, McGonagall, and Flitwick in the

dungeons, his wand held aloft and ready to administer the needed spells to raise the first defenses.

"Are we ready, everyone?" asked Dumbledore. "On the count of three, begin the incantation. Speak loudly and distinctly," he added, glancing at Harry.

Harry swallowed loudly. Why did his mind blank the moment Dumbledore spoke?

"One...two...three!"

But then the contents of the spell book seemed to flow from Harry's mind and he incanted the complicated spellwork and swished his wand appropriately, watching Professor Flitwick for just the right movements.

Harry worked hard. They all did. It took a very long time. Harry estimated that it just might take another year to do it right.

Chapter Six—Everyday Life With Draco

Doing dishes was drudgery, but working in the tea shop was just plain hard work. Draco learned the different kinds of tea and how to brew them, how to serve the different menus of teas, and how to smile to the customers, particularly the ladies. He found out if he flirted enough, he always got a bigger tip.

Eventually he had saved enough to get his own flat. A place little better than the shelter's—and he had to share the toilet—but it was good being on his own. He felt as if things were progressing, and it was on one summer day that he realized he had been living the life of a Muggle for a year.

He celebrated by buying a bottle of bourbon and downing the whole thing over the course of the evening, the frowning picture of Harry Potter on the Chocolate Frog card looking on.

"There's no sense in frowning at me, Potter," he slurred to the card. "If I have to be a Muggle, I'm going to spend it numbed up properly. What do you care? You get to have anything you want. You've got *the* plum job at Hogwarts—" and the card cv had changed again to reflect that. Potter did indeed have the Defense Against the Dark Arts job. "And you're famous. Again."

Draco tilted the bottle up and slurped the last of its contents. He let the bottle drop to the floor where it shattered. He stared at it, reminding him of his first night as a Muggle and his hopes to kill himself. He stared at the shards in renewed horror and slid his chair away from it. The natural impulse was to wave a wand to clean it up—and he found himself doing that on more than one occasion when he had a pencil or feather duster in his hand—but the feeling subsided, often changing to embarrassment if anyone saw him and then anger when he was alone.

Harry Potter frowned more sternly, crossed his arms over his chest, and turned away.

Draco picked up the card. He was suddenly feeling morose. "Don't turn away from me like that. You're all I've got." He petted the card to mollify and Potter shifted his shoulders as if feeling the caress. He seemed to like it. "Please. A bloke's got a right to feel a little sorry for himself, now doesn't he?" Potter nodded half-heartedly. "I mean, after all, I've lost everything, haven't I?" He ran his sleeve under his nose. Things were threatening to get out of hand. He didn't want to spend the night blubbering. He'd spent far too many nights doing just that.

Potter relented—as he always did. Draco vaguely wondered if the real Harry Potter didn't have some sort of soft spot for Draco—No, that was ridiculous. It was probably more a case of empathy for anyone who talked to the thing long enough.

He decided he had celebrated enough. He was feeling a little sick and the room was spinning a bit, so he flopped down on his bed and just lay there in his clothes. He drifted and realized he was feeling a bit horny. Funny. He hadn't felt that way for three years. Not since getting involved with Voldemort. He loosely unbuckled his trousers and shimmied out of them, lifting his hips to push them down. He handled his cock, which wasn't entirely stiff but not entirely flaccid either. Stroking it soon brought on the unaccustomed stiffness and he sighed into the feeling. A vague figure of a woman took shape in his mind. She was fairly flat-chested—which always suited him. Much like Parkinson. And like Parkinson, she had short, dark hair. But unlike Pansy she had green, green eyes. He pulled on his prick hard, thinking of this short-haired, green-eyed lover wrapping her lips around his cock. "Oh yes," he sighed. After so long a time, Draco was finally relaxed enough to give himself a good long wank with this indistinguishable woman in his thoughts. He stroked, running his thumb over his glans, twisting it and then giving in to rapid stroking.

As he raised his hips into the orgasm and just before he lost consciousness, he cried out, “Harry!”

When he discovered himself in the morning he didn’t remember the night before at all. But he certainly recognized the leftovers of a wank. With his head throbbing and his mouth tasting like the bottom of a cauldron, he looked down at himself. “Gods, Draco. You disgust yourself.” He wiped himself down with his blanket. Wouldn’t do to stumble down the hall to the showers in this state.

* * *

In the kitchen of the tea shop he tuned the wireless to his favorite station. Working with Chad back at the mission, he had learned to like music the Muggle had called “Motown” and Draco couldn’t seem to get enough of it. Sometimes it was soulful, but mostly it had a beat to keep him moving. The songs were often about men losing women or women losing men or mistrusting the ones they had, but it seemed to strike a chord with him and he played it as often as he could.

Right now he was rolling out dough to “I Heard it Through the Grape Vine.” He gave a little spin at the end of the chorus and it was then that Maggie walked in. She was the tart waitress who was always trying to get into Draco’s trousers, as if he’d let her.

“It’s Fancy Shoes at it again,” she said in her nasally voice. What he wouldn’t do for his wand for just a few moments!

“Just because some of us have poise and some of us—” he looked pointedly at her—“do not, there’s no need for name-calling.”

“Wasn’t calling you a name, *Dra*-co.” She always said it like that as if she couldn’t believe someone who wasn’t a rock star would have a name like that.

“Well *Mags*, have you set out the new linens like Mrs. Roster asked?”

“You’re not my boss. I don’t have to answer to you.”

He shrugged. “I was just asking.”

“Well I did. And she rang. Says you’re to do the cashiering today.”

Draco whipped his head around. “What?”

“So get yourself cleaned up, *Dra*-co. You’re the front man today.”

“But...but...” Draco panicked. He didn’t know Muggle money. Always got it mixed up. He’d make a terrible hash of it. “I’ve...er...got these scones to do—”

She tied an apron around her waist and nudged him aside with her hip. “I’ll do it. You run along.”

She shooed him with her hand. Draco untied his apron and tossed it aside. He straightened his tie and found his suit jacket. Fuck. He loosened the collar with a finger and stepped out into the dining room. He was to greet and take their money. He could do it. The money had numbers on it. It was simple. A *Malfoy* was certainly capable.

He straightened his shoulders and unlocked the front door. He returned to his position beside the little podium. Specials. What were the specials? His mind was suddenly a blank. Why couldn’t he remember the sodding specials?

The door tinkled and in walked their first customers, two large ladies who certainly had no need of a mid-morning tea. He smiled. The ladies always liked his smiles. He showed them to a table and stuck his head into the kitchen. “Table six,” he said.

“I’m up to me elbows in flour,” she said. “You take it.”

“Bint,” he muttered and grabbed two menus. He sauntered to their table and placed each menu before them.

“Oh we already know what we want,” said one, giggling to the other.

“Of course,” said Draco, girding himself. They rattled off their orders but he couldn’t help but think to himself, *I was a powerful wizard once. The things I could do would frighten the knickers off of you two. And here I am taking your bloody tea orders.*

He smiled when he left their table and dropped his smile right away once he placed the order in the kitchen.

The day grew busier and Draco did his best at the cashier booth. The ladies always helped him but the students hoped he made mistakes in their favour. He was a wreck by the end of the day, and when he and Maggie counted the till, he was way off.

"What did you do?" she said, looking at him accusingly.

Full panic mode. He felt like bolting. "I'm not good with numbers."

"That's for damn sure. What am I going to tell Mrs. Roster? She'll sack you for sure."

"Don't tell her, Mags. I'll...I'll make up the difference from my own money. Except...I'll need to borrow some from you. Please Mags."

"You sure *are* bad with this."

"I told her not to put me on the till."

"Everyone's got to take their turn. And I don't want to get blamed for a short fall."

"Please Mags. I'm at your mercy here."

She stared silently at the till a long time when her gaze drew up and slid toward him. "Well...I'd consider helping you out and not telling the Missus...if you'd...you know."

"What?"

She leaned her shoulder into him and raised her face to his. Her mouth was mere inches from Draco's. "A little slap and tickle, my man. My own personal Boy Toy."

He pushed her away. "*What?* Trying to make a whore of me!"

She frowned. "It's either that or I tell her you stole it."

"But I didn't!"

"Your choice." She slammed the till shut and postured, staring at him.

He couldn't be on the street again. He couldn't! He glared at her. She was rail thin with a pinched face. She didn't interest him in the least. But if she'd keep her part of the bargain, then who cares what he did with his body?

He hoped—wherever his parents were—that they were looking the other way.

* * *

Draco dealt her every night for a week, somehow mustering the initiative. He buried his face in her musky pussy without complaint and did exactly what she wanted. But it did him no good. He was crap at the till. And Mrs. Roster told him flatly that if he couldn't work it he would have to be replaced.

He found another job quickly at another tea shop, and there he didn't have to do till work. Just wait tables. And he didn't have to pry pussy hairs from his teeth anymore either. "Cunt," he muttered when he thought of her.

But now a good portion of Draco's pay went to alcohol. Most nights he drank himself to sleep. And on weekends, he'd spend it in the pub watching some sort of boring Muggle sport on the telly, cheering when the other blokes did, and drinking, until he staggered home and fell to his bed asleep.

And so it went. One tea shop after another and more alcohol. Sometimes he got the days mixed up and failed to get to work, so drunk was he. He was sacked quickly from those jobs. He realized he had to stop drinking but there was no other relief in his life. Was this it? Was this what he was to be for the rest of his life? And wizards lived a long time.

Maybe he would have been better off killing himself like he had planned.

He sat in the dark one evening, fingering the Chocolate Frog card. He ran it between his thumb and forefinger over and over. He was between jobs again and he wondered for the umpteenth time if he should sell the card. But it tore a place in his heart to have to do it. He looked down at it in the dim light.

"Potter. I think I'd really miss these talks if I couldn't have them any more." Harry Potter looked up at him dolefully. "I wish you could talk to me. I wish *someone* would." He sighed bitterly. "I had the dream again last night." The card looked at him sympathetically. "The one about Mother. God, I feel so useless!"

He couldn’t help it. The tears came. He had been good about bottling them up lately. But now they had to come. He had borne too much. He sobbed and threw himself down on his bed. The sobs tore at his throat, racking it raw. His face was a mess of wet and snot. He wiped it on his sleeve and sat up when the worst of it was over. “What am I going to do? I thought this was enough. A roof over my head and money in my pocket. Money! This isn’t money. These stupid useless coins and this silly paper! Money is supposed to be gold and silver! It’s supposed to count for something! I’m supposed to have *vaults* of it!” He slammed his fist into his pillow. “Damn him! Damn the Dark Lord! I wish he’d never been born!”

Draco succumbed to weeping again and finally cried himself to sleep, clutching the card, while the image of Harry Potter looked on silently.

The next day he awoke and dragged himself to the shower. He took a quick one because the geiser didn’t hold much hot water. He ran back to his cold flat and toweled himself thoroughly, being a bit rough to get his circulation going. Draco decided to go to the library today. He thought long and hard about the possibilities and decided he could try to fulfill one of his ambitions: to be a barrister. Since the Wizarding world was out, perhaps he could become a Muggle lawyer. Perhaps it wouldn’t be too hard.

But a few hours in the library told him it was useless. The best he could hope to achieve was to perhaps own a tea shop of his own someday. He was certainly learning the business. Except for the till. That damned till!

Draco managed yet another position and vowed to keep it no matter who he had to fuck. The forty-ish woman who owned the place had a husband who was off at sea as a merchant marine or something and she often turned her eye toward Draco. He shivered inwardly.

* * *

Draco worked diligently. He never dated. He never made friends with his coworkers. He didn’t have a life outside the tea shop. He spent some time in libraries and government offices, trying to figure out how to run a business in case he ever saved enough money—though it wasn’t likely.

Perhaps it was best just to work for the one place and not worry over improving his lot. Wasn't it enough to get up every morning and make it to work, doing the same thing over and over again?

"Young man," said the old codger at Draco's table. The man always came on Thursdays and always ordered the same thing: Darjeeling with scones.

Draco had been daydreaming as usual and he twisted round to return to the table. "Yes, sir. Was there something you wanted?"

"Raspberry jam, if you will."

"Certainly, sir. I forgot. As quick as I can." Draco strode to the kitchen and absently grabbed a pot of strawberry jam, returning quickly with it to the table. No sooner had he put it down and rushed to help another patron did he discover his mistake. After seating the newcomers, he rushed to the kitchen to get the raspberry jam, but when he returned to the table to exchange them, the old man was spooning raspberry onto his scones.

"What--?" Draco frowned. He was certain he had grabbed the wrong pot. The old man looked up at him and smiled. "I do like raspberry jam. But I think that one jar is quite adequate."

"Oh. It's just that I thought I'd brought you the wrong kind."

"Really? How thoughtful of you. You very well could have left your mistake."

"That wouldn't have been very nice, now would it?"

"Oh, you'd be surprised, young man, the rudeness, the...cruelties...I've seen."

Draco stared at him. There was something familiar about him. "Do I know you, sir?"

"Well, I am here every Thursday."

"No, that's not what I mean. I...well. Never mind. Is there anything else I can get for you? More scones? Another pot."

"No. I am remarkably satisfied." He glanced about the tea shop. "This seems like a very cheery place to work. Tell me, do you enjoy it?"

Draco sighed and wiped his hand down his apron. "It's all right."

"Just all right? You seem like a smart young man. What would you rather be doing? Going to school, perhaps?"

It was the way the man said 'going to school' that stabbed Draco with strange recognition, as if he could almost grasp where he'd seen the man before but couldn't quite summon it. He shuddered. "School and I don't seem to agree. I don't think there's anything else I'm fit for. I'll probably be doing this the rest of my life."

"Well, it can't be all that bad."

"There's always something ugly lurking under the surface of any shiny thing." He said it with a sneer, something he might have said to another Death Eater had he actually been close to any. Death Eaters. Why had he thought of that, for Merlin's sake? He hardly ever thought about that, unless his arm hurt. He rubbed it absently. The man watched his movements.

"Did you hurt yourself?"

Draco laughed mirthlessly. "Yeah. I fell down. *Way* down, and hurt my arm. It's not been the same since."

"That's a shame. I have a touch of arthritis in my left elbow and I'm afraid I've not been the same either."

Draco smiled at the harmless old man. He reminded him of—but no. He wouldn't allow himself to think of him. He had no right to think of him.

He gestured toward the kitchen. "I've got to go."

"Thank you for the chat. Good-bye, young man."

"Bye."

Later when the old man left and Draco was clearing the table, he found a twenty pound note. "Mad old codger!" Dimwitted. And weren't old men on pensions or something? Surely the geezer thought he was

leaving a much smaller denomination. Draco certainly knew what it was to scrape by and slipped the note in his pocket straight away. Except... the old man had been kind to Draco and he probably needed the money more than Draco did. With a deep, irritated sigh, Draco grabbed the note from his pocket and ran out the door. He looked both ways and saw the man ambling up the lane. He ran to catch up. "Sir! Sir!"

The old man turned and glanced at him with sparkling blue eyes. "Yes, young man?"

"Sir, you left this on the table." He proffered the note.

"Why yes," said the old man. "It's a gratuity for service well done."

"But sir." Draco waved it at him. "It's too much. It's a twenty pound note. See?" He thrust it into the old man's hand.

The man looked at it and handed it back. "I know very well what it is." He smiled and turned up the road again.

Draco stood looking down at the twenty pound note for a long time. Muggles. Who would have thought they could be so...so...human.

A loud crack awakened him. It was a familiar sound, at least from his Wizarding days, and he snapped his head up and looked around, but he could see no wizard or witch Apparating or Disapparating.

When he looked down the lane, the old man was gone.

Draco always wondered about him, because he never returned for his Thursday tea.

Chapter Seven—A Simple Hogwarts Affair

The Weasley/Granger wedding was set to take place on Saturday and Harry was looking over his dress robes for holes, swishing his wand over it and thinking a non-verbal *Reparo*.

Several months had passed since he broke up with Roger and though he knew it was a mistake, he hooked up with Muggles two more times. Both disasters. Once, Ron Flooed in just as his date walked out starkers from the bedroom and he had to be *Oblivated*. That didn't last more than a fortnight. And the third fellow had found Harry's wand.

Harry tried to explain it by saying he had been interested in being a conductor at one time but since he couldn't read music, the man thought Harry was hiding another boyfriend somewhere. There was shouting and name-calling, and Harry called it quits.

He had to face facts. His love life stunk. He was beginning to think he would end up like those sad bachelor teachers, like Binns or McGonagall. Or Dumbledore. Although he always secretly wondered about McGonagall and Dumbledore...

Of course there was one solution. If Muggles weren't going to work out then he'd have to go with wizards. But how was that to work? It was two months ago when Harry gave it a lot of thought and found himself at London's finest gay wizard's club. He'd never been to one but he reckoned this might be the fastest way to find someone.

He had Disillusioned himself. He learned the proper way from Tonks. Though she couldn't teach him to be a Metamorphmagus, she taught him the same spells the other Aurors used for disguises. Harry believed that if he went incognito he could at least meet a bloke who was interested in the real him. That is...the him behind the illusion...well. He sighed. It wasn't a perfect solution but it had to do.

Harry entered the Swish and Flick. The music pounded in his chest and the lights—which turned out to be fairies—darted here and there. A dance floor was in the middle. There were men of all stripes; young, middle aged, even older, and a mix of both Muggle and wizard wear. Most of the younger men went for the Muggle wear; skin tight jeans or leather trousers, and for those still wearing shirts, they wore the muscle-man type, some with buckles, some just vests leaving their chests bare.

It smelled like a combination of the Quidditch changing room, a pub, and cedar chest with the heady aroma of all sorts of colognes mixing together.

Overwhelmed, Harry went to the bar first. This was the test, of course. If anyone looking at him didn't recognize "Harry Potter", then he was safe.

His disillusioned glasses looked different from his normal gear. His hair was a light brown and his eyes the same colour. His nose was made a little more pointy and his chin more rounded. He didn't look like

himself at all, though someone who knew him well might make a double take.

He smiled at the bartender and asked for a beer. The man smiled back without recognition, but with a bit of a flirty glance. Harry reddened. Well, his disguise was good. And at least he didn't look like a troll.

He took his beer and then turned back to watch the dance floor. It wasn't long until someone came to the bar beside him. Harry saw platinum hair and was immediately interested. The man looked at Harry and smiled seductively. "Hi. Sitting this one out?"

"Oh, I don't come to clubs usually," he said, trying to sound casual.

The man nodded and brushed back his long locks in a familiar way. "Neither do I. Noisy places. But what's a boy to do? Can't go into the Muggle end of town."

"I dated Muggles a few times."

The man leaned in. "Really? What was that like?"

"They were all nice blokes, but. You know. Hiding everything gets tiring." A pang of guilt washed over him. He was exactly being the most honest person at the moment himself.

The man nodded again. "See what you mean. Besides. I can't very well start dating Muggles. I work at the Ministry."

That gave Harry a shock. But then...maybe he didn't work with Ron or Mr. Weasley. There were certainly a lot of posts at the Ministry. "What sort of stuff do you do?"

"I work in reception. Atrium."

"Oh, that sounds interesting," Harry said politely.

"Actually, it isn't. But I'm working my way up. How about you? Ministry?"

"Oh no. I'm—" The next Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts. Want to make a guess as to who I really am? Gods, what was he going to say? *Not too many lies, Harry*. "Er...I tutor. Home schooling, you know."

"Didn't know. Some witches and wizards are home schooled? I thought they all went to Hogwarts."

This Harry did know. "No, not all do. All are invited, certainly, but not all do."

"Did *you* go?"

"Oh yes." Harry sipped at his beer.

"Did you go to school with Harry Potter?"

Harry felt sweat trickle down his back. Why did he have to bring this up so soon? "Um...yeah."

"Wow. What was he like?"

"Oh you know. Regular chap."

"Oh go on!" He pushed Harry's arm. "I bet you didn't know him at all."

"Well, he was kind of private. Stuck with a small circle of friends."

"So I hear. Well, enough about him. How about you? I'm Wulf Ingalls. And you are?"

"Er...Harry. Harry...Evans."

Wulf shook his hand. "You know. Funny thing. If you squint, you sort of look like Potter."

"Really?"

Wulf kept a hold of his hand. And then he took the beer from Harry's other hand and put it on the bar. "Well maybe not. Let's dance, Harry."

"I'm...not very good at dancing."

"It's just moving to the music."

"If you say so." Harry allowed himself to be led to the floor and they joined the other wizards dancing up a storm all around them. It was fast music and so he could make up steps, which seemed to work out

better for Harry, who kept conjuring up his hopeless attempts at dancing at the Yule Ball in his fourth year. Wulf seemed very gregarious. More so than his other boyfriends. Wulf laid his arm on Harry's shoulder while he ground his hips to the music and Harry watched it with a glazed expression and a crotch growing in size. Harry wasn't into the idea of one-offs but he was beginning to see what others found so appealing about it. He wanted to have sex with Wulf. One didn't need a relationship for that. It's only sex. That's what all men wanted, after all. If Wulf wanted it to, Harry decided he'd give it a go.

They danced together most of the night. Wulf didn't seem interested in anyone else. After they'd both taken off their shirts and tucked them into the back of their trousers, Wulf pulled Harry into an embrace and kissed him, hard and firm—right there in the middle of the dance floor. A few boys nearby whistled and shouted, "Get a room!"

Wulf smiled at that. "Shall we?"

Harry fortified himself with good old-fashioned Gryffindor courage. "Why not?" he said brazenly.

They slipped on their shirts and left the building. "Your place or mine?" asked Wulf, running a finger down Harry's sensitive neck.

"How about mine. Want to side-along?"

"Sure. Anytime you're ready." They Apparated outside his flat and Harry led the way up the stairs.

"Looks like a Muggle part of town."

Harry almost took out his key but remembered he didn't have to. "I like it better than wizarding parts of town."

"Muggle-raised, eh? I find most blokes raised with Muggles stay in Muggle parts of town. It's what their used to." He watched Harry wave his hand to open the door and raised his brows. "Wandless, eh? You must be a good teacher indeed. Sort of young, aren't you?"

"Just a bit advanced is all." Harry whispered *Lumos* and a transfigured Muggle lamp came on. "Want a drink?"

But Wulf grabbed Harry and pulled him into a rough kiss. Harry's dick reacted in delight. He'd never had it like this before. "This is what I want," growled Wulf to Harry's damp lips, and shoved his jacket off. He was pulling at Harry's clothes, not caring if he snapped off buttons or tore the material. Harry didn't care either. He was being swept away on his own lust and this man dragging him into the bedroom and throwing him on the bed.

Harry usually topped, but apparently not with Wulf. Harry decided it didn't matter if the man was a one-nighter.

Wulf seemed to like holding Harry down. He pushed him into the mattress, face mashed against the pillow. Wulf forced Harry's legs open. "I'm not using lube, Evans. And I'm not going to be gentle. If you have any reservations, you'd best say them now."

Harry never experienced anything like this. It was very exciting. He turned to looked at Wulf over his shoulder. His glasses got pushed askew and so all he saw was this naked man with white-blond hair crouching over him, ready to giving his arse a good pounding. His voice caught in his thickened throat and his prick was suddenly hard as a rock. "W-wulf. Just do it."

It wasn't as if Harry hadn't bottomed before. He enjoyed it but preferred to top. But Wulf was so commanding, and quite frankly, Harry got a charge out of being out of control for once.

Wulf had a thick cock and he only spit in his hand to give himself some lube. But Harry soon discovered he wasn't kidding about it. The man's cock pushed at his hole, forcing the flesh to widen around it. Harry hissed in pain and tried to wriggle away. "No...." he gasped, having second thoughts, but Wulf kept on pushing. His dick penetrated Harry and his hips shoved forward. "Ah!" It felt so full. It burned. The cock slid back and forth, seeming to tear his insides, but at the same time, Harry had to admit how hot an experience it was. But just the same, he non-verbaled a bit of lube and he felt Wulf above him chuckling.

"Aren't you a naughty boy, Evans." And he gave Harry's bum a smack. Not just once, but each time he shoved forward, spanking each cheek until they were raw and red.

Harry didn't know what to think about the stinging slaps. No one had ever done that to him before. It hurt, to be sure, but when he pushed back into Wulf, the man sped up his thrusting, and he soon forgot

about spanking Harry, and fucked him in earnest. It was finally starting to feel good to Harry and he thrust back into Wulf, fucking himself on the man's penis.

With a shout, Wulf clutched at Harry's hips and came, stabbing short thrusts into him. He stayed in him a long time, not moving. Harry was still hard, his prick trapped between his body and the mattress. Finally, Wulf pulled free of Harry but he latched his teeth onto the back of Harry's neck. He bit hard and Harry winced. "Still hard, little Harry?" he whispered.

"Yes," said Harry, wondering if he was turned on by being bitten or not.

"We'll have to do something about that. Turn over for me."

Cautiously, Harry did so. "That was...pretty intense," Harry said a little shakily. "Y-you're not going to hurt me, are you?"

Wulf smiled tenderly. "No. I'm sorry if I was a bit rough. I enjoy it rough. I just want to suck you now. Is that all right?"

"Oh. Certainly." Harry laid back and straightened his glasses to watch.

Wulf licked at Harry's erection and Harry eased back. "That's better, isn't it?" cooed Wulf between licks. It wasn't long till he was swallowing it whole and sucking and licking in turns. Harry didn't hold back. He came in a thundering orgasm, pumping his cock into Wulf's warm, wet mouth. And Wulf swallowed every drop. And when Harry softened completely, Wulf gave it a kiss before smiling like a Cheshire cat and moving up to lie next to Harry.

Harry thought that this was an amazing night of new sensations and was glad he'd decided on at least this once to a one-off. But as it turned out, the man kept coming back for more, and even took Harry to some of the finer wizard restaurants. He enjoyed Wulf's company. He was terribly funny and he was good at making Harry feel special. And even though the sex was good, the man did like it rough. And he seemed to be liking it rougher and rougher. Harry was beginning to suspect there were a few kinks he wanted to give a try with Harry. But besides the good time he was having with Wulf, he felt guilty. He knew at some point he was going to have to tell Wulf who he really was. It just didn't seem fair otherwise. He certainly knew every other intimate thing about Harry!

But the wedding was looming and he was beginning to wonder if he was going stag or not. "Listen, Wulf," said Harry one day while they strolled in the zoo. Harry glanced at the reptile house fondly, thinking of that day he released the snake and locked Dudley in the cage in its place. "There's something I've got to tell you—"

"Ice cream!" Wulf squealed in delight. He rushed over to the vender and got Harry a chocolate in a cone and himself a vanilla. They walked to a bench and sat. Harry watched Wulf's sensuous tongue do to the ice cream as he had done to Harry many a time, and Harry forced himself to look away.

"Wulf, what I have to say is important."

Wulf looked at him with his undivided attention. He only licked the ice cream occasionally so that it didn't drip down to his hand. "I'm listening."

"The fact is, we've been seeing each other now for six weeks—"

Wulf stared at him, a mixture of fear and anger in his eyes. "You're not breaking up with me. Harry!"

"No! Nothing like that. Though when I tell you how dishonest I've been to you, you might want to."

Wulf squinted at him, now entirely confused.

"Boy, this is hard." Harry licked the cone one more time and then tossed it in the nearby bin. "I'm...I'm not who you think I am. I'm...I'm under a Disillusionment charm."

"What? Why?" Then Wulf laughed. "Oh Harry, I don't care what you look like. I really like you. I wouldn't care if you looked like old Snape. Remember him?"

"Yes, quite well. Um...it's not because I'm ugly, it's because...because...Oh hell. Why don't I just show you." Harry pulled out his wand and tapped his head. "*Finite Incantatum*." He felt the disillusionment shimmer away. For a moment Wulf stared at him uncomprehendingly, until the light of recognition widened his eyes. He drew back slightly.

"No. No. It's a trick."

"The trick was before. This is the real me. But you see why I had to, right?"

"Because you look like Harry Potter."

Harry sighed. "Well, it's not just that I *look* like Harry Potter. It's because...I *am* Harry Potter."

Wulf's eyes doubled in size. "Holy Merlin's balls!" All the thoughts Harry feared ran through Wulf's expressions. "Harry Potter is...*gay*?"

"Yeah, but it's not something I want everyone to know, you know. How...how are you with this?"

"The things I said to you. I insulted Potter...er you."

"No you didn't. You just said some things that any interested person might say. I'm sorry about the deception but surely you see why I had to do it."

"Oh yeah, yeah." Wulf was quiet for a while and Harry was beginning to think he'd made a mistake. Until Wulf's grin nearly split his face. "I've been shagging Harry Potter."

Harry made a guilty laugh. "Yeah, but you know I can't have that going around. Teacher and all."

Wulf looked up at him tenderly. He tossed his ice cream aside and took Harry's face in his hands. "I won't tell. It's my secret. And besides, you're nothing like I thought Harry Potter would be. I thought he'd be an arrogant prat."

"Well I'm not, right?"

"Not at all. You're adorable. And lovely. And a wonderful, wonderful shag."

Harry blushed. He was glad he didn't have to deceive Wulf any longer. And now that the wedding was coming up it looked as though he'd have a partner to go with. Except...

It was only a few weeks before the wedding, and sex with Wulf was getting kinkier and more dangerous. Harry wasn't certain if it was

something that would have occurred anyway, or if Wulf was getting some sort of kick out of doing these things to "Harry Potter" but it all had to stop. This isn't the kind of thing Harry enjoyed nor the basis for building a relationship. He had a long discussion with Wulf and though it was a tearful break-up, Wulf promised not to tell anyone. Harry had his wand hidden in his sleeve the whole time. He didn't want to have to *Obliviate* him but he knew that was always a possibility.

And so Harry went to the wedding of his two best friends, stag. Which was just as well. If he wasn't coming out to anyone he couldn't very well bring a male date, now could he? Besides, he had too much to do as Best Man.

Ron was outrageously nervous and trying to back out at the last minute. Harry only convinced him by giving him a peek at Hermione who was waiting behind a rose arbor at the Burrow. "She's beautiful, isn't she Harry?"

"She's the most beautiful girl I know. Always has been."

He looked at Harry. "I'm a stupid prat, aren't I?"

"Yes. Yes you are. Are you going to go through with it now?"

"I love her so much, Harry. I only hope you find...er...someone you can love."

He patted his friend's shoulder. "Thanks, Ron. I know I will someday. But right now, it's your day. Shall we?"

He walked close beside Ron, ready to grab him if he bolted, but he needn't have worried. Once he had spied Hermione—her hair all beautifully done-up in curled piles on her head, and her flowing white dress—Ron was the very picture of Faithful.

Harry watched as the presiding wizard joined their magic, listened to the vows sworn, and sighed deep inside. He was certain he'd find someone someday. But how come he always pictured a man with a pointy nose, pointy chin, a smirk on his lips, and white-blond hair? He'd had all these relationships but not one of them resulted in his falling in love. *That's because you're already in love, you idiot*, he told himself. *You've got to stop it. Draco isn't coming back! Ever!*

He was shocked into sudden awareness when everyone burst into shouted applause. The ceremony was over and suddenly Ginny took his arm and they followed the bridal couple back down the aisle amid a shower of rice.

Harry went through the motions of the party. He supposed he could also celebrate the near completion of his Hogwarts education. Lupin had told him how proud he was and Dumbledore was pleased with his marks so far. He continued to work with Lupin on his spells for his Defense class, though Lupin told Harry that the young Gryffindor knew more than he had at his age. Harry knew the man was only flattering his young pupil, but Dumbledore tried to convince him otherwise. He explained to Harry that though there might be more to learn from books, Harry was intuitive in his knowledge of spells and they came to him naturally, whether he was using the orthodox methods or not. Harry cheered at this. He felt like he knew more now. Loads more and with his rebuilding of Hogwarts that was nearly complete, he really did feel like a wizard at last. It was a heady feeling. More than defeating Voldemort, which seemed more like someone else's assigned task, as if it were inevitable. But being his own man, his own *wizard*, was something Harry needed on his own.

But he was lonely again. Lonely for the kind of companionship his married friends, or Lupin, or Dumbledore couldn't offer him.

He Disillusioned himself again and went to the Swish and Flick but after cruising through a few times, he ended up leaving alone. Besides, he was afraid of running into Wulf. He went instead to a Wizard gay bar he'd heard about, The Broomstick. And then he saw *him* leaning against the bar. He was tall and thin and his platinum hair shone in the candle glow. Harry didn't think about it. He just moved forward through the crowd, waited until the man looked up and caught his eye, and positioned himself unmistakably in front of him. "Buy you a drink?" said Harry, amazed at his own bravery and how he felt perfectly right about it.

The man looked him over and smiled. "Sure. A butterbeer for me."

"Nothing stronger?"

"No. Don't want to lose my head."

Harry smiled. "Two butterbeers," he said to the bartender. He smiled at the man and shrugged. "Maybe I don't want to lose mine either."

When they received their bottles, they clinked them together, and drank. Harry felt a bit giddy. Was he about to pick up a man? A wizard? How cool was that?

"So what's your name?" he asked, taking another drink.

"I'm Edward."

"I'm Harry. You're cute, Edward."

The man blushed and took another quick drink. "Thanks," he muttered, smiling. "So are you. I haven't seen you here before."

"Well, I haven't been here before. Not quite 'out', you know."

"Yeah, I know how it is." He pushed the beer forward. "I can't come out to my family. Can you?"

"No. Just my closest friends. It isn't easy, is it?"

Edward sighed. "No. There's all these expectations."

"Yeah! And the fear that all you've done won't amount to anything if people knew."

Edward looked at him. Harry noticed he had very long lashes and a soft-looking mouth. "But we don't have to talk about this," said Edward sheepishly.

"No," said Harry, mesmerized by Edward's mouth. "Actually, I'd rather be kissing you now."

Edward blushed again. "You would?"

Harry wondered where all this courage was coming from. "Yeah. Do you mind?"

"Not at all," said Edward, a little too eagerly.

Harry didn't care. He took Edward's shoulders and dragged him forward, planting his lips on him. He *did* have soft lips and a leisurely tongue. Harry pressed his whole body against the taller man, loving

the way it felt as it softened beneath him—except for a particular part that was digging into his thigh, a decidedly *hard* something.

Harry kissed him deeply, holding him, relishing the sensation of body, of mouths, of tongues. They kissed for a bit, ignoring the noise and clatter of the bar and just concentrated on each other. When they finally pulled away, they were both panting.

"Want to get out of here?" asked Harry.

Edward's eyes glittered. "Yeah."

They went to Harry's place and instead of the almost desperation of Wulf's lovemaking, they went at it slowly, peeling the layers of clothing off as if discovering something new. Harry gently laid Edward down on his stomach and massaged his whole body, paying extra attention to his white, rounded bottom, and kissed each cheek before he ventured a finger down his crack. Edward moaned and writhed in a most delicious fashion and Harry found himself intimately licking the man while spreading his cheeks with his thumbs. Harry loved the musky taste of men, loved to make them moan beneath him, loved to shag a perfect round bottom, but never admitted—never consciously noticed—that it was made all the better when his partner had white-blond hair and his face was slightly turned away.

Harry lubed them both, scrambled up to his knees, and leaned forward over him. He guided his dick to Edward's gasping hole and shoved forward. He threw his head back at the first giddy sensations of the man's flesh enveloping him. "So tight," he murmured. And then he began the slow in and out of his cock, feeling that rosy bud try to expel him only to suck him down again. Edward writhed a lot when Harry shagged him and Harry enjoyed that, too. When he came in jolts, he felt Edward squeezing down on his anus to milk Harry all the more.

Harry lay back and blinked languidly at the man's erection when he turned over. "However shall we take care of that?" asked Harry playfully.

Edward rolled further and pressed it against Harry's thigh. "Actually, I'm so aroused now, I'd just like to rub against you," he said, breathlessly.

“No problem,” said Harry, and watched as the man rolled on top of him, thrust his penis into Harry’s damp groin, and frotted. He came in seconds, drenching Harry’s pubic hair. He wrapped his arms around Edward and lay with him on top for a while until they naturally slid into a cuddling position.

In the morning, Harry awoke to the sound of the bath draining and an empty bed. Edward came out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped about his waist. “Hope you don’t mind. I used your bath. I’ll be out of your way in an instant.”

Harry sat up and grabbed his glasses from the side table. “There’s no need for that.” Edward was quite handsome, and he liked the way he pushed his long hair out of his light blue eyes. “You can stay as long as you like.”

“Yeah? Cheers.” He smiled and sat on the edge of the bed. “I like you Harry. I wonder...can we see each other again?”

Harry grinned and lay back. “I’d like that. I’m not really into one night stands.”

Edward rubbed the back of his neck. “Me neither. Last night was the first time I went straight home with a man. Can you believe it? At my age.”

“Not so unbelievable. You were the first one I ever just picked up like that.”

“Really?” They looked at one another a little shyly. “I don’t think I caught your surname last night.”

“Didn’t give it. Too busy being horny, I guess.” He chuckled a little uncomfortably. “It’s...Evans. Harry Evans.”

“Well. I’m Edward Touchstone.”

Harry gestured to him to come back into bed. Edward smiled shyly and tossed the towel aside. He slid under the covers. His cleaned flesh felt cold against Harry but Harry soon warmed him.

After another bout of lovemaking, they stayed in each other’s arms. “What do you do, Edward?”

"I work in the Ministry."

"Blimey. Doesn't anyone work anywhere else?"

"You, too?"

"No," said Harry. And he gave Edward the same lie he gave to Wulf. And almost on cue, Edward asked the same question.

"Did you go to school with Harry Potter?"

"Yeah. Didn't know him, though."

"They say he is a nice bloke."

"That's what they say," said Harry a little guiltily.

And so they began going out. But Harry didn't wait nearly as long to tell Edward who he was. He fixed a nice dinner in his flat, poured wine in Edward's glass, and sat opposite him at the counter. "So, Edward."

Edward twirled his fork in the spaghetti and ate a large mouthful. He looked up at Harry with raised brows. "It's good," he said once he'd swallowed. "I notice you cook a lot the Muggle way."

Harry blushed. "I kind of keep forgetting. I can do it the wizard way. But I sometimes enjoy it the other way." He toyed with his pasta for a moment before laying down his fork. He took up his glass and drank almost half the wine down. "So Edward. I really asked you here tonight to tell you something. Something important. About myself."

"You're Muggleborn? I could have guessed. That sort of rot doesn't matter to me."

"Oh. I'm glad. But I'm not Muggleborn and that's not what I wanted to tell you." He finished his glass and set it aside. "The thing of it is, I've been deceiving you a bit as to who I am. I'm under a Disillusionment Charm because I have to disguise who I am. Bit foolish, really, but I just didn't want everyone to know I'm...you know. Gay."

Edward put down his fork and dabbed at his lips with the serviette. "Oh? Well...who are you, then?"

"Okay. I'll remove the charm, shall I?"

Edward looked pretty nervous and even more so when Harry removed the charm. In fact, he leapt to his feet. "You're Harry Potter! Oh God!"

"I-it's not that bad, is it?"

Edward began breathing heavily. "Oh God!" He backed toward the door.

"Edward. Calm down. It's no big deal."

"No big deal! You're only the most important person who ever lived!"

Harry winced. "No I'm not! That's absurd."

"Y-you saved us all. You killed He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Y-you...you're a very p-powerful wizard."

"Not that much," he pleaded. Edward was still backing toward the door.

"I should have known." He glanced back toward the Firebolt. "I should have realized. Oh my God!"

"Edward!" He reached for him but the man shrunk back.

"No! I shouldn't be here. I'm not good enough for *you*!"

"That's ridiculous—"

"No. I'm sorry, Harry—Mr. Potter."

"'Mr. Potter'? Edward—"

"No. I have to go."

Harry reached for him again and grasped his arm. "Edward. I'm the same person you knew before. I'm not anything special. Please. Come back and sit down."

"No. I'm sorry. I just can't. I just...can't." He slipped Harry's grasp and was out the door in an instant.

The door shut and the sound seemed to echo in the empty flat. Harry stood staring at the closed door for a long moment. He wasn't certain if he should be angry or depressed. He opted for depressed.

Silently, he cleared away the dinner things and suddenly heard the fireplace whoosh. For one hopeful second he thought it might be Edward changing his mind, but it turned out to be Ron and Hermione.

"Hey, mate? Did we miss dinner?"

Harry, who was standing with the plate poised over the trash bin, looked down at the spaghetti sliding off the plate. "Yup." He scraped the rest of it before he realized he could just *Scourgify* it. "Dammit."

"Harry," said Hermione, all concern. She came around the counter to look at him. "What's the matter."

He hadn't meant to say anything but suddenly it just tumbled out. "I was in the middle of a date when I finally revealed who I really am and he ran straight out of here like his robe was on fire."

Hermione hugged him and Ron—seemingly torn between the idea of Harry and "date"—said nothing. Hermione tugged Harry along and sat him down on the sofa. They sat on either side of him. "It's only one man," she said.

"But Hermione, is this the rest of my life? Hiding who I am? Afraid to tell them? Afraid they'll run off in fear of being with the great Harry Potter? I *hate* that!"

There wasn't much for them to say. But after all, it was their presence that comforted him the most. It was like old times, really. They stayed with him quite late, playing wizard games and just talking. He was glad that nothing had changed between them. He worried that it would once they married. But it all seemed the same. The three of them. The way it was meant to be.

Later, Harry tired not to think about his love life, or lack of it. He worked hard on his studies, both to finish his Hogwarts training and his teaching work. His NEWTs came back extremely high—and he'd done it all himself! He was particularly proud of that, especially since Hermione offered to help him. And his powers were stronger than ever. He didn't tell the others how much wandless magic he was capable of. No sense in bragging. But he felt into his own all right. And Hogwarts

would reopen again very soon. So he should be happy. And he was. Very happy. Maybe a little lonely, but happy.

If only he could stop thinking about Draco Malfoy.

Chapter Eight—A Hogwarts Honeymoon

Draco Malfoy couldn't stop thinking about Harry Potter. He had spoken harshly to his Chocolate Frog card that morning and Harry had disappeared out of the frame. He hadn't returned and Draco was getting worried he wouldn't. "Sod it," he told himself. He spent too much time with that freaky thing anyway. He tucked it in his wallet and dragged himself out the door to go to work at yet another tea shop. He had been late a number of times to this one and the manager was this close to discharging him. Often he came to work drunk but he was able to hide it adequately. And on those more difficult days, he was late. He supposed the honeymoon was over. No more daydreaming that things would get better. No more pie in the sky about his lot. No, the Muggle honeymoon was definitely over.

Any money he made went to booze, not into any Muggle bank vault. He sometimes forgot to pay his rent. One day, while leaving his flat to go to work, the landlord was lying in wait for him. "Malfoy!

Draco turned, not liking the sound of that.

The man bore down on him. He was wearing a knit waistcoat over a dirty undershirt. Draco cringed back. "The rent is late. Have you got it?"

"Well, I get paid tomorrow afternoon. Surely you can wait till then—"

"And I've waited and I've waited. No more. You're out!" He turned his back on Draco and thumped down the stairs.

"What?" Draco ran after him. "Please, Mr. Bayford. Can't you give me a few more days—"

"I've given you two *months* as it is," he cast over his shoulder. "Your flat is padlocked and you won't be getting your kit, I can tell you."

Draco stood at the bottom step, watching the back of his landlord recede into the shadows of his own flat whereupon he shut the door.

Draco breathed. No. Not again! He couldn't be homeless again. His eyes stung with tears as he glanced heavenward into the smoky London sky. He knew he should have paid the rent straight off, but he needed his drink, didn't he? Everything else was so miserable. He at least had to have that!

He shook his head. Best not think about it now. He had to get to work and glancing at a digital clock on the side of the building across the lane, he could see he was already late.

He ran. He had forgotten to grab his jacket and now he was getting soaked by the fog. He hoped his manager would be understanding today. But what were the chances of that?

When he arrived, there was Mr. Blunt, glaring at him. "Sorry I'm late. Mr. Blunt. Had an argument with my landlord." Blunt said nothing, so he took that for what it was worth and escaped into the kitchens. He could tell right away they were short on staff. Mimi, the chubby waitress, told him that two had called in sick and Blunt was on the warpath.

He nodded, saying nothing. He knew Mimi had a "thing" for him. He wondered about pimping himself to her. After all, he needed a place to stay and his options were few. He watched her wide backside move through the kitchens and grimaced. He could do it. He knew he could. He'd done worse, hadn't he? The Dark Lord demanded he go on raids with him. Maybe he didn't personally do anything but standing by and doing nothing was complicit enough. Enough to convict him, that was for sure.

Yes, it looked like another night of carpet munching. Could the day get any worse?

Draco managed to break three teapots, which Blunt told him was coming out of his salary. At break, he stood outside with Mimi and shared a fag with her. She flapped her lashes at him and he supposed he should make some overtures before the day was out.

"Say Mimi," he said in his slickest Malfoy tone. "You're looking rather saucy lately."

She giggled hysterically and pushed on his shoulder. "Go on!"

"No, really." He leaned in next to her, his shoulder touching hers. "I've meant to say earlier, but, well. You know I don't go out much. I guess I'm a little shy about the girls. You know."

"You?"

"Yeah. Still waters run deep, and all that. What do you say we get together tonight?"

"Ooh. That would be lovely!"

Thought so. "But here's the thing, Mimi. I haven't got a Kn—er...a farthing to rub together. Could we make do with something at your place?"

"Oh, but my place is an absolute sty!"

With a pig to go with it. He forced a smile. "Oh you know blokes. Our places are always much worse. I wouldn't mind. Wouldn't even notice."

"Well...if you're sure. I have some left over curry from the other night. And I have a bottle of wine! We could make a night of it."

That's the plan. "Then it's a date. Oh. Better get back on shift. Don't want Blunt to burst a vessel." *If he'd oblige with four...*

Draco worked, enduring the lurid glances from an anxious Mimi. Merlin's balls. What had he reduced himself to? But didn't he say no matter who he had to shag, he'd never go homeless again?

"Malfoy, table six!" Blunt barked.

Draco blew his long fringe out of his eyes and grabbed his notepad from his apron. He stood over the table while the stupid prat bent over a sack, rummaging around. *Haven't all day, you know*.

When the man finally straightened out and looked at Draco square in the face, Draco froze. His mind was playing tricks with him. Too much talking to that Chocolate Frog card, no doubt. But as it slowly dawned on him that it *was* Harry Potter in the flesh his heart fell right to his stomach. Terror as he had only known with the Dark Lord seized him. Everything seemed to slow down as if a TimeTurner had been set. Potter stared at him with those blazing green eyes and Draco knew that he had come to kill him.

This was it. Death. At the hands of Potter. There was nothing more fitting in his estimation. Harry Potter had come to finish the job he had started when he killed the Dark Lord. Why he had taken so long to find Draco was the mysterious part.

But then Time seemed to start up again because Potter hadn't made a move for his wand. In fact, he looked just as shocked to see Draco as Draco was upon seeing him. Oh. So that's the way he was going to play it. Let's make fun of Malfoy living like a Muggle. Let's toy with him first like a cat and a mouse.

But why now? He could have done it when Draco surrendered to Potter at the last battle. But he hadn't treated Draco badly. He had been a gentleman. So why was Potter doing this now? Could it be...could it actually be that he didn't *know* Draco was here? That it was a surprise to him? But how could that be? Surely the Ministry was keeping track. They'd have to be to see that he was living like a Muggle as he was supposed to do.

Potter said nothing. Draco said nothing. A stand-off. Well, there was one thing Draco would not do. He had surrendered himself to Potter, not hoping for leniency but at least a chance, and he hadn't gotten it. He would not serve Harry Potter. He already served one Lord who turned out to be a complete madman. He would not serve Potter.

He slammed his notebook back in his pocket, did an about-face, and marched back to the kitchens, wondering with an itch to his neck when the magic would jet toward him and end it all. But no. Potter wasn't the kind to curse someone in the back. That had been Draco's ploy.

Once he slammed the door behind him he tried to breathe. He made it. But he was afraid to turn around now, to see Potter coming for him. If he pleaded on his hands and knees...No, dammit. He was a Malfoy. He could at least face his death like a man.

Blunt swooped down on him in a second. "What are you doing, Malfoy! That's a customer you're ignoring out there."

Draco took a deep breath to stop the shaking. He didn't succeed. "I won't serve him," he said. "He...he...." He tried to think of a lie and it came to him instantly. "He tried to steal from me once and I won't serve him here."

“You either serve him at once or you’re sacked!”

Draco’s fury rose to the surface. A few dishes crashed from the shelves without anyone touching them. “I said I won’t! So I guess I quit!” He tore off his apron and shoved it into the manager’s face as he stormed through the kitchen doors. He cast one poisonous glance at Potter who was still sitting and staring at him before he plunged out into the cold.

It was raining. Perfect! All Draco’s plans were falling to the gutter. No job, no place to go, Harry Potter witnessing more of his humiliation. It was just getting better and better. His heart was too weary to go on. He’d already gone through too much. He would have been far better off in Azkaban. At least he would always know where his next meal was coming from. And without Dementors, how bad could it be? He only had two choices now. He could either commit some crime and commit suicide by police or try to perform some magic and get sent to Azkaban. Either one would suit. This was it. No more.

“Malfoy, wait up!”

Potter! He was after him. She he make a break for it? Who cared anymore? Maybe he would A.K. him after all. All he knew, was that Harry Potter was somehow his destiny. It was fitting it was Potter. He stopped. He let the rain drench him. He shivered into it, feeling it all for the last time. If he was to die, it should be at the hands of Harry Potter. It all made some sort of horrible sense.

Draco sighed into the wind and slowly turned to meet his destiny...

The End...Except we know it isn’t

Author Notes: It was hard finding a place to stop this. It really isn’t a complete story as the others have been, just a sort of filling in the holes of our heroes before they met their destiny. It seems like an unhappy ending but what Draco doesn’t realize and what we all surely know, is that he does indeed go to meet his destiny, but not in the way he envisioned. From here, we integrate into “Aftermath” and all the incarnations to follow. Happy reading!