Title: Getting There

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Pairing: Harry/Draco

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Warnings: attempted suicide, EWE

Word count: ~18,000

Summary: An attack on Malfoy Manor ends up being not what it first seemed, as Auror Harry Potter finds out. Hermione Granger-Weasley finds herself appointed as Draco's Healer, designated to work with him, the survivor of a suicide attempt. Taking his first steps down the road of self-healing, Draco discovers that life is worth living, and there's probably room for someone else to share his path.

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Beautiful art created by yaaronet, melmoe, and oldenuf2nb

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Getting There

Part 1 of 2: Healer Granger-Weasley Gets a New Patient

Hermione was normally an early riser, but walking through the halls of St. Mungo’s secure ward at five in the morning was early even for her. Hermione spared a smile for Jocelyn Nightingale, the pretty Auror who was standing guard at the only closed door along the long, stark white hallway.

When she reached the small conference room at the end of the hall, Harry greeted her with a warm hug. “Thanks for coming,” he said.

“You look exhausted.”

“Been up all night.”

“Ron came in just as I was leaving. He told me he’d been putting out Fiendfyre at Malfoy Manor all night.”

They sat down next to each other at the conference table. Harry waved his wand and the door shut behind them.

“Did he tell you anything else?” asked Harry.

“Nope. He collapsed on the bed and was out like a light. I had to take off his shoes.”

Harry smiled at her.

“Rough night?” she asked.

“Exhausting, but not too dangerous.”

“Good. Now fill me in on why my emergency contact alarm went off. I’m not even on call tonight.”

“Around eleven last night, Camilla Dunstan showed up at the Ministry screaming for Aurors to be sent to

Malfoy Manor."

"Camilla Dunstan?" asked Hermione, not recognizing the name.

"She's been Malfoy's housekeeper for about six months. A team of four of us was dispatched and found Fiendfyre when we got there. It wasn't completely out of control, but was running wild through a good chunk of the first floor. Ron, Lark and Coggs took on the fire. I got one positive life sign to my scan so I went off to search the upstairs. I found Malfoy asleep in his bedroom with his wand next to him."

"Which Malfoy?"

"Draco. Lucius and Narcissa haven't been back in Britain for a few years."

"So what am I doing here?" Hermione asked with a soft sigh.

"Getting to that. I brought Malfoy here. Turned out that he consumed about three times the normal dose of a sleeping potion. I cast Priori Incantatem on Malfoy's wand, and it turns out that he cast the Fiendfyre."

"Oh my."

"I double checked it. No one else touched his wand either."

"Wow," she responded breathlessly.

Harry nodded. After a few moments, he continued. "The Healers gave him a counter potion. When he woke up, I questioned him. He told me that the last thing he remembered was going to sleep and that I should 'fuck off and find out who tried to kill him' and that I was still a 'speccy-faced git'."

“You think he doesn’t remember?”

“The Healer found no signs of any Memory Charm.”

“You think he’s faking it?”

“No clue, but I sent Jocelyn in to talk to him—more flies with honey and all that. She came up with the same.”

Hermione chuckled.

“What?”

“Wrong kind of honey.”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t you read the papers?”

“You know I don’t.”

“Malfoy flies for your team, sweetie.”

“Really?”

“You didn’t know?”

“No. Never seen him around either.”

“I remember reading it a few years ago. So let’s get back to why I’m here.”

“Sturdevent assigned you.”

“Me?”

“Well, he is your supervisor.”

“I’m pretty junior for this. Also, I have a past history with Malfoy,” she said, not quite believing she should take the case.

“Doesn’t everybody?”

“Oh,” she said, coming to a realization. “No one else will take it.”

Harry shook his head.

“Anything else before I see him?”

“Don’t think so. I’ll wait here for you. I need to file a preliminary report before I can go home. God I hate paperwork.”

“That’s fine. I don’t imagine this first meeting will be very long. I doubt he’s going to be pouring his heart out.”

“He doesn’t have one.”

“Harry,” she said in warning.

“Okay, go do your thing.”

“My thing?”

“You know what I mean.”

Hermione smiled and nodded. “I’ll be back soon.”

Malfoy’s eyes were closed when Hermione entered the room. He looked peaceful, even handsome. She hadn’t seen him in many years. He looked older, but then again so did she. She brushed her robes flat and then reached up to check that her hair was secure in its twist.

“Mr. Malfoy?” she asked in a quiet professional manner.

Malfoy opened his eyes and stared at her. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“I’m a Healer specializing in psychological maladies and I’ve been assigned to your case.”

“Psychological maladies?”

“I know you must be tired, but I wanted to introduce myself and maybe talk for a few minutes.”

“Fuck off, Granger.”

“Granger-Weasley,” she corrected and forced herself to remain calm.

“Whatever. Get out,” he spat.

“I’m sorry. I can’t do that. You’re under protective custody, and I’ve been assigned to make an assessment of your mental health for the Ministry.”

“I don’t care what you’ve been assigned to do.”

“Well, you don’t have a choice. If you’d like to get out of here sometime this century, you’re going to have to talk to me.”

Draco turned on his side, facing away from her.

“Mr. Malfoy, I realize that we have a rough history, but I assure you that I will be professional. I need to confirm some facts about last night for the Aurors, but anything else that you tell me will be in the strictest confidence.”

Malfoy said nothing for several minutes. Hermione waited patiently. When he finally spoke, he said, “I want someone else.”

“There is no one else.”

He did not reply. She waited for several more minutes and then said, “Get some rest. I’ll be back to talk after lunch.”

Hermione apprised Harry of the situation and asked him to send over Malfoy’s Ministry file and to set up an interview with the housekeeper for her.

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Hermione heard a knock on her office door at eleven o’clock sharp. She greeted Camilla Dunstan and offered her tea. Camilla was much younger and prettier than Hermione expected, and the young witch seemed quite nervous.

When they were settled, Hermione began her interview. “No need to be nervous. I just have a few questions.”

“I already talked to the Aurors last night.”

“I know. I read the report about what happened. I just thought maybe we could talk about it and about how you came to work for Mr. Malfoy.”

“Is he all right?” Camilla asked, sounding genuinely concerned. “They wouldn’t tell me anything.”

“He’s fine. He’s under observation.”

“Good. That’s good. He’s a nice man.”
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Hermione digested that piece of information. “I’m hoping that you can help me to help him.”

“I’ll do what I can. He tried to kill himself, didn’t he?”

“What makes you say that?”

“Just a feeling. Also the Aurors didn’t seem to be too concerned with trying to find out who did it when they interviewed me last night. They mostly asked me about Mr. Malfoy.”

“What’s it like working for him?”

“It’s fine. He’s very quiet and I really don’t see much of him. He leaves me notes with things to do or shopping that needs to be taken care of.”

“Do you talk?”

“Not much. Mostly greetings and small talk if at all. He’s either reading in the study or working on a potion.”

“Do you ever help with the potions?”

“Nah, I’m just the housekeeper. I mean, I’m no Squib, but I’m just not very… well I didn’t really excel at Hogwarts. I did manage two OWLs: Charms and Transfiguration.”

“That’s good.” Hermione tried to sound encouraging.

“No, not really. I didn’t stay for NEWTs.”

“So how did you come to work for Mr. Malfoy?”

“Umm, it’s a little embarrassing.”

Hermione gave her best supportive smile. “Anything you tell me will be confidential. Don’t worry; I’m not judging you. I just want to help Mr. Malfoy.”

“I was working for the Zabinis,” Camilla began.

“In Switzerland?”

“Oh, no, the younger ones, Pansy and Blaise.”

Remembering the wedding announcement three years ago, Hermione nodded.

“I had been working for them for about three months, when… when Mr. Zabini…”

“It’s all right.”

“Well he sort of started coming on to me. I was thinking that I would have to quit, and I really needed the money. Mrs. Zabini isn’t stupid. She figured it out and was really nice about it. She told me about Mr. Malfoy and how he needed a housekeeper and that I wouldn’t have a problem because…”

“Because he was gay,” Hermione said matter-of-factly.

Camilla nodded. “So I started working for him.”

“When was this?”

“Last November.”

“Have you noticed a change in Mr. Malfoy’s behavior or moods since then?”

“Not really. He was always pretty quiet.”

“Did anyone come to visit?”

“Not really. Sometimes Mrs. Zabini alone and sometimes with Mr. Zabini.”

“No one else?”

“Umm, not that I know of.”

“No other friends? Men in the morning?” Hermione asked delicately.

“No.”

“Did he ever go out?”

“Not during the day, but I’m pretty sure that he went out at night at least once in a while.”

“Why would you say that?”

“He wouldn’t be at the Manor when I arrived some mornings. He’d show up around lunch. I just assumed he spent the night at his London flat.”

“He has a flat in London?”

“Yeah, he usually asks me to clean it once a month. It was connected to the Floo at the Manor, but everything else about it was Muggle. Nothing magical in it at all.”

Hermione thought about that for a moment. “I’d like to ask you about last night.”

“Okay.”

“I know what happened after you showed up at the Ministry. What happened before that?”

“Mr. Malfoy sent me home early yesterday.”

Hermione interrupted Camilla to ask, “Is that normal?”

“No, not really. He told me to take a few days off. He even paid me for the whole month. He said he was going out of town and if he was detained, he wanted to make sure that I was taken care of.”

“Had he ever done that before?”

“Paid me early? No.”

“Gone out of town?”

“No.”

“Then what happened?”

“I was going to lie down and read when I realized that I left my book in the kitchen at the Manor. I’m reading Magical Me by Gilderoy Lockhart. He’s so amazing. You ever read it?” Camilla asked, obviously enraptured with Lockhart’s fictional persona.

“I’ve heard of it,” Hermione replied and stifled a laugh.

“So I went to the Manor to pick it up and saw the Fiendfyre. I ran to the Floo and went straight to the Ministry.”

“Did you see Mr. Malfoy?”

“No! I had no idea he was still at home. I never would have left him. I thought someone was just trying to destroy the Manor as revenge or something.”

“Do you know anyone who would want revenge on Mr. Malfoy?”

“Well, I know he was a Death Eater, but now, no. I can’t imagine anyone wanting to hurt him. He keeps to himself. It’s really quite sad.”

“How so?”

“He seems so lonely.”

“Has he ever said anything to you?’

“No, but you can tell. You know what I mean, right?”

“Yeah, I think I do.”

Hermione jotted down a few notes and finished up with Camilla. She ate a quick sandwich in her office and then headed back down to the secure ward. After a bit of small talk with the Auror on guard, she pushed the door to Malfoy’s room open and found him on his side, facing the wall.

“Mr. Malfoy?”

“Go away.”

“I’m sorry; I can’t do that.” She waited a moment. “Could you please sit up and talk with me for a few minutes?”

Malfoy sat up with a scowl firmly in place on his face, and Hermione took the chair next to the bed.
“Thank you.”

“All right, get on with it.”

“Mr. Malf_ is it all right if I call you Draco? You can call me Hermione. I’m on a first name basis with pretty much all of my patients.”

“Is that professional?”

“In my profession it is,” she said with a smile.

“Fine.”

“Thank you, Draco. I need to talk with you about last night.”

“Potter was in earlier. He has my statement.”

“Yes, he sent me a copy. I’d like to ask you about it.”

“I was tired. I took a Sleeping Draught. When I woke up, I was here in St. Mungo’s with two Healers and Potter standing over me.” Malfoy’s reply sounded rehearsed.

Hermione relaxed and took several deep breaths. She hadn’t expected this to be easy, but having to try and engage Draco Malfoy after all these years was much harder on her nerves than she had anticipated. She pushed down old memories that were bubbling up to the surface. She assumed that he was probably doing the same.

“The Healer estimated that you had taken three times the normal dose of Sleeping Draught.”

“I have trouble sleeping.” Draco shrugged nonchalantly.

“Why don’t you tell me about that.”

“Look, I don’t really want to play these Muggle mind games.”

“I could use Legilimency,” she stated, hoping to get a rise out of him.

“Like hell you will.”

“I could get a Wizengamot review board to grant me permission in the interest of your personal safety and the Auror Department’s need to conclude the investigation.”

“Fuck you.”

“Or you can cooperate so that I can file a report and the Aurors can close the investigation. Would you like to get your wand back and get out of here?”

Draco seemed to be considering his options. After a minute, he replied, “Fine.”

“Tell me about the Fiendfyre,” said Hermione, making eye contact.

“A lot of people would like to see me dead. They need to catch whoever set it.”

“Your wards were intact. The spell was cast from the inside.”

“So?”

“With your wand.” Hermione kept her eyes firmly locked with Draco’s.

“That doesn’t mean_”

“The Aurors have interviewed Camilla.”

“They don’t think that she…”

“The Fiendfyre was set from the inside with your wand. If not you, then the Aurors need to explore_”

“Tell them to leave her alone.”

“Because?”

“All right. Give me a second.” Biting his lower lip, Draco seemed to be wrestling with his conscience. He took a deep breath and then softly said, “I cast the spell.”

Hermione nodded and waited.

“Last week was the anniversary of… I got caught up in the memories. Things got a little too much for me.”

“You gave Camilla the rest of the week off and paid her two weeks in advance for the whole month.”

“Leave her out of it. She’s a sweet girl.”

“You planned it,” Hermione said calmly.

“What do you want from me?” Draco yelled.

“I want to help you, if I can.”

“That’s a load of Hippogriff dung.”

“No, it’s not. I’m a Healer and you’re my patient. Our past is our past. That was years ago.”

“Five.”

“Eight.”

Draco looked like he was thinking it over. “Fuck, you’re right.”

“More importantly, I think you’re hurting and I’d like to help you.”

Draco snorted. “Because you have such a short memory.”

“I have a good memory, but I also have an obligation to my patients.”

“So what happens now?”

“I tell the Auror in charge of the investigation that you cast the Fiendfyre spell and took an overdose of Sleeping Draught. I’ll recommend keeping you here for observation for at least forty-eight hours. We’ll

talk. After that, you could be released on your own recognizance as long as you agree to meet with me for a one-hour session, five days a week until such time that I feel that we can meet less frequently, and then until our sessions are no longer necessary."

"And Potter will just let me go?"

"Most likely the Auror department will recommend a surveillance spell to monitor that you aren't doing anything harmful to yourself or others."

"That's ridiculous!"

"Or you can remain here at St. Mungo's."

Draco scowled at her.

"I'm going to turn in my preliminary report. I'll come back this evening and we can talk some more."

"You think you've got it all figured out, don't you?"

"No, not in the least, but I will say this, Draco: I think people can change. Eight years is a long time. I don't presume to know you at all. I haven't seen you since the trials and I'm big enough to admit that you may not be the person I remember."

"You talk a good game, but you're just as full of crap as the rest of them."

"Who?"

“Everyone.”

She paused a moment to see if he would say anything else. When he didn’t, she softly said, “I’ll be back later.”

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The day that each of their two-year Auror Apprenticeships were over, Harry and Ron requested each other as partners. Their request was approved the very next day, and they immediately moved into an office together and had been there ever since.

Hermione entered the office, gave Ron a quick kiss on the lips and then plopped herself into the only guest chair.

“Hey, how’d it go?” asked Harry, looking up from the thick stack of parchment in front of him.

“As well as could be expected I suppose. I did get him to admit that he cast the Fiendfyre spell and took the potion.”

Ron let out a long whistle. “Wow, he really did it then? Tried to off himself?”

“It looks that way,” she replied, then pulled out a piece of parchment and handed it over to Harry. “My preliminary report.”

Harry looked it over. “This seems reasonable.”

“Is that his file?” she asked.
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“Yeah.”

“Anything pertinent?”

“Not really. He’s been pretty quiet.” Harry stared at her curiously. “What?”

“That’s what the housekeeper said, very quiet. Hardly the Malfoy we remember.”

“Well, yeah. After the trials, he and Lucius had a six-month house arrest followed up by a Wizengamot review. Then there’s pretty much nothing. They kept their noses clean.” Harry continued to read from the file. “In 2001, Draco applied for a Potions apprenticeship with the Ministry, but was denied.”

“Why?”

“Cause he was a Death Eater,” Ron said as if it was obvious.

“The official report cites ‘questionable intent and known affiliations with Dark Wizards’. Two years later he applied for an apprenticeship in the Department of Mysteries. He was denied with the same reason.”

“Interesting,” she mused. “What about Lucius and Narcissa? Any luck finding them?”

“We know they’re in France, but we haven’t got anything yet. This morning I asked Malfoy if he knew how to get in touch with them. He said he didn’t. And then, this was weird…”

“What?”

“I asked him when was the last time he saw them. He told me that they were home for Christmas, but all our sources say that they haven’t been back in the country since they left four years ago.”

“You should ask Camilla about that. She started working for Malfoy last November,” Hermione suggested. “Do you have information on why they left?”

“Nope. The only thing in the file is that Lucius transferred the Manor and a large portion of the family holdings into Draco’s name about five years ago. Less than a year later, he and Narcissa left for France. Oh, and Draco hasn’t applied for any official international Portkeys. Doesn’t mean he hasn’t left the country, but it doesn’t look that way.”

Ron looked at Hermione and then at Harry. “Is it me, or is it strange to be talking about Draco Malfoy after all these years?”

“It is strange,” Hermione agreed.

“Why do you think he would want to kill himself?” Harry asked solemnly.

“You know I can’t tell you that.”

“Yeah, yeah, just the facts related to the investigation.” Harry smiled at her. “Do you guys want to grab some dinner tonight?”

“Why don’t you two pick up some take-away? I’ll be home a little late. I’m going to try and talk to Malfoy one more time tonight.”

“You’re better than me, love,” Ron said.

“He’s hurting and needs help. I have to be objective and not let who he was get in the way of that.” She

gave a sad smile and stood to leave.

“Oh, one more thing,” Harry said.

“Hmmm?” She turned her attention to him.

“You were right about his team affiliation. There are two newspaper clippings from 2001 gossiping about his being at the wizard gay clubs, but then nothing after that.”

“That makes sense. I think he probably sticks to the Muggle bars now. Avoids the attention that way.”

Harry looked sympathetic while Ron barked, “You think Malfoy dates Muggles?”

“Not date, probably just sleeps with them.” She saw Ron make a disgusted face. “Oh grow up, Ron. You’re a big boy now. Anyway, Camilla told me that he has a Muggle style flat in London. The Floo is connected to the Manor, but everything else about it is Muggle.”

Harry frowned. “She didn’t tell us that.”

“You probably didn’t ask,” Hermione replied with a wide grin.

“You should’ve become an Auror. How many times have I told you that?” Ron teased his wife.

“Nah, that’s your job.”

“Some job, you can have it,” Harry said, sounding serious.

“Okay, I’m going to go now. I’ll see you at home later,” she said to Ron. “Harry, you’ll send a copy of his file to my office?”

“You’ll have it first thing in the morning.”

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Hermione said a quick hello to Lark, who was on guard duty for the evening, before taking a deep breath and entering Malfoy’s room.

“Hello, Draco. How are you feeling?”

“As good as one can with the sub-par food and endless parade of Healers-in-Training coming in every hour to practice their Bioscan charms.”

Hermione smiled and took the seat next to the bed. “Were you able to sleep?”

Draco shrugged.

“I can order a potion for you.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“You look tired.”
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“Is that your professional diagnosis?”

Hermione ignored the snipe and decided to pursue the issue. “Do you often take sleeping potion?”

“Do you?”

“Sometimes, if I’m having trouble sleeping. I’m a bit of an anxious person and it can affect my sleep patterns.”

Draco looked surprised that she had answered the question. Hermione waited patiently.

He turned his head away from her before speaking. “I take something most nights.”

“Last night you took three times the typical dosage.”

“I’ve been taking it for several years and built up a tolerance. I brew it myself and have had to increase the potency over time. Last night was no different than what I’ve been taking the past six months.”

It hadn’t occurred to Hermione that Draco hadn’t tried to overdose on Sleeping Draught. She thought about it for a moment, then asked, “Tell me about your difficulties sleeping.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you not feel tired? Do you have too many thoughts when you’re trying to settle down? Do you feel physically ill? Things like that.”

Draco looked at her and seemed to be considering what to say. “I don’t like what I see when I close my

eyes."

It was a bit of a cryptic answer. "Do you have bad dreams?"

"They're not dreams, otherwise I'd take Dreamless Sleep."

"Visions?"

"No."

"What then?" she asked gently.

"More memories than anything else."

"Have you tried Occlumency to clear your thoughts?"

"I've tried everything."

"Why do you think you keep seeing them?"

"You're the Mind-Witch; why don't you tell me?"

"Let me ask you a different question. Are you in the memories?"

"Sometimes."

“Are they old or more recent?”

“Let’s stop this little game, shall we? Just ask the question,” Draco said, becoming more agitated.

“What’s the question?”

“You want to know if the memories are of the war, of Hogwarts, of the Dark Lord.”

“Are they?”

“Fuck you!”

“I’m not here to torment you, Draco. I’d like to help you, but that’s not going to happen if you won’t tell me about what you’ve been going through.”

“You’re so full of yourself.”

“Maybe, but so are you.” Hermione let the silence surround them for several minutes. She wasn’t going to get anything more tonight.

“I suppose that’s enough for tonight. I’ll be back in the morning.” She paused for a moment and continued when she got no reaction. “Would you like to try something that might help you sleep?”

“Nothing works,” he replied, completely deflated.

“There’s a technique that I like to use with my patients. It’s sort of like a self-Legilimency.” Actually, it

was more of a magical hybrid with Muggle hypnosis, but she didn't think that was going to score any points with Draco.

"Self-Legilimency?"

"Yes. It's a technique that I've found several uses for."

"What is it?" Draco asked, sounding skeptical.

Hermione pulled out her wand and Summoned a water glass. She Transfigured it into a metronome and placed it on the tray table. She started up the metronome and it began to click at a slow regular interval. "Close your eyes."

"What?"

"Close your eyes and just listen," Hermione said with her best soft and soothing voice.

Draco did some sort of sneer thing, but then closed his eyes.

"Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth."

Draco took a breath.

"Keep breathing. Try to keep time with the metronome. Breathe in with one click and out with the next. That's good. I'm going to cast a Relaxation Charm. Nod if you can feel that."

Draco nodded.

“Go with it. Let it happen. Lie down, relax and listen to me. I want you to focus on a recent memory, something good, something simple. Perhaps think of drinking a really good cup of tea or looking out the window and seeing the sun shining. Nod when you’ve got it.”

Draco gave a small nod.

“Okay, keep breathing, keep focusing on that memory, just a simple moment.”

Draco’s breathing became lighter and lighter. Soon he was only breathing through his nose. He was asleep. Hermione stopped the metronome and Transfigured it back into a glass. She spared him one last look and then left the room.

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The next morning Hermione sat at her desk with a cup of tea and Draco Malfoy’s file. The file was waiting for her with a note from Harry saying that he spoke with Camilla and that Lucius and Narcissa had not been in during Christmas. She also told Harry that, to the best of her knowledge, Draco had spent the holidays alone with the exception of going to the Zabini's party for New Years Eve.

After an hour, Hermione gave up on the file. There really wasn’t any additional information that provided any more insight into Draco’s emotional state other than the few bits and pieces that she had already discussed with Harry. Certainly the isolation was not healthy, but she also had a bad feeling regarding Draco’s overall self-esteem. With one last sip, she finished off a second cup of tea and went to check up on her newest patient. She found him sitting up in bed reading the Daily Prophet.

“Good morning, Draco. How did you sleep?” she asked, taking in the sight of him seemingly well rested.

“Don’t be so smug.”
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“I wasn’t being smug. I was just asking.”

“I slept through the night.”

“Good. I’m glad. You looked pretty ragged last night.”

“Well let’s see how you look after…” Draco stopped himself and quickly turned his head away.

“It’s all right if you’re not ready to talk about it yet.”

“Yet being the operative word, I suppose,” he said, turning back to face her.

“Well, yes. You’re going to have to talk about it at some point.”

“Because talking does oh so much good.”

“What would make you say that?”

“Talk is cheap.”

“I place a lot of value on talking.”

“I place a lot of value on Galleons.”

“Money can make your life more comfortable and yet here you are.”

“Sure, rub it in.”

“I’m not trying to rub it in. I’m only trying to get you to consider that money doesn’t solve your problems.”

“I never said that. I don’t think that money can solve problems. At least not ten thousand Galleons anyway.”

“Ten thousand Galleons?”

“After the war I offered money to the rebuilding of Hogwarts effort, but apparently Galleons aren’t any good if they have the Malfoy name attached to them.”

“How did that make you feel?”

“Fuck off!”

Hermione let out a soft sigh. “I’m trying, Draco. I’m hoping that I can get you to meet me half way.”

“You hate me.”

It startled her how he said it so matter-of-factly and out of the blue. “I don’t hate you. I haven’t seen you in years. I hardly know you.”

He didn’t respond.

“Draco, I’d like to talk about the Fiendfyre. It’s no coincidence that of all the things you could have done_ spells, potions, cursed artifacts— you chose Fiendfyre.”

“I thought I didn’t have to talk about it yet.”

“I’d like to talk about the Battle of Hogwarts. Tell me about your experience with the Fiendfyre in the Room of Requirement.”

“You were there,” he snapped. “You know what happened.”

“Yes, but I was rather focused on Ron and Harry and not dying. I’d like to hear your point of view.”

“Crabbe set the Fiendfyre. You three saved Goyle and me. Crabbe died. The end.”

“I’m hoping that you’ll be willing to try the technique we used last night.”

“The self-Legilimency?”

“Yes. I’ve used it before to help patients access their memories. You’ll be able to remember and talk about it, but you’ll be safe.”

“I don’t know.”

“I know that it’s not easy to think about the past, but perhaps if you do think about it, maybe you’ll understand your choice the other night.”

“Will it get me out of here?”

“We’ll see. I can’t release you until I’m certain that you aren’t a danger to yourself, but I think this is a step in the right direction.”

“Fine,” he said with obvious reluctance.

“Good.”

Hermione set up the metronome and cast a series of spells on Draco. They included the relaxation spell from the night before along with several spells that she had designed herself that functioned very similarly to Legilimency. Once Draco was comfortably under, she began the process.

“Can you think back to the Battle of Hogwarts? You’re waiting outside the Room of Requirement with Crabbe and Goyle. If you can see it, tell me what you see.”

Draco’s voice was calm and steady when he replied, “We’re hiding out to see what happens with the battle. I figure it’ll be safer inside the castle, but told Crabbe and Goyle that we could spy for the Dark Lord. We see you, Potter and Weasley enter the Room of Hidden Things. We wait a minute, then follow you in.”

“And then what?”

“We confront Potter. It gets out of control pretty quickly. Crabbe starts firing curses. Things are crashing all around us. I yell to Crabbe not to kill Potter. Goyle and I lose our wands. You stun Goyle and then Crabbe sets the Fiendfyre.”

“Tell me how you feel.”

“I’m scared out of my mind. It’s getting hotter and hotter and the beasts are growing so quickly. I have no wand. I have no way out. I’m pretty sure I’m going to die.”

Draco’s voice became more agitated and he was sweating.

“It’s okay, Draco. It’s not happening. You’re just remembering it. You’re safe.”

Draco nodded.

“Then what happened?”

“Potter happened. He came at me on a broom. I couldn’t believe it. I tried to take his hand, but it slipped. Then you and Weasley showed up and took Goyle. The flames are everywhere. I’m still pretty sure that I’m going to die when I get on the back of Potter’s broom. The absurdity of it all— he’s trying to save my life.”

“You’re outside the room now. What are you feeling?”

“I’m shocked. I’m having trouble breathing. I can’t believe that Crabbe is dead. I can’t believe that Potter saved my life after we had just tried to capture him. Crabbe tried to kill him, all of you really.”

“What else are you feeling?”

“I’m afraid.”

“Of what?”

“Of the Dark Lord, of the Death Eaters. It all seems so futile.”

“What else?”

“I’m thankful that I’m alive, but I hate that Potter saved me. I hate everything and…”

“And?”

“I wished he had left me to die.” Draco sniffled and was having difficulty breathing.

“You’re okay, Draco. I’m going to stop the metronome and when I do, the spell will end. You’ll open your eyes and be here with me. You’ll remember everything that you saw and what we talked about.”

Draco nodded and sniffled once more.

“Good. Finite Incantatem,” Hermione said as she stopped the metronome.

A few moments later, Draco opened his eyes and took a deep breath.

“Are you all right?” she asked.

“I’m fine.”

“What do you think?”

“I just realized something.”

“What?”

“Potter saved me once again the other night. I bet he loved that. I bet you do too. I bet you’re all having a good laugh.”

“I’m not laughing. I think you were very brave today. I think that facing how you felt at the final battle will help you deal with what happened the other night.”

“Healer Granger-Weasley to the rescue.”

“No, Draco, you’re going to be doing all the work this time. You’re going to have to rescue yourself.”

Draco snorted.

“Why do you think that you wanted to recreate that event?”

“You’re not much of a Mind Healer are you? It’s obvious. Isn’t it? I thought I should have died and so I wanted to finish the job.”

“That’s one way to look at it, but why now? And why didn’t you kill yourself with a hemlock potion or something that would have been instantaneous?”

“Poetic justice?”

“Were you looking for justice?”

“I’ve never had it before so why start now?” Draco diverted his gaze to his hands and began picking at his fingernails.

“You were free after the war. You didn’t think you received justice?”

“If you call an outcast social pariah free. I’ll tell you what justice is. Justice is what people feel when they get their way.”

“Well, I have a theory. Would you like to hear it?”

“By all means,” Draco said with over exaggerated grandeur.

“I think you wanted to be rescued. I think you’d like to live. You’re just not enjoying it much at the moment.”

“Is that the sage advice you give all your patients?”

“No. Do you want to live, Draco?”

He didn’t respond.

“Look at me,” she said as gently as she could. “Do you want to live?”

“Yes,” he whispered as a single tear tracked its way down his cheek.

“I’m glad. I’d like to help you find out how you’d like to live.”

Draco wiped the tear away with the side of his index finger and turned his head to look out the window.

“You’re doing well, Draco. I have some other patients to see, but I’ll be back later. See if you can get some rest.”

Draco nodded.

Hermione left the room feeling rattled to her core. She felt rejuvenated by the fact that she had made some headway with Draco while utterly deflated at seeing such a wounded human being. This was her job, the career she had chosen and yet it still was always difficult to see a patient so far gone as this. He had lost all hope. How on earth was she going to give that back to him?

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After a cup of tea to settle her nerves, Hermione met with two patients and caught up on some office work. As usual, she had lunch at her desk while making notes. When she went back to meet with Draco again, she found Pansy Parkinson, rather Zabini, arguing with Lark, who was on guard duty again.

“Don’t you know who I am? I’m his best friend and I demand to see him,” she yelled a few mere inches from Lark’s face.

Being a seasoned Auror, Lark kept his cool. “I’m sorry, but as I told you, no one gets in without authorization from his Healer.”

“And who would that be?” Pansy snapped.
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“That would be me,” Hermione answered with a fake smile.

Pansy whirled around and eyed Hermione with much disdain. “You’re joking.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Well authorize me. I want to see him.”

Hermione gestured to the conference room down the hall. “Let’s talk for a few minutes first.”

“And then I can see him?”

“Yes, but I’ll need to make sure it’s okay with Draco first.”

Pansy agreed and followed Hermione into the conference room. They sat down and Hermione initiated the conversation. “Do you know what happened?”

“I just got back in town late last night and there was a letter from Camilla saying that there was a Fiendfyre attack on the Manor and that Draco was here.”

“Draco set the Fiendfyre himself and then took a sleeping potion.” Hermione carefully watched Pansy’s reaction.

“Oh,” Pansy said softly. Her mood changed from angry to sad.

“You’re not too surprised?”

“I didn’t think he’d do it,” Pansy stammered.

“Had he talked about killing himself before?”

“Not specifically, but he has mentioned things in passing, like life was stupid or why bother living.”

“Do you think he’s been depressed?”

“Obviously,” Pansy drawled but then changed her tone back to one of concern. “He’s been sad for years. I tried to encourage him to go out, to see people or even meet new people. He couldn’t do it.”

“When was the last time you saw him?”

“About two weeks ago.”

“Did anything odd happen?”

Pansy shook her head. “Not that I know of.”

“What about Lucius and Narcissa? Is Draco in touch with them?”

“I think they exchange a letter now and then. I know they keep asking him to come and visit them in France, but he won’t go.”

“Okay, why don’t you go see him now. If he says anything that you think might be useful to getting him

some help, please let me know."

"I will."

With a slight hesitation, Draco agreed to see Pansy. After Pansy went into the room, Hermione cast an Observation Spell on the wall to watch them interact. She couldn't hear them, but she could see that Pansy was crying and Draco wasn't talking much.

Harry came up behind her and put a hand on her shoulder, startling her. "You scared me."

"Sorry. I came for a quick follow-up with Malfoy."

"He's in with Pansy right now."

"They're still friends?"

"Yes. In fact, she may be his only one."

"How's it going with him?" he asked, sounding genuinely concerned.

"Making progress. More than I anticipated actually."

"That's good?"

"Yes, I think so. Oh, can you do me a favor?"

“Sure.”

“Malfoy mentioned something about a ten thousand Galleon donation to the Hogwarts rebuild being turned down. Can you look into that for me?”

“No problem.”

“Thanks,” she replied, then turned her gaze on Pansy and Draco. “You know what I think when I see them together?”

“What?” he asked, draping his arm around her shoulder and looking at them as well.

“That could be you.”

Harry stepped away and stared at her in disbelief. “You think I’d try to kill myself?”

“No, oh no. What I meant is that I see you as that alone.”

“Hermione,” Harry said, trying to stop her.

“No, really, Harry. You have friends and of course the Weasleys are family, but you’re on your own. You haven’t dated anyone in ages, not that you ever had a serious relationship. You still live at Grimmauld Place. You always say that you’re going to move and then never do. You hate your job.”

“I hate paperwork.”

“No, Harry, Ron hates paperwork. He loves his job. You hate it. You’ve been so unhappy these past few

years. I worry about you."

"Don't."

"I do, Harry. I worry about you. You never found yourself, found who you wanted to be."

"I thought you weren't supposed to analyze your friends."

She smiled at him. "I make an exception for you."

"I'm fine, Hermione, really."

"But are you happy?"

Harry looked at her with sad eyes and replied, "And how would I know that?"

"Oh, Harry," she exclaimed, pulling him into a tight hug.

Pansy came out a moment later. She stared at Harry with unadulterated hatred, then turned to her focus to Hermione. "Fix him," she stated firmly then walked away, her high-heeled boots clicking loudly against the floor.

"Would you like me to come in with you?" Hermione asked Harry after Pansy had turned the corner.

"Sure." He gave her a soft smile, then put on his Auror face and strode confidently into the room.

“Hi, Draco,” Hermione said.

“Hello, Malfoy. I have just a few questions for you and then I’ll be out of your hair.”

“Somehow I doubt that.”

Harry smiled. “We’ve tried to contact your parents without any luck. Do you know how to contact them?”

“No.”

Hermione stepped closer. “Would you like us to contact them?”

Draco smiled at her. She could tell that he knew exactly what she was doing. “No.”

“Well then,” Harry said, “since the Manor is in your name and you’ve consented to medical care, we have no reason to try and contact them.”

“Are you sure, Draco?” Hermione asked, hoping that he might reconsider.

“Yes. I’m almost twenty-six years old. I think I can manage without my mummy and daddy.”

“All right.” Harry nodded once. “There’s just one more matter. Pending Healer Granger-Weasley’s approval, we need to know where you intend to live. The Manor is uninhabitable at the moment. Of course, you’ll need to inform us when you’re going to take care of that as well.”

“I have a flat in London. I’ll ask Camilla to make sure it’s prepared for me.”

“I’ll need to do a surveillance run first, before you move in.”

“How touching.”

“How about you give me a break.”

“Fine. Check with her and schedule something.”

“Good.” Harry turned to leave but then turned back and awkwardly said, “Thank you and I hope you’re feeling better.”

The second that Harry was out of the room, Draco said, “He’s still so full of himself.”

“Why would you say that?

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“Do you think he knows the real you?”

Draco grimaced and shook his finger at Hermione. “You think you’re pretty good at this, don’t you?”

“I’m good at my job if that’s what you mean.”

Hermione was able to get Draco to open up and talk a little about his life after the war. By his own description, he kept to himself and a few older friends. He talked about the strain on his relationship with his parents after he admitted that he was gay. He tried to date other wizards, but ultimately his

name got in the way. He purchased the flat in Muggle London in an attempt to get out more, but he was too uncomfortable in the Muggle world. So now he just liked going there for a change in scenery from the Manor.

Pleased with the day's progress, Hermione called it a night and went home to spend some time with Ron. She found herself in desperate want of his company and his touch.

Hermione had two standing appointments the next morning. She stopped by to see Draco just before her lunch date with Ron and Harry.

"How are you feeling today?"

"I'm not sure."

"How do you feel about leaving the hospital? Do you think you're ready?"

"I can't wait to get out of this place. The food is horrible."

"Are you ready to be on your own?"

"I've always been on my own."

"You're avoiding the question."

"Isn't that the question you're supposed to answer?"

“No, it’s for you to answer. I just sign the forms.”

“Yes, I’m ready. Now why don’t you ask me if I’m going to try and kill myself again?”

“Are you?”

“I don’t know.”

“That’s a fair answer. Will you promise to contact me if you feel like you might?”

“I… I can do that.”

“Promise me.”

“I promise.”

“Camilla sent me an owl this morning. She said she received your note and asked me if she could come and see you this afternoon. Is that all right?”

“That’s fine. She’s a sweet girl.”

“She is. I’ll be back later for a longer session. I’d like to try the self-Legilimency again.”

Draco nodded.

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Lunchtime at the Leaky Cauldron was busy as usual. They found a table in the back and ordered the special of the day.

“So what’s the news on Malfoy?” Harry asked. “You going to release him soon?”

“Perhaps tomorrow,” she answered and quickly took a drink of her butterbeer. It didn’t happen too often that her cases collided with an Auror investigation and even less often regarding someone they knew personally. It was sometimes difficult to know exactly what information she could ethically reveal.

“Oh, I found out about that ten thousand Galleons donation.”

“That’s a lot of Galleons,” Ron said, obviously hearing about it for the first time.

“What did you find?”

“I asked Minerva about it. She told me that Malfoy did try to make the donation. She wanted to accept it, but the board wouldn’t agree. However, she gave me a list of the official donations.” Harry unfurled a piece of parchment. “See, here,” he said, pointing to an entry towards the bottom of the scroll. “Ten thousand Galleons, anonymous.”

“So it looks like he made the donation anyway,” she said while thinking it over.

“Looks that way,” said Harry.

“Still doesn’t mean he’s not an evil git,” teased Ron.
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Throughout the rest of lunch, Hermione couldn't help but think about all the things that it could mean.

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"How are you doing?" Hermione asked Draco later that afternoon.

"Fine. Camilla came by earlier. She's going to go food shopping and get the flat all set."

"Good. I think you could be on your way tomorrow."

"She's also going to see what she can do to clean up the Manor. I'll pay her extra, of course."

"Of course." Hermione decided not to press Draco about going back to the Manor himself.

"I also apologized to her."

"Oh?"

"I do have a conscience, you know."

"I never said you didn't."

"But you think it."
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“No, I really don’t. Tell me why you wanted to apologize.”

“Because I nearly killed her, because I was going to leave her without a job.”

“What about your dying itself?”

“What?”

“Do you think it would’ve affected her?”

Draco paused. “She would’ve gotten over it.”

“How about Pansy, Blaise and your parents?”

“Ah, now you’re talking like a true Mind Healer.”

“You’re avoiding the question.”

“They’d get over it too,” Draco answered, sounding bitter.

“Maybe they’d get on with their lives, but it doesn’t mean they’d get over it. We often move on but still carry grief like that with us.”

Draco snorted.

“Do you think about Vincent Crabbe?”

“Sometimes.”

“Professor Snape?”

“Sometimes.”

“Are you over their deaths?”

Draco didn’t answer.

“They weren’t even your family. Imagine if you had lost your mother and father.”

“I have lost them.”

“Perhaps, but they are still alive. You still have the opportunity to change that if you want.”

Draco didn’t answer.

“I’d like to try the self-Legilimency again. I’d like for you to look at the other night. The night you set the Fiendfyre. Do you think you can do that?”

“Is that what stands between me and my wand?”

“Only do this if you’re ready.”

“I’m not ready,” he said plainly.

Hermione nodded. “That’s okay. We can try it some other time.”

“Am I stuck here?”

“No, I’m still going to recommend your release tomorrow. You’ll have to be monitored by the Auror department and you’ll need to meet with me daily. I’ll set up a standing ten a.m. appointment in my office here. Are you ready for that?”

“I’m ready.”

“Good. I’ll see you in the morning.”

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Part 2 of 2: Draco Gets the Message

Draco paced the length of his room over and over anxiously waiting for Hermione to show up. She hadn’t specified a time at the end of their morning session, only that she thought he was ready to go home and that she’d be back in the afternoon.

He showered, shaved and dressed. Camilla had brought him a clean set of robes and informed him that his flat was settled. She had stocked the pantry as well as packed and moved his personal items and
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clothing from his bedroom at the Manor.

Finally, at three o'clock Hermione showed up with Potter in tow.

"Good afternoon, Draco."

"Good afternoon," Draco replied and backed himself against the wall.

Potter just nodded. Apparently greetings and salutations weren't part of the Auror curriculum.

"How are you feeling?"

Draco was convinced that he was going to be sick of that question very soon. "I'm fine. I'm anxious to go home."

"Well then, I'll let you and Auror Potter get on with it."

He rolled his eyes at her formality. She handed him a flat, and non-descript silver coin. "What's this?"

"That's how to reach me in an emergency. Tap it twice with your wand and say your message to me. I'll get it right away. Keep it close."

"Clever."

Hermione blushed. "Do you have any other questions for me?"

“Umm, not that I can think of.”

“Well, good luck. I’ll see you tomorrow morning.”

“Thank you.”

“Bye. See you later, Harry.”

Potter smiled at Hermione and gave her a short wave goodbye. “Oh, wait. Ron has to work late and wants to do it next week. I think he already owled Ginny, Luna and Neville. There’s probably an owl waiting for you.”

“Oh, okay. I’ll see you tomorrow then.” She gave them both one last smile and left.

Potter turned to Draco and said, “So I guess that leaves you and me.”

“You can spare the bedside manner and just give me the facts. You’re an Auror not a Healer.”

“Fine,” Potter said, exasperated. He pulled out a long piece of parchment and quill from his robes and set them down on the tray table. “This is your official statement regarding the Fiendfyre and your consent for treatment and observation by the Ministry. You must keep all your appointments with Healer Granger-Weasley. She will file weekly status reports. You also need to consent to having a monitoring spell cast on your wand. It doesn’t monitor everything, only spells that could be considered dark or dangerous. You also need to consent to a vital signs monitoring spell. It will detect major changes in your breathing and heart rate as well as detect any significant blood loss. The spells will be bound to my wand and alert me. Read it carefully and initial and sign at all the marked places.”

Draco took his time reading and reviewing the document. After he was finished signing he said, “I bet you love this.”

“No, not really,” Potter said nonchalantly as he tucked the parchment into his robes.

“Come now. Auror and Death Eater. Gryffindor and Slytherin. Me and You. You don’t care?”

Harry laughed softly. “Yes. I’m hopelessly apathetic… about a lot of things really. Oh, I used to think about you after the trials, but to tell the truth you haven’t crossed my mind in years. That’s not to say I wouldn’t care if you died.”

“I’m touched.”

“It’s in the job description.”

“Auror Potter to the rescue.”

“More like to sit around on endless surveillance and file useless reports.”

“How glamorous!” Draco teased.

“Look, I know this sucks. Keep meeting with Hermione, work through whatever issues you’ve got and you’ll be rid of me and the Ministry.”

“Like you’ve worked through your issues?”

“This isn’t about me,” Harry said softly. He grabbed the signed parchment and turned to leave the room. “I need to turn this in and have it authorized so that I can pick up your wand from the evidence room. I’ll be back later to cast the monitoring spells and escort you home.”

Draco watched him leave without saying goodbye. When the door had shut behind him, Draco confessed to the empty room, “It’s always been about you.”

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It was a very long three hours before Potter returned. Draco’s stomach growled. He had declined dinner. He just wanted to get to his flat, eat something and crawl into bed. Unfortunately, Potter had to do all his fancy Auror spells. When he was finally done, he handed Draco his wand back.

“Your new wand is hazel, with dragon heartstring,” Potter noted.

“Yes.”

“It’s just very different from your old wand.”

“You would know. Out of curiosity, what happened to it?”

“I have it locked in my Gringotts vault. It’s not something that I need hanging around.”

“I don’t blame you.” Draco turned his wand over in his hands and felt it connect with his magic. It felt comfortable. He Summoned his cloak and was relieved not to have any problem. “Can we go now?”

“Sure. We have to walk down to the front entrance so you can sign out and then we can take the Floo there.”

“Can’t we Apparate?”
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“I suppose we can Apparate to the inside. You know, I really don’t understand why you’re living in a Muggle building.”

“They can fill a lot of books with what you_”

“Save the pithy banter, Malfoy. I don’t like this any more than you do.”

“And yet you’re still doing it. I’ve got so many spells on me right now, I don’t think that I can take a piss without you knowing.”

“Number one, it’s not my choice. Second, you should have thought of that before deciding to burn your house down.”

“It was my house. What should it matter to the Ministry if I want to burn it down?”

“With you in it?”

“Still my business.”

“But you could’ve hurt your housekeeper or the Aurors who came to save your precious Manor from that Fiendfyre.”

Draco had no reply to that.

“Look, I’m sorry. I don’t get why the Auror department has to monitor you. It should be left to the St. Mungo’s staff. I get cases like this all the time. There’s a dark curse detected. Aurors are sent to investigate and most of the time it’s just some experiment gone awry or some stupid domestic dispute.

We get stuck with the paperwork and follow-up. It makes no sense and it's not what I signed up for, but we're both stuck with it."

"Or rather, I'm stuck with you."

"Whatever, Malfoy. Let's just get you home."

It was after seven by the time they Apparated into Draco's flat. It was a plain, two-bedroom flat sparsely filled with furniture and bare walls. There was a fireplace in the living room which connected directly to an eat-in kitchen.

"Home sweet home," Draco sighed and hung his cloak.

"I need to do a quick check."

"By all means." Draco gestured to the hallway to the bedrooms and then headed to the kitchen to see what Camilla had left for him. He inspected the cupboards and the Muggle refrigerator. Most things needed to be cooked. He'd yet to use the Muggle stove. There was bread. He could always make toast with his wand.

Potter came into the kitchen and watched him. The git seemed to be reading his mind. "I did a walk-through this morning and must say that I was surprised to find no magic other than the Floo. You weren't exactly a Muggle lover."

"I'm still not."

"Then why did you buy this flat?"

“Long story. Let’s just say I come here for the quiet.”

“Do you cook?”

“Not in this kitchen.” Draco frowned at the loaf of bread in his hand.

“You’ve never cooked in this kitchen?”

“I’m used to the magic appliances at the Manor. I come here to read, relax, and usually bring some food from the Manor.”

“There’s a good pizza place nearby.”

“I wouldn’t know. I don’t go out.”

“You don’t go out?"

“Need a dictionary?”

Potter glared at him.

“I used to go out when I first bought the flat, but I couldn’t get comfortable among the Muggles so I stopped. I don’t go out.”

“No wonder. I live just a few streets over and I’ve never seen you around. Do you have any Muggle money?”

“Somewhere I had a few pounds tucked away.” Draco tried to remember where he'd put them.

“Never mind. Consider it a peace offering.” Potter made his way to the door. “I’ll be back in a little bit.”

“You’re buying me dinner?” asked Draco, completely gobsmacked.

“Well, I’m buying myself dinner too. I haven’t eaten since lunch and of course all the stupid bureaucratic red tape for your case took two hours longer to finalize than I anticipated.”

“That still doesn’t explain why you’re offering to have dinner with me.”

“I haven’t the slightest idea.”

“Perfect. I’ll pick out a cabernet. Looks like Camilla brought over a dozen or so bottles of wine for me.”

“What do you like on your pizza? You do know what pizza is?”

“I’ve had it in Italy.” Draco scowled. “Just cheese, please.”

After Potter had set out on his pizza quest, Draco opened a bottle of wine and let it breathe. He set the table with two place settings and wine glasses.

When Potter returned, they awkwardly sat down to a meal together. They ate silently for several minutes. Potter ate with his hands and Draco could feel his stare as he cut the pizza with a knife and fork.

“You could use your utensils. It’s what separates us from the apes.”

“Ha ha. It’s more fun this way.” Potter took a hearty sip of his wine. “The wine is good.”

“For the price I paid, it better be. So I have to ask. Do all your parolees get this fantastic personal service?”

“You’re not a parolee. You’re under protective monitoring, and no.”

“Am I your first suicide?” The situation was surreal already. Draco saw no harm in trying to figure out just what Potter’s motives were.

Potter paused a moment. “Second. No. You’re my first suicide attempt. I’ve had to investigate one suicide.”

“Hmmm.”

They continued to eat and Draco refilled their wine glasses. Potter still kept staring at him. It wasn’t an expression that Draco recognized Potter ever having looked at him with before. “Ask before you start banging your head on the wall like a house-elf.”

“Sorry, I have to admit that I’ve been thinking about you a lot these past few days.”

“I’m flattered,” Draco said coyly and then took a long sip of wine.

“I can’t imagine why you wanted to kill yourself.”

“Well, you’ve tried to kill me. Why did you want to do it?”

Potter stared at him a good ten seconds before he replied. “I wasn’t trying to kill you. I wanted to hurt you, yeah, but you were trying to hurt me too, and not for the first time.”

“I seem to remember taking a bit of a beating myself on the Hogwarts Express. Maybe it wasn’t you, but it was certainly on your behalf.”

“Look, Malfoy, we could probably sit here all night and tit for tat our school years. I’m a grown man now and so are you for that matter. What you did has me a bit rattled. Why do you think I’m here talking to you?”

“I haven’t the faintest clue.”

First taking a deep breath and running his hand through that untamable mop on his head, Potter made intense eye contact and asked again, “Why did you do it?”

Draco considered this for a moment. Granger, or whatever she wanted to be called these days, wanted to build trust, talk about meaningful events and find themes, but Potter— he came right at it head on. They had never been friends. They were always at odds. Even now, he was Auror Potter and Draco, well, he was a Malfoy.

“I was tired,” Draco finally answered, not seeing any point in prolonging the inquisition.

“Tired of what?”

“Everything. Living.”

“I get tired too…”

“But…”

“Exactly. But.”

And there it was, that esoteric thing that, if someone could map and explain it, they could save the world. Well, Potter had saved the world so maybe it was something else entirely. Draco took another bite of pizza and stared at Potter the entire time he chewed. After he swallowed, he took another sip of wine before responding, “I guess some forms of tired are different than others.”

Oddly, Potter seemed to accept this answer and started to eat his pizza again.

“Now it’s my turn.”

“Your turn to what?”

“To ask you a highly personal question.”

“Oh. I guess.” Potter looked horribly uncomfortable.

Draco thought for a moment. It had been years since he’d seen Potter. Sure he thought about him, but seeing him now and actually talking face to face brought back a deluge of old memories and packed-away thoughts.

“Right after my trial, you said something to my mother. I couldn’t hear it.”

“You never asked her?” Potter asked, somewhat mystified.

“No, I figured if she wanted me to know, she would’ve told me.”

Potter studied him carefully as if he didn’t understand what could possibly be secretive about what he said. “I told her we were even.”

“I don’t get it. Even for what?”

Again Potter seemed confused. “She never told you?”

“What?” Draco asked, becoming agitated.

“In the forest with Voldemort?”

Draco cringed. “Must you say his name?”

“Yes, I must. She didn’t tell you?”

“That’s what I said.”

“Oh.” Potter resorted to running his hand through his hair again as some sort of thinking technique. “It was right after Voldemort had cast the Killing Curse on me. Look, this isn’t well known, but I always assumed both your parents knew so you must have known.”

“Just get on with it.”

“I had been knocked out. He sent your mother to check if I was dead. She leaned over me and asked me if you were alive.”

“The Dark Lord was watching?”

“Yes, but a little ways away and she was hovering over me and sort of breathed it. So I breathed back 'yes'. And that’s when she did it.”

“Did what?” Draco was on the edge of his seat.

“Lied to him. She told him that I was dead.”

Draco sat stunned. He drained the rest of his wine glass and dared to look back at Potter.

“I don’t understand,” Draco said when he finally found his voice.

“Your mother loved you. She wanted you to live and was willing to sacrifice her life for yours. I know a little something about that.”

“I never knew.”

“Your father too.”

“What about my father?”

“I overheard him with Voldemort. Voldemort wanted him to fetch Snape. Your father tried everything

he could to get him to reconsider his plans for the attack at Hogwarts that day. He knew you were in the castle. He wanted to save you."

Seemingly the world had stopped on its axis and began to turn in the reverse direction. Draco was shocked to the marrow and had no words to express the strange confusion in which he seemed to be drowning.

Potter looked at him and smiled. "Think about that the next time you're tired."

"I… I…"

"Yeah."

"Yeah."

Potter stood and Summoned his cloak. "I should go."

"Sure, just light-up a room and leave." It sounded like a bad pick up line, but at least it broke the tension.

"You have a good night."

"Thanks, you too." The oddest thing was that he meant it. "And thanks for dinner."

"No problem."

After Potter had gone, Draco finished one more glass of wine and levitated the dishes to the sink. He changed into pyjamas and crawled under the covers. For the first time in years, he fell right to sleep.

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Draco walked into the waiting room outside Hermione's office at exactly one minute to ten. It was a small room, tastefully decorated. He was about to sit on the small couch when the door to Hermione's office opened and she emerged with a smile.

"Good morning. Right on time."

"I'm nothing if not punctual."

"Come on in. Would you like a cup of tea?"

"That would be lovely."

She had a teapot and two teacups already set out on a tray. She poured out and Draco declined milk and sugar.

"So," she began after a quick sip of tea, "how was your first night?"

"Odd."

She raised her eyebrow and waited for him to continue.

"Potter stayed and we had a pizza together."
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She seemed genuinely surprised.

“I think he was just trying to make himself feel better about all the monitoring spells.”

She laughed at that. “Forgive me. I’m still trying to envision you and Harry hanging out.”

“We weren’t hanging out. We shared a meal and some very strange and uncomfortable conversation.”

“About what?”

“About me. About him. About my mother telling the Dark Lord that he was dead when he wasn’t.”

“Not exactly small talk.”

“No. I suppose we have a lot of unfinished business.”

“So how do you think the conversation went?”

“It was difficult. I never knew that about my mother.”

“Really?” She was surprised again.

“Really.”

“How did it make you feel?”

“Confused.”

“Anything else?”

“Like perhaps I don’t understand my parents.”

“Are you going to tell them about what happened at the Manor?”

“I don’t think I’m ready for that yet.”

“So what else did you and Harry talk about?”

“He wanted to know why I tried to kill myself.”

“Wow.” She paused and seemed to be collecting her thoughts. “I can’t believe he did that. What did you say?”

He could see her edge forward on her seat hoping that Potter did all her work for her.

“I told him that I was tired.”

She studied him thoughtfully.

Draco smiled at her and then added, “You didn’t think I was going to pour my soul out to him, did you?”

“Not sure. You two certainly have a history.”

“We’ve hardly ever talked before last night.”

“But you were always crossing paths. In some ways I think that Harry Potter would not be the same person without Draco Malfoy and I think the reverse is true of you.”

Draco snorted at that idea.

“So other than Harry’s impromptu visit, how was your first night home?”

“Good, I guess. I slept. Burnt myself some toast for breakfast.”

She smiled at that idea. “I’d like to talk more about your mind frame. I’m concerned about your isolation as well as your self esteem.”

“Whatever. You’re the Healer.”

“I’d like for you to talk about yourself, things that you like about yourself.”

“I like myself fine.”

“All right. Tell me five things that you like about yourself.”

“Is this a test?”

“No. Consider it a learning exercise.”

“Okay. I’m rich and I have great hair.”

“That’s two.”

“This is stupid.”

“Only if you decide to stick to the superficial.”

“I like Camilla.”

“That’s Camilla,” Hermione replied with a serious look.

“I like that I’m nice to Camilla.”

“That’s a bit more meaningful.”

“I like that I like Pansy.”

“You’ve been friends with her for over fifteen years; I bet you can do a little better than that.”

“Okay. I like that I’ve maintained our friendship for fifteen years.”

“That’s four. What else?”

“There is nothing else,” Draco replied in challenge.

“I’m sure there is. You just have to dig a little deeper.”

“Nothing.”

“All right, I’ll give you one. I like that you’re here and that you’re talking to me. It takes an incredible amount of inner strength to do what you’re doing, especially with me, someone who you have every right not to trust, but here you are.”

Draco had not prepared himself for that.

They spent the rest of the session talking about the various relationships he'd maintained over the years, including his parents. By the time he got home, he was exhausted. Far too exhausted to deal with Pansy, but there she was, sitting in his living room when he Apparated in.

“There you are,” she said in a way that only Pansy could for someone sitting uninvited in someone else’s home. She had him pulled into a fierce hug in seconds. “Where were you?”

“Hello to you too. I was at my Ministry required therapy session.”

“Oh.”

“Oh.”

“How about some tea?”

“You offering?”

She snorted at him. “Arse. Fine, I’ll make it.”

He followed her into the kitchen.

Pansy looked around for the teapot and tutted at him. “At least now I know why you never invited me here. It’s horrible. Empty walls. Empty everything really.”

“I don’t come here much.”

“Well you can’t stay here like this. I’ll send an owl to Camilla to bring some things over from the Manor.”

“If they survived.”

“No need to be so macabre with me.” She waved her wand and in addition to making tea, she Transfigured the kitchen curtains and changed the color of the walls and the hardware on the cabinets. “I’ll tackle the other rooms after we have our tea.”

“I don’t remember hiring you as my decorator.”

“Oh, Draco, darling, we’re friends. You don’t have to pay me,” she replied with a devilish smirk, then set the tea on the table.

Pansy’s company turned out to be enjoyable if not useful. She even fixed some sandwiches for lunch and

the flat certainly looked a great deal better by the time she left. Camilla came over that afternoon with a few paintings and tapestries from the Manor. Draco immediately spotted them as Pansy's favorites.

Draco asked Camilla about the stove, but coming from a long pureblood line herself, she had no idea how it worked. He asked her to come by for an hour or two in the afternoons, but there really was no need for her to stick around all day considering how small the flat was. She seemed to think that would work out fine since it would take a few weeks to get things sorted at the Manor. Draco wasn't sure how he felt about that.

He settled in with a fire and the Daily Prophet and no idea what to do about dinner when there was a knock at the door. Surprising, but not really surprising— it was Potter.

The Savior of the Wizarding World and Senior Auror stood sheepishly in the doorway. "I thought I'd come and check up on you."

"I thought it was supposed to be a weekly thing."

"This visit's unofficial."

"Unofficial?"

"I was worried about you. It felt weird the way I left last night."

"Do you know how to use a Muggle stove?"

"Huh?"

"Do you… know how… to use… a… Muggle stove?"

“Oh. Yeah.”

“Fine, you can come in, but you have to show me how the bloody thing works.”

Potter did indeed know how to use the stove. He even cooked a couple of cheese omelets for dinner. Draco rummaged through the refrigerator and cut up some fresh fruit to go with it.

“The flat looks completely different,” Potter said in between mouthfuls.

“Pansy was here.”

“Ah,” he replied as if that explained everything.

“I appreciate the dinner, but I have to ask, why are you here, Potter?”

“Like I said, I was worried.”

“Why do you care?”

“Dunno, just do. I guess some of it is that we both went through a lot of things when we were younger. I guess I relate to what you’re going through.”

“Because we fly for the same team?”

Potter blushed. Draco made a mental note of how easy it was to do.

“No. I don’t think that has anything to do with it. I was thinking more along the lines of going through difficult times during the war.”

“We were on opposite sides.”

“Doesn’t mean that I think you had an easy time of it.”

“I’m somewhat stunned by this conversation.”

“Why?”

“I didn’t think you’d ever learn humility, never mind in eight years.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“It was meant as one.”

Potter didn’t overstay his welcome and left after dinner. Although that still didn’t help keep the Chosen One out of Draco’s thoughts for the rest of the evening. For the first time that he could remember, Draco thought of Potter as attractive, very attractive. The situation was unnerving.

Draco took a hot shower before bed and wanked for the first time in months. He got off on the image of Potter cooking eggs of all the ludicrous things. Eggs? He envisioned pressing himself against Potter’s back as he cracked eggs into the pan. Draco came so hard that he had to lean against the shower wall for support.

“Fuck,” he whispered to himself. “Fuck.”

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Draco decided that he was most definitely not going to mention last night’s dinner with Potter to Hermione and certainly not its aftermath.

Instead, Hermione brought up his denied application to the Department of Mysteries and wanted to know how that made him feel.

“Outcast.”

“Why did you apply?”

“I wanted to explore the nature of the way we travel by magical means. It’s a pet interest of mine. When I was rejected, I began to do research on my own.”

“Interesting. What did you study?”

“I began to detail and contrast the methods in which we move through time and space: with Apparition the wizard’s magic moves to place they envision; with Portkeys we bend time and space— well, time to a minimal degree; while with time turners we bend time to a larger degree, and space as well, and the wizard moves through that bend.”

“Fascinating. I’d love to see your notes some time.”

“I’d have to check the Manor and see if they’re still there.”
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“You should do that.”

Draco thought about the implications of that for a moment before he continued. “I looked at other methods of moving through time and space or perhaps combining them.”

“Do you want to go back in time? Do you want to change something that happened?” She seemed rather excited by that prospect.

“No, I understand why I can’t do that. There’s too much uncertainty in it. That's why Time-Turners only work within a small time frame. I thought about not a person traveling back in time, but sending an object or a message.”

“A message?”

“Yes, and not one that would alter history like ‘Stay away from somewhere or something’ but a message of hope.”

“Is that what you’d send yourself?”

“Maybe.”

“What would you say?”

Draco averted his eyes from Hermione and stared vacantly at the third row up of books. “Don’t give up.”

“Did you give up, Draco?”

Draco could feel her eyes on him, boring into his skin. Still he couldn't look at her. He could feel it coming. His throat constricted. The tears began to well along the bottom of his eyes. He couldn't do this. He wouldn't.

"Draco?" she asked softly.

He couldn't reply. He bit his bottom lip and shut his eyes. He could feel the tears slipping down the front of his cheeks.

"Draco," she practically whispered. "We all experience despair and loss. Many of us give in to it. It's very powerful and it's so easy to get sucked under. It's okay to admit it, to accept our weaknesses and find our strengths."

Draco shook his head.

"Would you like to try the self-Legilimency again? Look at what happened the day you set the Fiendfyre at the Manor from another perspective."

"I can't," Draco choked out with his eyes still squeezed tightly shut.

"I think you're ready."

"Not yet."

She let him go early, but asked him to consider going to the Manor. Perhaps he could go with Pansy or Camilla for support. She also asked him to think about the self-Legilimency. He needed to confront his actions and she thought that it was the safest way to do it.

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Over the next few days, Draco fell into a routine. He met with Hermione in the morning, had lunch with Pansy, and chatted small talk with Camilla in the afternoons. Hermione gave him a metronome and urged him to try the self-Legilimency techniques to help him sleep. She was adamant about avoiding potions for the time being.

Potter came late one evening two days later. They shared a bottle of wine and talked about their early years at Hogwarts.

The days turned into a week. Draco kept meeting with Hermione while Harry, as he insisted he be called now, kept dropping by at strange hours looking bored. When Harry showed up the following Saturday afternoon, Draco asked him if he would accompany him to the Manor.

Draco took in the damage. He could tell that Camilla had been working to clean things up and salvage what she could. Still there were burnt portraits and scorched walls. The chandelier that used to shine so bright in the entrance hall was a congealed contorted ball of brass. Various painting and tapestries hung in a state of partial or total disrepair. He stood and breathed it all in. This was the physical evidence of his lack of will power or at least will to live. Suddenly, there was a hand on his shoulder. He had momentarily forgotten that Potter – Harry – was there.

His study was in good shape. Only the outer door was scorched. Draco mentally thanked himself for shutting the thick mahogany door that night. He gathered up several books and stacks of his notes, a few quills, some ink, and removed the Morez clock from the wall.

“I don’t think I want to see anymore right now,” Draco told Harry.

Harry nodded and helped him shrink and carry the selected items back to his flat.

After the books were put away and the clock safely hung, Harry offered to go out and pick up some
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Chinese take-away.

“I think I’d like to eat out, if that’s all right?”

“Sounds like a plan.” Harry smiled and his eyes shone bright.

Draco was fairly certain that there was no way, self-Legilimency or otherwise, he’d get to bed without a good wank.

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The following Wednesday, Draco brought in his notes to show Hermione.

“These are really good,” she said, looking over the notes. “Your research could be really important. It could change the way wizards look at time travel. You should be proud.”

“Not that anyone will ever see it.”

“I’ve seen it.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Yes, and I think others will see it eventually, if you keep working at it. Are you going to work on it again?”

“I started a few days ago, after I found my notes at the Manor.”
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“How’s it going?”

“It’s getting there,” Draco replied and couldn’t stop the smile that formed on his lips.

“That’s great.” Hermione put the notes neatly aside on her desk and picked up a quill. “I’d like to change the subject and talk about your visit to the Manor.”

“All right.” Draco steeled himself.

“Can you tell me about it?”

“Not much to tell. I surveyed the damage, found out the library had been spared, then Harry and I went for Chinese food.”

Her jaw open slightly, Hermione stared at him. He had rendered her speechless. If not for the barrage of questions he knew was coming next, he would have been happier about the event.

“You went with Harry?”

“Yes. I told you that he had come by a few more times than was necessary per the Auror monitoring code of conduct.”

“I think you may have left out a few of the details.”

“We’ve developed an odd friendship of sorts.”

“Draco, are you interested in Harry?”

“Define interested.”

“In a romantic way?”

“I didn’t realize that this was part of my therapy.”

“Everything is a part of your therapy.”

“I find myself attracted to him, but I doubt anything will ever come of it.”

“Why not?”

“Because I highly doubt he feels the same way. I’m just the latest in a long line of things that Harry Potter needs to save. Scratch that. I think I’ve been on that list before. I’ve just moved back to the top.”

“What if it was more than that?”

“There is no more than that.”

Harry had mentioned that he was having dinner with Ron and Hermione that evening. Draco would’ve given anything to borrow Harry’s Invisibility Cloak and listen in on that conversation. He could just picture the yelling and reprimands and The Weasel tuning twelve shades of red. Although he could see their point, it wasn’t exactly good form to be socializing with your old ex-Death Eater, school nemesis, and subject of your current Auror case.

That night in his bed, Draco found himself worrying about what Hermione might really say to Harry. Would she tell him to stay away? Maybe spending time with Potter was a bad idea, so why did it feel so comfortable? Draco felt his anxiety build and pulled out the metronome and tried to put Harry Potter out of his mind. Truth be told, the self-Legilimency was working out very well in helping him sleep at night. Draco was rather encouraged by it and had charmed the metronome to stop after twenty minutes. He was almost always asleep before it stopped.

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Several 'no Harry' nights later, Draco was convinced that Hermione must have said something. He found himself disappointed in a way that he wouldn't have expected.

Still it was a good day. Hermione agreed to reduce their sessions to three days a week, but was emphatic about his using the coin to contact her if he felt like doing anything drastic. Draco could tell that she wanted him to talk about his suicide attempt, but he simply wasn't ready. He wondered if he ever would be.

Draco was getting used to the flat and the Muggle kitchen in particular. He was chopping onions to sauté when he butchered his finger with the knife. He wrapped it in a tea towel and ran to his bedroom to get his wand. Strangely, he found Harry standing there, wearing sweatpants, a t-shirt and Muggle trainers, panting, looking panic stricken and wand at the ready. The crack of his Apparition still lingered in the air as they stared at each other in confusion.

"What are you doing here?" Draco asked, holding his bloodied hand in the towel.

Harry gestured to his hand. "I got an alarm."

Draco laughed. He couldn't help it. "I cut my finger chopping onions. I was just coming in here to get my wand."

"Here," Harry said softly and held out his free hand, "let me do it."
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Draco unwrapped his hand and placed it in Harry's. A quick wave of the wand, a murmured spell and it was healed. Only Harry still held onto him at the wrist looking at him with such intensity that it made Draco's hair stand up on the back of his neck.

"I think you need to decrease the sensitivity of that spell," Draco whispered and tried to pull his hand away.

"I'd worry too much," Harry replied as he tucked his wand into his pocket and then pulled Draco closer.

Harry raised his other hand to Draco's face and cradled his jaw, his thumb stroking the skin of his cheek with the barest caress.

Draco shivered and averted his eyes.

"Look at me," Harry pleaded.

Shaking his head, Draco tried to pull away only to have Harry pull him closer and wrap the arm that was holding his wrist around his back. Harry leaned forward and ghosted a kiss over Draco's lips. Harry then whispered over them, "Don't tell me you don't want this."

"This is a colossally bad idea."

Keeping a hand on Draco's cheek, Harry nodded, then began kissing his neck.

"Ahh," Draco gasped. "Too much. Too much."

Harry rested his forehead against Draco's neck. "What's too much?"

Draco tried again to pull away and this time Harry let him. "I can't do this."

"Why not? You feel it too. I know you do."

"You don't really want me. You want to save me. I'm just another_"

"You're not another anything. Draco." Harry caught his gaze and lowered his voice. "I want you. I didn't know how I could possibly stay away. You have no idea how scared I was when that alarm went off."

Draco tried to process all the information only his erection wasn't letting him get past the 'I want you' part.

"Come here," Harry said, low and throaty, sounding like he might die if he didn't get his way.

Draco didn't need that on his conscience. He took the three steps forward into Harry's open arms and then they were kissing. It was warm, wet and urgent and made Draco's toes tingle. Harry's hands roamed and touched and caressed and then finally found their way to Draco's buttons.

"Oh fuck," Draco moaned as Harry got his shirt open and pressed a kiss to his chest. Draco shivered and felt himself being nudged backwards to the bed. "I… I…" he stuttered.

"What?" asked Harry, as he guided Draco onto the bed.

Draco bit his bottom lip and shook his head.

Harry trailed his fingertips down the center of Draco's chest and to his stomach.

"What?" Harry asked again as Draco shivered and gasped beside him.

"It's like my skin is starved. It's been so long, so, so long."

Harry kissed him again and toed off his shoes. He helped Draco scoot up so his head was on the pillows before he pulled his own shirt over his head, taking his glasses with it. Harry found his way between Draco's knees and then slowly lowered his bare chest against Draco's, hot skin against hot skin.

"Ahhh," Draco cried out.

Harry kissed him again. This time it was soft and exploratory, and Draco succumbed to it while his skin drank in every sensation of being touched and caressed.

"How long has it been?" Harry whispered.

"Years," Draco choked out in between heavy breaths.

Harry pulled himself up to his knees and studied him thoughtfully. "No one's touched you?"

Draco shook his head and could feel the flush of embarrassment creeping up his neck. "No, not like this."

"I know what that's like." Smiling, Harry reached his hand out and Draco took it. He tugged Draco up to his knees and turned him around. Harry pulled Draco's back tight against his chest and wrapped his arms tight around him. "Your skin's on fire, like a thousand needles, like your body has never felt anything before, and any touch could send you over the edge."

“Oh sweet Merlin,” Draco cried as Harry’s hands caressed his arms, chest, neck and pretty much anywhere within reach.

“Let me touch you.” Harry purred against his neck and continued to explore Draco’s upper body. “Lift your hands up and around my neck.”

Tentatively, Draco raised his hands over his head, and Harry helped to guide them behind his neck, where Draco then clasped them tightly, holding on for dear life.

Harry’s fingers softly stroked down the length of Draco’s inner arms from his wrists to his armpits and then over his chest. Draco bucked his hips and moaned louder and louder.

“Stay just like this,” Harry whispered against his ear. “Want you just like this. Just you. This is for you.” Harry continued to stroke and caress his arms, neck, chest, and stomach, his touch so reverent that Draco thought he might come just from that. Finally, Harry dipped down into the waistband of his pants and unbuttoned the top of his trousers.

“Can I?” Harry asked so politely when Draco would have ripped his own pants to shreds to get them off.

“Yes. Fuck. Hurry.”

Harry licked Draco’s neck while he unzipped his trousers and then slid them along with his boxers down to his knees. Draco’s cock bobbed free and the release of the pressure was almost enough for him to come right then.

“Please, so close,” Draco hissed as he stretched his body and clasped his hands as tight as humanly possible behind Harry’s neck.

“Kiss me,” whispered Harry.

Draco turned his head to the side and in an instant his mouth was attacked while Harry’s hand found his cock. There was nothing for it. Draco thrust up violently into that hand; one, two, three times and then he came hard while Harry sucked in every last whimper and moan that he gave. Harry held him tight and rocked him through the aftershocks. When it was over, Harry spun him around in his arms, pulled him chest to chest and kissed him hard and rough, and Draco was certain that he had never been kissed like that before.

Harry lowered him to the bed, removed the remainder of Draco’s clothes and then his own before stretching out beside him. More kissing followed. So much more that Draco was dizzy and could only moan when Harry pulled him onto his side to face him. Harry’s cock was slick with pre-come or perhaps Draco’s own come and it slid perfectly against Draco’s hip. Harry pulled him closer and frotted against him, gasping and moaning in sheer desperation.

“Fuck, what you do to me,” Harry cried out just before he came. His body shuddered its release and then he collapsed in a sweaty heap against Draco’s shoulder.

They rested silently for a few minutes before Draco said, “I haven’t had dinner yet.”

Harry kissed him again. “Me neither.”

They cooked together, ate together and then crawled back into bed together.

In the morning, Draco awoke in a bed that smelled like Harry and a note carefully placed beside him on the pillow.

Draco,

I had an early meeting and didn’t want to wake you. I’ll see you tonight.

Harry

It was a powerful little missive that said so much in such few words.

Harry did return that night and the next. Draco was lost in some sort of dream where the object of your affection wants to wait on you hand and foot and spoil you. They agreed not to talk about it, but just go with it. Draco was pretty sure he would go anywhere, anytime, anyplace with Harry. Besides, they were both aware of the absurdity of it as well as all the reasons against them.

It was Harry who stated definitively, “I think we both deserve a little happiness.”

Draco resisted the temptation to Summon his dictionary and show Harry the definition of little.

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“Why me?” Draco asked. It had been on his mind since that first morning after and he finally got up the courage to ask it.

“What do you mean?”

“What I mean is… you could have anyone, why me?”

“Because you see me as Harry Potter, the person, not the name. The rest of the hype never meant anything to you.”

“Your friends do that too.”
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“Unfortunately they’re all either female or male and straight, and even if they weren’t, I still don’t think I’d be attracted to them. I’m attracted to you, very attracted.” Harry pushed his body closer to Draco’s for emphasis. “I like your eyes and your wit. I like that you have only the finest gourmet ingredients in your kitchen. I like that you gave ten thousand Galleons to Hogwarts even when they wouldn’t publicly acknowledge your donation. I like that you tried to apply for a position at the Ministry even after they turned you down once before. I like your body and the smell of you.” Harry dipped his head into the curve of Draco’s neck and sniffed. “I like the fact that you know nothing about Muggle life and yet here you are in this flat. I like that_”

“Bedroom now.” It came out squeakier and far less commanding than Draco would have liked, but it did the job.

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Early morning of his next appointment with Hermione, Draco was reading at the kitchen table. Harry entered the room freshly showered, the smell of shampoo in the air as he tried to read over Draco’s shoulder.

“Is that Arithmancy?” asked Harry.

“A form of it.”

“What are you doing?”

Draco tilted his head back to meet Harry’s gaze. “I’m trying to detect patterns in travel spells and the way they align or intersect with time and space.”

“Are you sure you’ve never seen Muggle sci-fi movies?”
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Draco diverted his attention back to his book. “Quite positive.”

When Harry continued to look over his shoulder, Draco asked, “Don’t you have some evil-doers to go stalk and apprehend?”

“More like paperwork work to fill out and oversight meetings.”

“Isn’t some of that paperwork mine?”

“No, but I can take a hint.” Harry gave Draco a quick kiss on the lips. “I’ll see you later?”

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“I’m sleeping with Harry,” Draco blurted out the moment he took his seat.

Hermione looked stupefied.

“I guess he didn’t tell you.”

“No, he didn’t. Why don’t you tell me about it.”

“I cut my finger chopping onions. He came to the rescue. I swooned in his arms.”

“You sound like a Celestina Warbeck song.”
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“I guess I’m not exactly comfortable discussing my sex life.”

“You can leave out the sex, but I would like to know the rest of it and how you feel about it.”

“And maybe you’ll pass Harry a note in Potions?”

“Draco, I’ll admit my objectivity could be slightly compromised by my relationship with Harry, probably by my relationship to both of you; however, I am trying to treat you for a serious depression and suicide attempt. I think we need to talk about this.”

“Always back to the suicide.”

“Yes. It does come back to that. Typically, I advise depressed patients against embarking on any new life event that could be stressful: new job, new home, and new romance. You’re working with a lot of volatile emotions and throwing a new person into the mix can make things more difficult.”

“Are you telling me to stay away from Harry?”

Hermione sighed. “No, not at all. What I am saying is that your being involved could present some serious issues and I think you should try and work through them. On the other hand, you could be very good for each other.”

Draco relented and spent the session discussing his newfound relationship with Harry. He was startled when the buzzer that ended the session went off. Time had literally flown.

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When Harry arrived at Draco’s flat that evening, he looked tired and weary.
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“Everything all right?”

“Yeah, just a long day.” Harry collapsed on the sofa and Draco handed him a glass of white wine. “Thanks.”

With a glass of his own, Draco settled down next to him.

“I had lunch with Hermione.”

“Oh?”

“She, of course, couldn’t say anything, so she just stared at me until I had to give in and tell her about us.”

“Ah. Well you are probably breaking at least a dozen Ministry regulations regarding professional conduct and all that rot.”

“I never really cared much for the rules. Hermione knows when to bend a rule as well.”

“Hard to believe.”

Harry smiled wistfully. “I think she’s worried.”

“Oh.”

“I’m not.” Harry leaned forward and kissed Draco deeply. He tasted of the wine and Floo powder, an

odd combination, but Draco didn't mind.

That night Draco let Harry fuck him. It was raw and desperate and they bled emotions onto sheets in a way that Draco never knew possible. As a lover, Harry was as conscientious as he was demanding. He insisted Draco come first. So he did, while screaming Harry's name and coating their stomachs with his come. Draco fell asleep sticky, sated and wondering how he had lived without this for so long, yet terrified that it could never last.

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The following week, Hermione brought up his birthday. "It's next week, right?"

Draco nodded.

"Sometimes birthdays can be a tricky time of year."

"I know. I've had some bad ones."

"What do you think about this year's?"

"I think I'll have to wait and see."

"That sounds prudent." She scratched a quick note in his file. "Have you had any suicidal thoughts recently?"

"You keep coming back to that."
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“We haven’t really talked about it. Don’t get me wrong, Draco. I think you’re doing well, very well. You’ve worked through a lot of issues here, but I think you need to stop avoiding the main issue so that you can move on.”

“Okay,” he replied softly.

Once Draco was comfortably under the spells, Hermione took him in his mind to the day of the Fiendfyre just a few short weeks ago.

“Where are you?” she asked, her voice delicate and soothing.

“I’m in my study.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m looking at the clock. It’s a Malfoy family heirloom. It’s enchanted to chime whenever a new Malfoy is born, no matter where in the world.”

“Is it chiming?”

“No. I’ve never heard it chime. I’m thinking I never will.”

“What else are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking of the last time I saw my parents. It was years earlier just before they left for France. They looked sad yet resolute. They didn’t think there was anything left in Britain for them.”

“What did you think?”

“I was left in Britain.”

“Then what happened?”

“I put out the fire, left the room and locked the door behind me. Now I’m walking to the front entry. I check that the door is locked and the wards are set.”

“What are you feeling?”

“I’m feeling so tired.”

“Tired?”

“Tired of life, tired of being alone, the closed doors, the dirty stares. I’m thinking that nothing I do will ever matter and that I will die in this enormous house full of a mountain of family heirlooms alone,” Draco said in a strained voice.

“And?”

“And I want it to be over already. I remember Crabbe and the Fiendfyre. It was over for him pretty quickly. I figure I can die and take it all with me. There’s no point in leaving anything behind.” Tears dripped from Draco’s closed eyes.

“Then?”

“I set the Fiendfyre and immediately Apparate to my bedroom. I take my Sleeping Potion and lie down on the bed.”

“Then what?”

“It’s quiet, very quiet. I listen to the silence, if you can really do such a thing. I close my eyes and remember the Fiendfyre at Hogwarts. I remember Harry diving for me on his broom. I’m holding on tight, so tight. The flames are hot and the sound of the Fiendfyre is deafening. He’s diving down, down towards the flames. The door is the other way. I’m going to die.”

“Then?”

“I open my eyes and I’m in St. Mungo’s.”

“All right, Draco. You did very well. I’m going to end the spell and we can talk about this.”

Once Draco was fully awake, Hermione handed him a tissue so he could dry his eyes.

“Are you okay?” asked Hermione.

Draco nodded and tried to keep from crying. He could feel the anxiety as if it were some measurable thing like temperature or acid level.

“What do you think?” she gently prodded.

“I thought I didn’t have much worth living for.”

“Do you think that’s true?”

“I don’t know,” he choked out. It was coming. He could feel it. There was nothing he could do to stop it.

“What about your research? Your friends? Your family?”

“Maybe,” he whispered.

“How about you?”

“Me? What?” He could barely breathe.

“Do you think that you can live for yourself?”

“Maybe. I don’t know.” The tears came again and he began to sob. “I don’t know.”

Draco buried his face in his hands and cried. He cried for everything he had lost and for all the things he could never have. He cried for the things he didn’t understand. Most importantly, he wept for how close he came to destroying everything.

After a minute, he felt a warm hand on his shoulder. Draco hadn’t noticed Hermione get up and walk over to him. She handed him another tissue.

“It’s okay, Draco; let it out.”

He cried for several more minutes, then collected himself. Hermione handed him a glass of water and affectionately put an arm around his back.

“Okay?”

Draco nodded.

“You ready to continue?”

“I have to do more of this?” He looked up to see her smiling at him.

“Almost done. You can do it.”

Draco took a deep cleansing breath and blew it out. “Okay.”

Hermione took up her chair again. “Tell me something worth living for.”

“Harry.”

“Yes, Harry has that effect on people.”

“I’ll thank you not to minimize what’s going on between us,” Draco snapped, although he was uncertain as to why he was so angry. He had been with Harry barely a week.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it that way. He is a strong figure, but I do understand that you’ve been intimate with him in a way that few have known him.”

“You have.”

“I haven’t been sexually intimate, but yes, I probably know Harry better than anyone.”

“Am I crazy for wanting him? Wanting him to want me? Thinking that we could have any semblance of a real relationship? I’ve never had a real relationship.”

“You’re not crazy, but as to whether you two can have a relationship, well, that’s for the two of you to work out. Draco, you have to want to live for you, first, and want to make Harry a part of that life, second.”

She was right, of course.

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Draco was so worn out from the day’s session that he fell asleep on the couch shortly after he came home. Harry awakened him in the middle of the afternoon.

Sitting up and rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Draco asked, “What are you doing here so early?”

“I quit the Ministry.”

“You what?”

“I am now Harry James Potter, private citizen.”

“You can’t.”
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“I did. Let’s go out and celebrate.”

“You can’t be serious!”

Harry plopped himself next to Draco. “I am. For the first time in years, I’m doing what I want and I feel great about it. And I have you to thank for it.”

“Me?” Draco asked incredulously.

“You gave me a new perspective. I’ve wanted to do this for years, but didn’t think that I could. Life is too short to be unhappy.”

“Harry, you can’t do this. People are going to think I’ve got a spell over you. They’re going to think I’ve…I have no idea, but they’ll think something up.”

“I don’t care. Let’s go somewhere. Travel. See the world. Come with me?”

“You’re mad.”

“Mad for you,” Harry practically growled it as he pulled Draco into an embrace.

“They’ll blame me for your leaving.”

“I told you, I don’t care.”

“I do.” Draco pulled away and got to his feet.

“What’s the problem? Draco?”

Draco felt the tears welling in his eyes. “Too much,” he rasped. First grabbing his wand from the coffee table, he Apparated to his bedroom at the Manor.

He was cold and his entire body was shaking. He sat on the edge of his bed and placed his wand on his nightstand. Then he noticed it. It was a folded piece of parchment. He didn’t remember it being there the night he set the Fiendfyre. He read the outside.

To DM from DM

It was in his own handwriting. He was certain of it. His heart pounding wildly in his chest, he picked it up. As he unfolded it, he could barely hold it straight in his trembling hands. There were three words:

Don’t give up.

The parchment fluttered to the floor. Falling to his knees after it, Draco buried his face in his hands and cried.

A few minutes later, Draco heard the crack of Apparition outside his bedroom door. He quickly seized his wand and cast the strongest locking spell he could think of. Banging immediately followed.

“Draco, let me in!” It was Harry, of course.

Draco stared at the door and hoped his spell would hold.

A sealed piece of parchment was slid through the gap under the door.

“This appeared just after you left.”

To DM from DM

“What is it?” Harry asked gently. “Draco, please, let me in.”

Panic set in. Everything seemed to be in slow motion as he picked up the parchment and broke the seal.

Let him in.

Instinctively, Draco knew that he hadn’t meant into the room. Draco tried to imagine what his life would become if he walked away from this, from Harry. His fears began to wage war inside his head, but then something clicked. He had done it. Success. He could taste it on his tongue. Inherently, he also knew that he should really listen to his future self. That is what he had wanted, after all.

Draco wiped his eyes and unlocked the door. In seconds, Harry was sitting next to him on the floor. Strong arms wrapped around his body. A firm kiss was placed against his temple.

And then there were such kind words. “You don’t have to run from me. I want you. I’m falling in love with you. Don’t run from me.”

Bereft of words, Draco could only nod. Harry lifted his chin and met his gaze. The next thing he knew Harry’s mouth was covering his. It was warm and wet and meant five thousand things all at once. In that moment, Draco decided that he could get used to kissing Harry Potter. The man had a firm jaw and soft lips and his hands roamed over his skin and through his hair. So it meant that Harry had saved him yet again. He could live with that if it meant kisses like these and the sex that he was damn well going to make sure they got around to in the next ten minutes.

Harry pulled back just a few inches and smiled at him as if reading his mind. Draco watched as Harry looked down at the two notes on the floor and read them.

“What are those?” Harry asked in that completely clueless tone that made Draco laugh in his head: Savior-of-the-Wizarding-World and Powerful Auror indeed.

“Just talking to myself,” Draco replied casually, then leaned in to kiss Harry again.

The End

If you enjoyed this story and would like to comment click here : Insane Journal Getting There Comment Post (unlocked)

Want to email me? rickey_a@sbcglobal.net

Ficlets in this universe (posted on my Insane Journal):

Little Missives Short sequel/epilogue (May 2008)

Canals Ficlet for Alaana Fair. She requested a ficlet set during their travels. (Mar 2010)

The wonderful and talented Melmoe drew Draco - "What are you doing here?"

The lovely yaaronet drew "A Message of Hope"

I commissioned oldenuf2nb to draw the "Touching Scene" because I greatly admire her artwork and knew she would do it justice. Please be respectful and do not use.

Return to the Simple Listing of Fan-Fic by Rickey

Title:Little Missives

Author: [info]rickey_a

Genre: Drama/Romance

Word Count: ~1500

Rating: PG-Slash

Warning(s): None

Summary: This is a short sequel/epilogue to Getting There.

Author's Notes: I commissioned the incredible talents of [info]oldenuf2nb to do some artwork for Getting There and decided to write this short little missive to add along with the updated posting on my website. Profuse thanks to [info]winnett and [info]spidermoth for the beta.

Little Missives

"Bugger," Harry said. The tip of his quill had snapped clean off. He was only halfway through his letter to Teddy, and he'd promised himself he'd finish it tonight. He'd been meaning to send his godson a letter for weeks, but kept getting distracted. As he rummaged through the top drawer of the desk for another quill, his hand pushed up against some sort of magical barrier. Opening the drawer wide and looking inside, he found another quill and took it out, but saw nothing else other than Draco's stock of writing supplies piled up against the back of the drawer.

His curiosity piqued, he pushed against what appeared to be the back wall of the drawer again. There was definitely a false backing. Harry wondered what it could be hiding. Given that the desk had once been Lucius', Harry would normally have been more concerned, but Lucius hadn't set foot in the Manor's study in over five years. Harry grabbed his wand and murmured a few basic Unlocking Spells. Nothing happened— not that he expected it would. He wondered what Draco might want to hide from him. He'd been living with Draco at the Manor for over a year, and this was the first time he'd ever come across something he couldn't access. He was well aware of some of the more questionable Malfoy or Black family heirlooms in Draco's possession. Harry tried several more Revealing Spells and found success on his fourth attempt. All that was hidden were a few pieces of parchment. Old love letters perhaps? Harry started to feel a touch guilty. Draco was probably upstairs in their bed waiting for him.

Two of the notes were quite small, and when he took a closer look he recognized them. To DM from DM was written on the outside. Harry remembered that night from two years ago. It was just after he and Draco had started their relationship, and he had resigned his position as an Auror. Draco had run away, and then one of those notes magically appeared. Reminiscing, Harry recalled the fear he'd seen in Draco's eyes, and how he'd wanted to comfort him with every fiber of his being. Draco had been as

fragile as crystal back then. Harry had wanted Draco so much, but was afraid of being the sharp edge that would shatter him to pieces.

So it appeared that Draco had saved the notes. Interesting. They had never really talked about it. Harry had always assumed it had something to do with Draco's research at the Department of Mysteries. Now he wondered why Draco would've saved the notes at home instead of at his Ministry office.

Harry pulled the larger letter from the drawer and opened it. He knew he shouldn't, but he simply couldn't help himself. Old habits die hard.

Dear Mother and Father,

I know it has been some time since my last letter. While traveling I didn’t often have access to a long distance owl, but now I am at home in Wiltshire. I returned about a month ago. I hope you are both well.

I have news, which I have put off telling you for quite some time. Prior to my year of traveling, there was an accident at the Manor. Well, accident isn't really the proper word. I had been depressed and it became overwhelming. One night I set Fiendfyre loose in the Manor. It destroyed most of the first floor. I saw to it that the Manor be restored whilst I was away, but I am sorry to say that some things were destroyed beyond repair. I am quite ashamed of this, and that is why I have been unable to tell you before now. I was under professional care for some time after that. I like to think that I am better.

The main reason I am writing this letter is to tell you that I had a traveling partner this past year. More importantly, he has become my life partner and moved into the Manor with me. While our relationship is not public, I imagine there is the off chance that you might hear about it. Even more remote would be your return to Britain for a visit. I wouldn't want you to find him in his pyjamas eating toast in the kitchen. I do not wish to hide this from you. I know you do not particularly approve of my sexual orientation, but I feel that you must accept it.

My partner is none other than Harry Potter. I love him and we are happy.

Mother, I imagine that you have now called for father to come and read this letter along with you. I am

sure this comes as a shock. No one was more surprised than me. I was at a very low point in my life after the accident. Harry came into my life and I have not regretted letting him in for one moment. We lived in my London flat for a few months and then, when I was ready, set off on our world tour. It was the most amazing experience. I saw so many things, and I cannot begin to describe all of the places and events that had a profound effect on me. I learned much about myself this past year. Most importantly, I realized that I had been more concerned with failing you rather than failing myself.

I found myself during my travels, funny how I had to travel the world in order to do that.

We are back home now, and Harry, who had quit the Auror Department, has begun working part-time in the Muggle-born Liaison office. Yes, the most famous wizard of our time works with Muggle parents who have discovered that their children can perform magic. He's happy about his job for the first time in years and I am thrilled for him. Tomorrow I have an interview at the Department of Mysteries. Harry arranged it, but has assured me that I have to earn the position on my own merit. However, I will not be dismissed solely because of my past. It will be a fair decision. I believe him, and for the first time in my life I am optimistic about my ability to do something on my own.

I'm sure all of this is difficult for you to digest. I imagine it's quite the bitter pill. All I ask is that you give it your consideration. I'd like for you to come for a visit and get to know Harry. I realize that it will be awkward at first, but it would mean the world to me. I miss you.

Your dutiful and loving son,

Draco

With the back of his hand Harry wiped the tears welling in the corner of his eyes and then folded the letter carefully. When he had replaced it in the drawer, he looked up to see Draco staring at him from the doorway.

"Oh," Harry whispered. "I'm sorry. I couldn’t… I was curious." He tried to look as apologetic as possible.

"I know. It's all right." Draco walked over to the desk.

"Did you ever send them a letter?"

"Not that one," Draco said softly. "Instead I wrote that I had returned to the Manor and was living with someone, and if they wanted to meet him, they could come for a visit."

"What did they say?"

"They wrote that if I wanted to see them, I could come visit them in France."

"Oh."

"We've had three similar exchanges this past year."

"They don't know it's me?"

Draco shook his head. They had managed to keep their relationship out of the press, even though most of their friends and coworkers knew they were together.

"You never told them about the Fiendfyre?"

Draco shook his head again. Harry stood and affectionately wrapped his arms around Draco. Against blond hair he whispered, "I think it's a beautiful letter. I think you should send it."

"I can't." Draco's voice sounded strained. "As I was writing it, I realized that the letter was really for me, not for them. There were things I needed to say— to admit. These..." Draco gestured to the drawer, "...are not things they want to hear. I don't think they'll ever understand, or ever accept."

"I love you." Harry kissed the side of Draco's head.

"I love you too."

"I think we should go to France," Harry suggested, and held Draco a fraction tighter.

Draco stiffened in Harry's arms. "The Chateau is beautiful in the springtime," he finally whispered after a silent minute. "You'd do that for me?"

Harry pulled back slightly so that Draco could see his face. "I would do that for you."

Turning Draco around, Harry leaned forward and kissed him— kissed him lovingly and passionately. Teddy's letter could wait. Tonight, Harry wanted to make certain that Draco knew how brave and beautiful he truly was. Harry wanted him to understand just how brave and beautiful he thought every single word confessed in that unsent letter.

The End

Fic: Canals (Harry/Draco)- Getting There sequellette

Title: Canals

Author: [info]rickey_a

Pairing(s): Harry/Draco

Rating: PG-slash

Warnings: None

Word Count: ~1360

A/Ns: This is a gift ficlet for [info]alaana_fair, who generously donated to Direct Relief Intl. to help aid

Chile after their disastrous earthquake and tsunami. You requested something of Harry and Draco's travels post Getting There. I was more than happy to write a little more in that 'verse for you.

Much beta thanks to [info]absynthedrinker, who has some lovely pictures of hot gondoliers, and to the gang at I. Smith who are always a great source of support.

Lingering at the table, Draco and Harry leisurely sipped their espresso, letting their dinner digest. It was after midnight by the time they had finished their second bottle of red and the remnants of yet another amazing Venetian meal. They had started with the octopus, moved on to a seafood pasta, and concluded with lamb that had been braised with some secret family recipe. Despite Harry's best efforts to charm the owner's wife, Gemma, she refused to tell Harry what was in it.

"I feel like I've put on a stone this past week," Draco said, wiping the corner of his mouth with his napkin. "Every single meal has been memorable. The calamari in that linguini tonight was from the gods, and I didn't think anything could top the veal medallions with truffle sauce we had in Milan."

"We seem to be eating our way through Italy." Harry stood and held out his hand to help Draco up.

"And we still have Florence and Rome to visit."

"Let's walk back to the hotel. I think I might Splinch my stomach if I tried to Apparate."

"It would be a shame to lose such a fantastic dinner. Gemma would never forgive you."

"She'd see it as an insult to her family, wouldn't she?"

"And she's a Muggle," Draco whispered.

Harry laughed. It was relaxed and full of life. Draco could tell that Harry knew when he was teasing. Their newfound connection was something worth cherishing. They had only been together a few months, but there were almost never any misunderstandings between them. Their youth had been nothing but an enormous chasm of misunderstanding, yet somehow this grown up Harry could infer Draco's meaning and understand when he was being serious and when he was simply kidding. It made their life traveling together so easy, so effortless.

The weight of fame, The Ministry, and politics had been lifted from Harry's shoulders, and Draco had witnessed how much lighter his lover had become since they'd left Britain. They had spent time in both wizarding and Muggle areas of Europe and were making plans to go to Africa after they made their way across the Mediterranean.

They walked along the cobblestone streets of Venice, enjoying the refreshing breeze and sounds of the city that believed a suitable end to an evening was dawn.

"I know we talked about leaving tomorrow, but I'd like to extend our visit a few days," Draco suggested.

"Sure, it's not as if we're on a schedule."

"I'd like to return to the wizard shopping district and commission some stained glass works. The Manor could use new décor, and I think a large animated piece would look great in the entrance foyer. A guardian dragon perhaps?"

Harry smiled, but Draco could tell his thoughts had drifted to the carnage of twisted metal, charred walls, and broken glass that had been left by the Fiendfyre.

"And I bet Camilla would love a piece as well. Something hopelessly romantic," Draco added, in an

attempt coax Harry back to happier thoughts.

"I bet she would. I'd also like to owl-post that book on Italian wizarding history I bought for Hermione."

"All the beautiful crafts, leather, crystal, porcelain, and jewelry, and you want to send her a book."

"It's what she'd like best."

"You're probably right." Draco couldn't help the overwhelming feeling of gratitude that bubbled up whenever they talked about Hermione. "Send her my regards as well."

"Hey, look!" Harry pointed to a gondola a few yards ahead. "Let's see if it's available. We've been here three days and have still to ride in one."

With apprehension Draco looked over the Muggle-made boat. "All right," he answered nervously, but Harry had already run ahead to stake a claim.

In horrible broken Italian, Harry talked to the gondolier who replied in English. Harry handed over some Euros and beckoned Draco over. The gondolier was a young handsome man and looked Harry and Draco over with a sly smile. Leave it to Harry to find the only gay gondolier in Venice, well maybe not only.

They settled down in the boat and pulled the soft wool blanket over themselves. The gondola quietly set off across the water. They made their way through several side canals and under stone bridges before entering the Canal Grande, il Canalasso, to the initiated. You couldn't appreciate its size until the boat turned the corner. In fact, you couldn't ever truly see what was around the bend until you got there, like a mystery unfolding.

Despite the late hour, the cityscape still carried the glow of streetlights, while the air was filled with the noises of singing, laughter, and the humming of motorboats carrying tourists to the casino.

Draco never tired of looking at Piazza San Marco— little did Venice's Muggle society know of its rich wizarding heritage. The lights coming from the island of San Giorgio sparkled like stars in the distance. Draco leaned closer against Harry as the gondolier turned the boat back toward the city and into the first side canal. Harry's knuckles rubbed in circles against the small of Draco's back. It was a moment of perfection, or as near as mere mortals could ever hope to achieve.

"I must remember this," Draco said, almost under his breath.

"It's certainly quite memorable."

"No, I mean, I… I would have missed this." Draco waited patiently for his meaning to sink in.

"Oh." At first Harry stiffened, but then pulled Draco tighter against him.

"I gave up." I was weak, he kept to himself. The thought was always so close to the surface, waiting for any opportunity to come to the forefront of Draco's mind.

"You were in pain."

Draco never discussed his suicide attempt with Harry. It was still too raw, too painful, and he didn't want it getting in the way of what was happening between them. However, the canal and the moonlight eased the aching of his soul.

"I need to remember this, that moments like this happen. Life is to be experienced. That's the secret. No matter how awful it gets, something like this is out there, waiting to happen. There's more than I ever imagined, more than I ever could imagine. I… I almost threw it all away."

"If you ever… you come to me. Do you here me? You come to me." Harry's voice cracked on the last few

words.

"I will."

Harry tentatively touched his lips to Draco's, but then soon urged them open with a demanding kiss. The gondolier was getting an eyeful, because Draco fervently kissed Harry back. The kiss was a solemn promise, as powerful and far-reaching as an Unbreakable Vow.

Draco closed his eyes and basked in the feel of Harry's hand caressing his cheek and the back of his neck. The gondola swayed as their weight shifted. The scent of Harry mixed with the salt and mossy smell of the Venetian air. Harry's lips were moist and unrelenting against Draco's.

Suddenly, the gondola came to an abrupt stop, and Draco opened his eyes. "Are we—?"

"I signaled the gondolier to pull to the side," Harry said with a confident smile and a casual wave of his hand. "I think we should continue this in the hotel room."

Draco wanted to continue this forever. It was a pathetic soppy notion that probably matched what drove Camilla to read novel after novel of Witches Romance Readers, yet Draco felt it, deeply. It rang true and he wanted to be with Harry for as long as the road would hold. Sometimes Draco wasn't sure who was leading and who was following, but he was sure of himself when they were together.

With a surge of confidence, Draco smiled playfully at Harry as he pulled him toward a darkened alley. The moment they were in shadow, Draco pressed Harry's body to the wall and kissed him, his intentions hard and evident. He was startled by the intense pull of Harry's Side-Along-Apparition. His last thought before the void was that he had come a hair's breadth from never feeling this, feeling so wanted. But now, he was there and he wasn't letting go.