HAPPY H/D HOLIDAYS, MAHALIEM!

Author: Anonymous

Recipient: mahaliem

Title: The Boy Who Only Lived Twice

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

Summary: Harry Potter is an Unspeakable. Draco Malfoy is the wizard who shagged him. Adventure! Intrigue! Secret identities, celebrities, spies! It's all right here, folks.

Rating: NC-17

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Warning(s): Fingering, anal sex, a blow-job

Epilogue compliant? Nay.

Word Count: 56,000. Sorry!

Author's Notes: Mahaliem, I'm sorry this didn't follow any of your prompts. Though they were awesome, I got carried away with another idea. I hope you like it anyway.

2. I got the idea for this from another fic I wrote several years ago. I think the fics are different, but if anyone has read the other, you may see that that one inspired this one.

3. Thanks so so so much to K for the beta, and the lovely mods for their patience.

(The Boy Who Only Lived Twice)

The Boy Who Only Lived Twice

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I.

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Summer, 2006

The first time Harry met his new handler, he thought his alias suited him. Of course, there was no way of knowing what Rabbit was really like beneath the guise.

They first met at a hotel in Croatia. Harry knocked on the door to the suite, and Rabbit opened it. Harry flashed him a smile. “I’m a friend of Alex,” he said, and Rabbit let him inside.

“Blackbird,” said Harry, and thrust out his hand.

“Yes,” said Rabbit, and shook it. He walked over to the kitchenette, where he’d spelled a kettle to boil. “Do you want some tea?”

Harry looked him over, startled by the simple, domestic question. Rabbit had a slender face with narrow features, slender lips and large eyes, like his alias's namesake. Thin hair the colour of dishwater hung flat and limp about his face. He was dressed neatly, but the clothes were drab and worn about the edges; his brown corduroys certainly had seen better days. A slight man, though tall, with a bit of a paunch about the middle, he seemed to be pushing forty.

“Alright,” said Harry, because it was rude to stare.

Rabbit took out the mugs and tea leaves, while Harry continued to observe his new handler in what he hoped was at least a slightly more subtle manner.

There was no way of knowing Rabbit's actual age. As soon someone became an Unspeakable, they were taken down to the Identity Chamber in the Department of Mysteries on Level Nine to pick a selection of guises: hair and fingernails, which would provide an endless supply of Polyjuice. Unspeakables also chose several voice boxes, which held their own voice safe after they swallowed the new voice in the box. Guises looked enough like an Unspeakable's true form that if their Polyjuice wore off in an emergency situation, they could maintain the illusion of the disguise with charms for at least a little while. They were also meant to be dissimilar enough from the Unspeakable's true form that recognition should be impossible.

Harry's primary guise was tall, black-haired, and broad-shouldered. He could comb his hair and he didn't have to wear glasses. He didn't have any notable scars. In general, Harry liked it better.

"How do you take it?" Rabbit asked.

"Splash of milk," said Harry.

Rabbit nodded and added the milk, then brought the tea to the table. The hotel was like a hundred other Muggle hotel rooms Harry had seen since becoming an Unspeakable: cheap, with chintzy furnishings, nondescript paintings on the walls and neutral colours everywhere. Harry knew he should have minded the empty anonymity of them, but somehow the repetition was comforting. Hotel rooms felt like home.

Between the beige curtains of this one, the blinds were open. Grey rain streaked down the glass on the backdrop of grey sky. The only thing unique in the room besides themselves was the wizarding newspaper, spread out on the table, and that was grey too. Harry had long ago stopped reading them; they never said anything true.

"How was your trip?" Rabbit asked. He sat down, taking out his Polyjuice. He kept his, Harry noticed, in a leather pouch full of phials, rather than the typical flask. Once Rabbit had knocked back his dose—the expression on his face barely changing at the horrid taste—he sipped his tea.

"It was fine," said Harry, still puzzled at the mediocrity of it all. His first meeting with Talon had been very

different. “I heard about Pegasus.” Pegasus was Rabbit’s previous agent. She—Pegasus' guise was female, anyway—had been wounded in a recent sting. From the little intel Talon had given him, Harry understood Pegasus was in St. Mungo’s on a long term recovery plan. Although Pegasus would have reverted to her true form after her Polyjuice wore off, the injuries she had sustained within her guise had been serious enough that her true form retained the injury. Polyjuice was only so powerful.

Rabbit just nodded again. “I imagine they would have told you. Is it too hot?” He gestured at the tea.

Harry looked down at it, took a sip. “No.”

“It’s been raining since Tuesday.”

Harry put down his cup. “Okay, this is weird.”

“It normally doesn’t rain this much.” Looking away from the window, Rabbit glanced toward him. “What’s weird?”

“I feel like I’m at my neighbour’s house.” Harry waved a hand at the tea. “She had a lot of cats.”

Rabbit sipped his tea. “There aren’t any cats.”

“It’s just very . . .” Harry waved his hand again. “Normal.”

“We can talk business now, if you prefer.”

Talon had been Harry’s handler since Harry had become an Unspeakable two years ago. He had been charming, passionate, and strong. Of course, just because Talon had always been open and expressive with him, didn’t make him so in his true form. All Unspeakables received training on hiding their own idiosyncrasies and assuming those of others as part of their guises. However, while guises were meant to

hide their identities from everyone, even other Unspeakables, the main idea behind them was to keep enemies of the Ministry guessing, not each other.

Personality aside, Harry knew that he could trust that Talon was brave, hard-working, and devoted to the cause. And whoever Talon really was, his guise had always been adventuresome and exciting.

Rabbit, whoever he really was, seemed like the opposite. He was going through the scrolls in the satchel he'd brought with him, pulling one out, scanning the parchment with a frown. He was just so slight and unassuming—mousy, Harry would have said, if asked, though he supposed he could just as easily say rabbity. The bloke did have a bit of an overbite, and he had offered Harry tea. Commented on the weather. It was hard to believe this person was an Unspeakable, even if it was just a guise.

Harry resented the reassignment—he would have even if he had had a better replacement. But Talon had had to go on leave for personal reasons—and it had been true that they had had far less success on casework, these past few months. Still, Harry was used to working with Talon. He missed his handler.

"How long have you been doing this?" Harry asked.

Rabbit didn't glance up. "Do you want me to lie?"

One of the first things Harry had learned as an Unspeakable was not to ask personal questions. It had been a relatively easy lesson, as sharing information about his own life would have easily defeated the purpose of the guise. Still, Talon and Harry had shared harmless things: Talon had already known Harry was a new agent when he had begun. Talon had a little sister; he knew Harry had a weakness for treacle tart. They had both played Quidditch. "I was just wondering, you know," Harry said. "How much experience you have with this stuff."

"Some," said Rabbit, which didn't really inspire confidence. "Is it going to be a problem?"

"Nope," Harry said, and stirred his tea.

Agents picked guises that were a different age than their true forms, so older Unspeakables selected younger guises and vice versa. Of course, if an agent was seventy, he might pick a guise that was forty, which might make someone think his true form was twenty. Seventy was probably a little old to be on the field, but then again at over one hundred, Dumbledore had still been spry.

Harry guessed that Rabbit was younger. Probably new at this. Fairly green. A relatively inexperienced handler might have been a problem, for another Unspeakable. But Harry was the best, really. Not at modesty, but at everything else, he was the best.

“Good,” Rabbit said, rolling up the scroll and pushing it across the table. “We’re tracking programmed wands. They seem normal. People buy them, either as their first wand, a replacement, or a substitute. The first time the wand is pointed at a Muggle, it casts an Unforgiveable.”

Harry frowned, unrolling the parchment. “The wand casts it? Without the wizard meaning to?”

Rabbit sipped his tea. “The wand casts it.”

“That’s some powerful spell work. Usually you have to really mean it to cast an Unforgiveable. Only at Muggles?”

“Yes.”

“Death Eaters,” said Harry.

“We can’t know for certain.”

“They’re aiming at Muggles.”

Rabbit drank more tea. “You can’t assume it’s Death Eaters simply because they’re aiming at Muggles.”

“Death Eaters hate Muggles.”

“I’ve read my history. You may suppose any Muggle-hating faction operates on the same principle as Death Eaters, but that hardly means that they’re connected to the old Death Eaters. Or that they’re styling themselves as new Death Eaters.”

“Bastards, is what they are.”

Talon would’ve been boiling mad. Rabbit just went on talking about the mission, and he sounded sort of like he had when he’d been talking about the rain. “We don’t know how they do it. That’s what you’re going to find out.” He nodded at the scroll in Harry’s hand. “This is Petra Kozić. She’s an associate of Anthony Bayliff, one of the buyers we tracked down last week.”

“The one Pegasus—”

“Yes.” Rabbit didn’t even flinch. “These people are dangerous.”

“You don’t need to tell me,” Harry said.

“Then we play it safe,” said Rabbit.

That was sort of what Harry expected from someone who looked and acted like Rabbit. Harry let him think that silence was assent.

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Summer, 2001

The first time Harry saw Draco Malfoy after the Death Eater Trials, it was four years after the Trials and the Battle of Hogwarts, and five years before Harry met Rabbit.

This was before Harry had become an Unspeakable. He'd been an Auror at the time, and Malfoy had just been arrested. He kept a little potions shop, and the Aurors had traced Malfoy's shop as the middle man in an illegal potions trade between Thailand and wizarding streets of Britain.

"Potter," Malfoy had said, when Harry had walked into his holding cell.

"Malfoy."

Malfoy smiled faintly. "Fancy meeting you here."

"You're guilty."

The smile twitched. "Veritaserum tends to disagree."

"I know you're guilty."

"I see you haven't changed."

Scowling, Harry sat down across from him. The holding cell was a brightly lit room with a metal table, two metal chairs. They used it for questioning witnesses and suspects, but Malfoy was no longer a suspect. Technically, he was free to go; there would be hell to pay when Robards found out Harry had

finagled a way to hold Malfoy so he could have this meeting.

The hell wouldn't be for Malfoy's sake. Robards never wanted Harry to do anything that might get his hands dirty.

Harry didn't like Robards very much.

"How did you do it?" Harry asked.

"Three drops on the tongue," said Malfoy, still with that slight, ironic smile. "The usual way."

"You always were a prat." Staring him down, Harry suddenly realized that Malfoy had grown good-looking. The angles which had made him seem so prissy at one time now gave him a sharp, patrician look. He resembled his father far too much, but his best features were all his mother's: the softer eyes, long long lashes.

"Look your fill," Malfoy drawled.

"You're disappointing," Harry heard himself say.

There was a long silence. Then a lazy, "Oh?"

"You're disappointing," Harry said. "I'm disappointed in you."

A slow blond brow raised. "Thank you for the clarification."

"I testified for you. After the war. And this is what you do with it?"

“Get arrested on false charges? I’m sorry. Next time, I’ll make sure I’ve actually committed a crime.”

Harry shook his head. “If you’re not guilty, then you’re a dupe. Why wouldn’t you try harder?”

“Harder, Potter?”

“You shouldn’t have let illegal potions be run through your shop.”

“I didn’t let—”

“You did, though,” Harry said. “If you really weren’t a part of this, then you didn’t have tight enough security,” Harry said. “You would think, with your past, you would—”

“With my past,” Malfoy said, sounding disbelieving.

“You would do something good. You wouldn’t let things like this happen. You know, you were the reason for a lot of shit. You and your family. You have a lot to make up for—”

“I was a child.”

“I don’t care how old you were. That’s part of the point. You know—we know—how bad things can get, if people just stand by and let shit happen.”

“You don’t know how hard—”

Harry’s hand cut through the space between them, a dismissive wave. “I don’t care how hard it is. You

should have tried to be someone better, Malfoy. After what we went through." Malfoy's cheeks were pink, his thin chest heaving. "I believed in you, you know."

Malfoy stared at him.

"I believed in you," Harry said. "That's why I testified at your trial, because you never had a chance. I mean, I thought you did. But you didn't. You were a kid. You were just like me. I thought that if someone gave you a chance . . ."

"You believed in me."

"Yes." Harry stared straight at him. "Slytherins, you know, they're not all bad. People make mistakes. But I learned people can make up for them. They can become better than the way they were raised, or the things they did when they were stupid and young." After all, there was Snape.

"You thought I could be better," Malfoy said.

"Guess I was wrong."

"What did you think I would do?"

"What?"

Malfoy had a strange look about him, an expression Harry had never seen before. "You thought I would be better; what did you think I would do?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. Something more than this." Malfoy stared at him, and Harry stared back. "You could still do something different."

Malfoy looked away. “I don’t know. I’ve had a lot of practice being a disappointment. I’m getting very good at it.”

“Do something else.”

“Like what, Potter?” Malfoy said irritably. “Do you know how hard it is to even run a shop? How about to go out in public, when everyone still hisses at you, casts hexes, throws vegetables? How about just to go on, knowing that people died, because of you, and there’s nothing you can ever do about it? Do you know how hard it is?”

“Cry me a river,” said Harry

“Fuck you.”

“People would help you. If you ask.”

Malfoy snorted in disbelief. “Who?”

“Me.”

Malfoy just stared at him. “You want to hear me say how I fucked up? You want me to grovel, is that it? You want to be the great Harry Potter, takes pity on Death Eaters, even; isn’t he just grand?”

“No.”

Malfoy’s eyes narrowed. “Then why?”

“Because. I still think you could do it. I think you’re smart, and good, maybe, deep down. You fixed that Vanishing Cabinet; you didn’t kill Dumbledore. I think you still have time.”

Malfoy grimaced. “To make it up to you?”

Yes, Harry almost said, but it wasn’t what he meant. Of course it wasn’t what he meant; it wasn’t what he was supposed to say. “Make it up to yourself,” that was what he was supposed to say.

Malfoy’s gaze swept off Harry, down to the table. He stared at it for a long time. “Let me out,” he said finally. “You have no reason to hold me here.”

“You can ask me for my help,” said Harry.

Malfoy’s eyes remained fixed on the table. “I don’t need your help, Potter.”

Malfoy didn’t speak to Harry again for another five years.

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Summer, 2006

The second time Harry saw Rabbit, he concluded that he was a pretty worthless handler.

Harry was on the job, talking to Petra Kozić at a wizarding bar in Croatia. The Dictus Charm was in his ear, which meant that Rabbit could talk to him without anyone else hearing. Harry had set up a Spellveillance around the bar, a net of charms that Rabbit could monitor for him, so Harry didn’t have to navigate seeing the bar through his eyes and through the charms at the same time. Rabbit could switch between the charms, checking to make sure all entry and exit points were safe, and warning him if anything

happened.

Except right now Rabbit was having a hissy fit in Harry's ear. Get out of there, his voice whispered in the charm.

"What do you do?" Harry asked Kozić.

"I am in trade," Kozić said.

"What kind of trade?"

Kozić laughed. "You are a very curious young man."

"Only about very stunning women," said Harry.

Now, said Rabbit.

"And full of false flattery," said Kozić.

"Why would I lie?" said Harry.

"Perhaps you would like to make a trade yourself," Kozić said. Her slender finger traced the rim of her martini glass. The mission objective was complete: Harry had assessed that Kozić didn't have the wands, and therefore orders were to extricate himself immediately. He wasn't supposed to make contact with Kozić at all.

She looked up at him with dark eyes and a seductive, dangerous smile. Harry had never been all that

great at following orders.

“Perhaps I would,” said Harry.

Perhaps you would like to get yourself killed, said Rabbit.

“I think I understand what you would like me to give you,” Kozić said, finger still circling the rim of her glass, “but what is it that you would offer me?”

Stupidity, said Rabbit. He will offer you stupidity, madam, and his life, he doesn't pull the fuck out right now..

“You don’t think I have anything to offer?” Harry asked. His smile was innocent, and his hand moved up her thigh.

“Perhaps,” said Kozić. “Some other time.”

“How about now?” Harry said, and squeezed.

How about never, agent? said Rabbit.

Kozić laughed. “You are very funny.” She kissed Harry’s cheek.

Three hours later, once Harry was sure he hadn’t been tracked and certainly hadn’t been followed, he met Rabbit at the appointed hotel room. The curtains were beige and threadbare, ill-suited to blocking the flashing lights of fast food, news stands, and other late night pursuits just outside the walls. The bed, which was narrow and dingy, looked very inviting.

“What the hell were you thinking?” said Rabbit.

Harry pulled out the flask in his pocket and downed his dose. Talon had used to complain about using the guise even amongst other Unspeakables. He had said that agents should trust each other enough to get along without it; he said that it made him itch, not wearing his own body. Harry had always liked it, though, despite the vile taste of Polyjuice. Blackbird’s body was perfect, without a single mark or scar. It made him feel good, like nothing could touch him, like he was beautiful.

It was his own body that itched.

“I was trying to get information,” Harry said.

“You were flirting.”

“That’s often how it’s done.” Harry looked longingly at the bed.

“That’s often how you get yourself killed,” said Rabbit.

“I think I’m still alive.”

“You went against orders.”

“I saw an opening,” Harry said. “So I took it.”

“I didn’t see an opening.” Rabbit’s dull hair hung about his face. His slenderness made him seem smaller than he was, and his button-down was faded.

Harry's eyes swept over him, and then he pointedly looked away. "Maybe you weren't looking hard enough."

"I know what I'm doing," Rabbit said. "I know how to do my job."

"And I know how to do mine." Harry went over to the bed and flopped down onto it.

Rabbit frowned. "You've got to trust me."

Harry barely spared him a glance. "Goes both ways; don't you think?"

Rabbit just watched him. "Did you act this way with your other handlers?"

Harry put his hands behind his head. "My other handler and I had an understanding."

Right about now, Harry missed his other handler. It wasn't like Talon had been perfect. Harry operated a lot on instinct, the way he had with Kozić. Sometimes Talon had been slow to catch on to that, maybe because Harry himself didn't always know what he was doing. But for that reason, Talon had never quoted regulation or thumped the rule book; he'd let Harry go his own way.

It hadn't occurred to Harry that someone else wouldn't be as easy-going. In this sort of field, you had to make up the rules as you went along; there wasn't any other way to do it. It was something Harry liked about the Department. There were ways of doing things, Harry had learned, and ways you shouldn't do things. But when you were an Unspeakable, sometimes the way to do things was the way you shouldn't.

Rabbit's nose wiggled.

It didn't actually wiggle, Harry realized, when Rabbit did it again. His lips, pursed, had twitched, making it look as though his nose moved just like a rabbit's.

“We don’t have an understanding,” Rabbit said.

“Yeah,” said Harry. “We don’t.”

Rabbit waved an angry hand. “I’m just supposed to stand back and let you get yourself killed?”

“Look. I’m good at this. I’m really, really good. I know what I’m doing.”

“I don’t care how good you are. I don’t care if you’re Albus Dumbledore—” Harry didn’t even flinch—“or if you’re Rowena Ravenclaw. I don’t care if you’re Merlin. I’m good at this too.” Rabbit’s voice was tight. “I’ve worked to be good at this. I’ve earned a little bit of trust.”

“Not from me, you haven’t.”

“I’m an Unspeakable,” Rabbit began.

“So am I. You think it’s enough?”

For some reason, that shut Rabbit up. He stood there for a long moment, something working through his face. Then suddenly he turned around, going over to the desk. For the next few minutes, he rifled through the scrolls there, as though they had not been having a conversation at all. When he next spoke, his voice was empty of emotion. “Our next target job is to look into an illegal potions ring. We’re nowhere on the wands.”

Studying Rabbit’s back, Harry frowned. “I don’t think so.”

The shoulders stiffened, but Rabbit didn't otherwise react. Harry's frown deepened. He knew that he was testing Rabbit, but he didn't understand the result. "Kozić doesn't have the wands," was all Rabbit said, "and she didn't give us any leads."

"I got a lead," Harry said. "I got a tracking charm on her."

Stiffness snapped into Rabbit's shoulders again, and he turned around. "You . . . what?"

Harry smirked. "I got a tracking charm on her."

Rabbit's nose twitched. "Show me."

Harry hauled himself off the bed, going over to Rabbit's satchel. He pulled out the map of Sisak, unrolled it, and tapped it with his wand.

"You charmed my map," said Rabbit.

"You can still use it."

Rabbit came up beside him, looking down at the little dot moving through the city. Frowning, Rabbit followed the dot for a long time before asking, "Where did you learn that charm?"

"It's in the family," said Harry, because he'd learned it from the Marauder's Map.

"Brilliant."

“Thanks.”

Rabbit shook his head. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“I know.” Harry grinned. “See? I know what I’m doing.”

“No, you don’t.” Pointing his wand at the map, Rabbit rolled it up so fast the parchment snapped in on itself. “Don’t do that again.”

“You said yourself, it was a brilliant—”

“It was brilliant.” Rabbit looked grim. “It could have got you killed.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “So, you don’t want any great leads, you don’t want to know where Kozić is, you don’t want to find the rigged wands, because it isn’t safe. Good to know.”

“It was stupid not to tell me about the tracking charm.”

“In case you didn’t notice, I didn’t exactly have time.”

“You make time,” Rabbit said. “You make time, or you get out.”

Harry liked being an Unspeakable because he was good at it, and no one tried to tell him what to do. “Why should I listen to you?” he said.

Rabbit just looked at him. “I’m the one who’s going to save you.”

“I didn’t exactly need saving, either.”

“Not yet.” Rabbit went to go put the map back in his satchel. “But you will.”

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Winter, 2002

The second time Harry saw Draco Malfoy after the Death Eater Trials, it was six months after Harry had talked to him about doing something different with his life, while Malfoy had been under arrest. This time, Harry was with Ron and Hermione. Hugo had just been born, but the baby was asleep, affording them a rare moment of peace. They hardly ever just sat around like this any more, Hermione reading, Ron flipping through a magazine while Harry contemplated his next move on chess.

“Ugh,” Ron said, dropping the magazine suddenly. “Oh, ugh.” He kicked it across the floor at Harry.

“I don’t need Hermione’s Witch Weekly,” Harry said, barely even looking. Soon the baby would cry; they would never finish their game. Ron and Hermione would bicker, then make up, then make gooey eyes at each other as Harry felt increasingly more isolated. He was already thinking about tomorrow, when he could go back to work.

“It’s not my Witch Weekly,” said Hermione, looking up from her book. “It’s Molly’s.”

“That’s what’s really disturbing about it,” said Ron.

“It’s a lot better than Wizardboy,” Hermione said.

“Er,” said Ron, looking shifty. “I don’t read Wizardboy.”

Neither did Harry. This was around the time he had stopped reading any of the wizarding publications.

“You didn’t see page thirty-four,” Ron went on.

“Yes, I did,” said Hermione.

“No, you didn’t.”

“Yes, I did.”

“If you had seen page thirty-four, you probably wouldn’t still have eyes,” said Ron. “You’d have gouged them out. I feel pretty certain.”

“What’s on page thirty-four?” said Harry, moving his rook.

“Don’t look,” said Ron.

Hermione snapped her book shut. “There’s nothing wrong with it. Besides, I think it’s great that he's making a new life for himself.”

“Making a new life is fine,” Ron said. “Making page thirty-four isn't fine.”

Harry finally looked down at the magazine. Picking it up, he turned to page thirty-four.

“Don’t do it,” said Ron.

It was a picture of Draco Malfoy. He stood there, casually, one hip thrust forward, holding a glass of champagne.

Harry stared at it uncomprehendingly. “It’s Draco Malfoy.”

“Great,” said Ron. “Now you’ll have to gouge your eyes out too.”

“Why is Draco Malfoy in Witch Weekly?”

“You could read the article,” said Hermione.

“You couldn't,” said Ron. “Because Draco Malfoy would be looking at you and waving, and then you'd have to leave to gouge your eyes.”

“He donated money to St. Mungo's,” said Hermione.

“Did he donate to the vision wing?” said Ron.

Harry looked down at the page. Malfoy's smile looked so easy, as though he always did it, as though he hadn't a care in the world. “Malfoy donated to St. Mungo's?”

“Malfoy is a schmoozer.” Ron was convinced.

“Malfoy is a philanthropist.” Hermione was also convinced.

“Malfoy is a loser.” Ron was convinced that he was more convinced than Hermione, and Harry wasn't

convinced of anything.

He looked down at the page again. “Why?”

“Because he hates us,” said Ron. “He hates our eyes.”

Hermione tucked her hair behind her ear. “Maybe he wants to make up for his past.”

Balloons were floating all around Malfoy and the man from the Ministry, and the people standing near by were clapping. Malfoy looked like a celebrity, a Muggle movie star; he looked used to applause, worthy of worship. “I don’t understand,” said Harry. “I thought he ran a shop. A potions shop.”

“He still has the Black family fortune,” said Hermione. “I suppose he decided to do something worthwhile with it.”

“He always was a suck up,” Ron said.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “How is it sucking up to donate money to charity?”

“It is when you're Malfoy”

“Why can't you just accept that Malfoy—”

“I told him to do something good,” said Harry.

Hermione paused at his interruption. “What?”

“Remember that time he got arrested?” Harry said. “I talked to him. I told him he could do something better.”

“Maybe he listened,” said Hermione.

“This isn’t better,” said Ron. “Better would have been to crawl into a hole somewhere. Then he would stop bothering us.”

“He's not bothering us.” Hermione turned to Harry for his support. “He's not bothering us,” she said again. “He listened to you.”

“He didn't listen to me,” Harry said.

“How do you know?” Hermioned put her hands on her hips. “Even if Malfoy did it just to suck up, does it make a difference what his intentions were? Who he is matters a whole lot less than what he does.”

Harry shook his head. “He hasn't changed. He can't.”

Hermione's hands fell off her hips, her eyes softening as they went. “He can be different,” she said, “than how he was during the war. We can all be different.”

“Just,” said Harry, “Malfoy,” and didn’t finish.

Hermione's eyes were still so soft. “You can be different too, Harry.”

Harry looked down at the article. “He looks like he doesn't even have to work at it.”

“Giving people money isn't any work at all,” said Ron. “I do it all the time.”

“Harry.” Hermione still sounded so concerned. “The important thing is just to try to be yourself.”

“Except when you're Malfoy,” Ron said. “Then you should try to be someone else.”

“I am myself,” said Harry. “Who else would I be?”

Hermione still looked sad.

*

Summer, 2006

The fifth job Harry worked with Rabbit, Rabbit saved his life.

Before that, Rabbit hadn't seemed to improve on further acquaintance. When they met after or before a mission, he was always drinking tea or reading the paper—sometimes, in a rare burst of activity, he did both at the same time. The only other thing he talked about besides their missions was the weather.

The missions themselves Rabbit planned down to the minute, in cramped handwriting that filled up inches and inches of schedule on parchment. Talon had never made schedules; Harry didn’t work well with schedules. But Rabbit loved them, apparently—and agendas, and diagrams, and detailed explanations of things that were so by the book, Harry was practically asleep by the end of them. The bloke was boring, essentially, and Harry had never thought “international wizard spy” and “dull” could describe the same person, but for Rabbit, they could.

He fussed at Harry for taking risks, for deviating from plans, for going left when the rules said to go right. He was also overly cautious—most likely a coward, if you asked Harry; he’d known enough of them in his

life to know what one looked like. No doubt Rabbit tried very hard to please; he thought that if he did everything just so, nothing could go wrong. But Harry had never done anything just so. That was why he was an Unspeakable, really: there were no rules to break. It had always worked out in the end.

Except for right now, when he was facing down three wizards lobbing Aveda Kedavra at his head, and every single spell Harry knew to take them down was bouncing off of their shields.

Harry had followed Kozić's tracking charm to several different locations, Penseiving the memories for Level Nine to examine. He had searched Kozić's flat, there discovering information about the next shipment of rigged wands. He'd been assigned to stop the shipment: thus the warehouse, thus facing three dark wizards with only Rabbit in his ear to help.

Which wasn't much help, Harry was thinking. Talon would've been rattling off attacks. Maybe something would get through the shields, or maybe there was something Harry hadn't tried yet—but Rabbit had been mostly silent.

When he did speak, it wasn't exactly helpful. Do you know Levicorpus? Rabbit said in his ear.

Harry ignored it, casting an Incendio.

Think of that, combined with the Reductus Curse, said Rabbit. Downward flick, then up to the right, add a curl at the end. Say, 'Retexticorpus.'

Harry had had experience casting spells he didn't know. The experience was that you could almost kill someone without meaning to—blood in the bathroom, Myrtle moaning, Murder! Murder!, the knowledge that the one from whom you learned the spell might not be the person you thought he was—Harry had experience. He just hadn't learned anything.

He cast the spell without thinking about it.

The skin of the wizards he was facing began to flay from the muscle beneath, in slow, unravelling strips, like ribbon. Blood began to flow from the seams, winding and intertwining in rivulets along peeled skin.

That spell wasn't in any books Harry had ever read.

Run, said Rabbit.

Harry wasn't used to running.

Now, said Rabbit.

Muscles began to strip from bone.

Harry ran. "They're going to die," he said.

The Dictus Charm worked both ways; he could hear Rabbit in his ear, and Rabbit could hear everything that happened on Harry's end in his own ear.

No, said Rabbit.

Harry didn't know whether to believe him. He ran until he was outside the warehouse.

Rabbit said, Corpus Integrum. Do it now.

Turning, Harry pointed his wand back at the warehouse. "Corpus Integrum!" he shouted.

Apparate, said Rabbit, and Harry did.

“Non Dicatus,” said Rabbit, when Harry appeared in the hotel room. The charm dissolved from Harry’s ear.

It was a different room than the one before. It was always a different room than the one before.

“Non Dicatus,” Harry said, and the charm dissolved in Rabbit’s.

“Are you hurt?”

“I don’t think so,” said Harry.

“Let me see.” Rabbit came toward him with his wand drawn, and Harry couldn't help it; he flinched.

Rabbit paused. “It’s a diagnostic.”

His voice was quite gentle—this, from the man who had just taught Harry a spell that could flay men alive, slowly pulling them apart one layer at a time. Harry looked at him: his drab, dry-wall coloured jumper with the patch upon the elbow, his skinny neck, his pasty skin.

It was ridiculous to judge a person based on first impressions when you already knew they went by an alias, were constantly on Polyjuice, and had got their voice from a box. It was ridiculous to judge a person based on first impressions regardless; Harry knew that from Snape, and yet he'd done it anyway. He really should have known better—people were always more than they appeared. Harry felt almost grateful to Rabbit for reminding him.

“Okay,” Harry said, still looking at him curiously as Rabbit cast the diagnostic. The familiar spell washed over Harry like light fingers, running over his skin, pressing and searching for cuts and bruises. It felt

different than Talon's diagnostic, more business-like and efficient, less invasive.

“All clear,” Rabbit said, and took the spell away.

Right about now Talon would’ve been whooping, pounding Harry on the back, telling him how awesome he was, how awesome they both were. Harry had, after all, just escaped multiple Aveda Kedavras and three dark wizards, and Rabbit had helped him do it.

He had helped him do it with a spell that turned a human body inside out.

Rabbit didn’t whoop or pound Harry on the back. He just stood there, nose twitching. “I’ll make tea,” he said finally. Turning, he headed toward the little kitchenette.

Harry pulled his flask out of his pocket and drank his dose of Polyjuice. They still had to write their reports, and do the debrief. As the Polyjuice hit his stomach, he could already feel the parts where the guise had grown weak coalesce and tighten. Usually the first part to start showing through was the scar.

“Where did you learn that spell?” Harry asked, when he had finished off the Polyjuice.

Rabbit filled the kettle with a spell. That was the way Rabbit always did it, but Harry had never thought about it before: the way that Rabbit always used magic, for everything. “They knew you were going to be there,” he said.

“Where did you learn that spell?”

“I made it,” Rabbit said, casting another spell at the kettle to boil.

Snape, Harry thought again, and let it go. “Pretty sure it’s against regulation.”

Rabbit pulled two mugs from a cupboard with his wand. “Are you frightened?”

“No,” said Harry, wondering if he should be.

Rabbit only nodded, measuring the tea leaves. “It’s more painful than it is permanently damaging.”

“That’s reassuring.” Harry watched for a while. “There’s always Cruciatus, you know.”

Rabbit flinched, but still did not look at him. “I know.”

“Why didn’t I just do that?”

Rabbit stared down into the mugs on the counter, as though they might give him an answer. When he spoke, it was with reluctance. “Because they probably had shielded specifically against it.”

He did not say it was because Cruciatus was wrong, nor that Cruciatus was an Unforgiveable. “Not because you’re against it?” Harry asked.

Rabbit had reached for a mug, but now he put it down again. “I don’t know.” He spread his hands out on the counter. “Why didn’t you?”

Rabbit's shoulders looked tight, one sharp blade hitched slightly above the other. “Because they probably had shielded specifically against it,” Harry said, slowly repeating Rabbit's words.

Rabbit turned around. “The spell is evil. It turns a human body inside out, for fuck's sake. It's illegal, immoral, unethical, and a thousand other things.”

“It's evil,” Harry agreed.

“And I would do it again.” Rabbit's lips were twisted, making them disappear still further; his face was an ugly, splotchy pale. He did not look harmless in that moment; he looked cruel. “You want to report me? Report me.”

“You saved my life,” Harry said.

“I had to,” Rabbit said. Then he turned around, and went back to making tea. His bony hands were trembling.

“Why?” Harry said.

“Because,” Rabbit said, spelling the leaves into little balls. “I have to stop them.”

“So do I.”

Rabbit snorted softly, charming water into the tea. “With Expelliarmus, no doubt. You’re just like the rest of them. You’re just like Harry Potter.”

“I’m nothing like Harry Potter,” said Harry.

Rabbit paused. It was a long pause, but he did not turn around. “Do you want the usual?” he said. His wand was hovering over the milk.

Harry remembered the way that Rabbit had made tea at their first meeting, and talked about the rain.

Harry had thought it meant Rabbit had nothing interesting to say. “Just a splash,” he said.

Nodding, Rabbit added milk to the other mug. “You could be deactivated,” he said.

“Did Retexticorpus kill them?”

Rabbit cast stirring spells on the mugs. “What if it had?”

Harry thought about that. “I don’t know. Would you kill them?”

Spelling the leaves out of the mugs, Rabbit paused. “I would do what I had to to get the job done.” He resumed removing the leaves. “It didn’t kill them.”

“They won't deactivate us.”

“Us?” said Rabbit, and turned around, holding the two mugs.

“Us,” said Harry.

Rabbit brought the tea over. Before drinking, he removed his own phial from its leather pouch. Grimacing at the taste of the Polyjuice, he washed it down. It was a good idea, Harry realized, cutting the taste with tea. He hadn’t taken the time to notice before that Rabbit was clever.

“I thought you didn’t like me,” Rabbit said.

Harry hadn't taken the time to notice either that Rabbit had always been aware of exactly what he thought of him. Snape had always known what Harry thought of him too, except after the end. Snape

had never got a chance to learn that Harry thought he was a hero. “Maybe I made a mistake,” Harry said, his voice quiet.

Frowning, Rabbit looked down into his mug. “How do you know?”

“I don't,” Harry said. “But I didn't give you much of a chance, and I'm sorry.”

“Chances shouldn't be given.” Rabbit lifted his eyes. “They should be earned.”

“Then you've earned one.”

A smile ghosted near Rabbit's thin lips. “If I had known that's what it would take to impress you,” he said.

Harry lifted a brow. “You would've turned my skin inside out?”

“No.” Rabbit took a sip of tea. “But I know a mean Bat Bogey Hex.”

Harry snorted. “I already know a mean Bat Bogey Hex. And I can bet mine's meaner than yours, considering who taught it to me.”

Rabbit's wry smile deepened, crooked. “You wouldn't want to face the one who taught it to me in a battle. I know, because I nearly did, once.”

“You've got nothing on me.”

Rabbit laughed, a dry, light sound. “You're still an arrogant son of a bitch.”

“I'm willing to bet you still have a stick up your arse.”

“Charming, as ever.”

“Thanks,” said Harry. “For saving my life.”

“I was doing my job.” A smile ghosted again on Rabbit's face. “I told you I was good at it.”

*

Spring 2003

The thirty or fortieth time Harry saw Malfoy after the Death Eater Trials, Harry was breaking up with Ginny for good.

Malfoy had nothing to do with the break-up, really. He was just on the Daily Prophet celebrity page, and Harry had been reading the paper. There wasn't any reason, really, Malfoy should be there. He'd left of giving to charities, just as Harry had suspected, and instead started sleeping with Quidditch teams and the Kneazles In Need Boosters, who did a yearly calendar.

Harry didn't care, really. He was eating breakfast, drinking coffee, and Ginny was in one of his shirts, sitting on the counter. She had spent the night at Number 12, but they didn’t live together; he and Ginny were on-again, off-again. He didn’t want to be that way. He didn't want to sleep around like Malfoy. He had told her so—except for the part about Malfoy.

“I want to break up,” Ginny said.

Harry spilled his coffee. “I was asking you to marry me.”

“Were you?” Ginny looked down at her bare legs. “I couldn’t tell.”

“If you want me to get down on one knee, I will.”

“Will that convince you?” Ginny said.

Harry frowned. “Convince me of what?”

“That you’re serious.”

Harry could feel a headache already starting for the argument yet to come. “You’re the one who thinks I’m not serious.”

“I think you seriously think that it’s what you want.”

Watching the coffee spread over Malfoy’s gorgeous face, Harry didn’t know what to say.

“Oh, Harry,” said Ginny, and slid off the counter. Crossing the kitchen, she put her hand in Harry’s hair. Instinctively, he bowed his head, could feel her fingers running against his scalp; he closed his eyes. “I’m sorry,” said Ginny; she kept on petting him. She slid to her knees, put a hand on his arm. “I’m so sorry.”

“How do you know what I want?” he said, and looked down into her face.

Her brown eyes were bright. “Tell me that you do,” she said. “Honestly tell me that you do, and I’ll believe you. I promise that I’ll believe you.”

Freckles were sprinkled across her nose; her skin looked kissed by sunlight. “I want you,” he said.

“Okay.” Her fingers played with the soft hair at his nape. “Do you want to marry me?”

He looked at her; he looked at her and looked at her and looked at her, and the answer was not in her eyes.

“Harry,” she said again, and she always said his name like that: my love. “Have you ever thought that people have been telling you what to do and what you want for so long that you don’t know what you want for yourself?”

“No one told me to want you.”

“Everyone expected it.”

“Why would they expect it?”

“Because,” said Ginny, and stood up, “Hermione was in love with Ron.”

Harry looked up. “I never wanted Hermione.”

“Didn’t you?” she said, and took her hand out of his hair. “And didn’t you want Ron, too?”

Harry recoiled. “No. Of course not.”

Ginny looked sad, and yes: in that moment, she looked just like Hermione. Harry tried to unsee it; he had never felt that way, not about his friends. “Maybe you didn’t. But people expected it. You were their

hero, Harry. They wanted you to get the girl."

"You're not a prize," Harry said in disgust.

"I'm not," said Ginny. "But they seem to think I am."

"But why you? If they want," Harry began, "if they want," he finished. "They could have picked Luna, or—or Parvati Patil; they could have picked Alicia Spinnet." He looked down and there was Malfoy again, on the paper, and there was no reason he should be there, no reason at all. The Death Eaters should have all gone to Azkaban, or died, or other things equally unpleasant.

"They're not your best friend's sister," said Ginny.

"You think I want you because they told me to?" There was an article about Harry Potter in the paper as well, somewhere between The Weird Sisters and Draco Malfoy. There always was, on the celebrity page. "You think I don't want you?"

"It's not like that," she said. "I know that you care about me."

"Then what are you saying? I don't even know what you're saying."

"I'm saying you never got a chance to find out who you are. You still haven't had a chance, because they're still all over you; they won't leave you alone."

"I know who I am."

"Do you?"

Harry put his hand over Malfoy's horrible, coffee-stained face. "I do."

"Okay." Ginny tucked a lock of hair behind an ear. "Do you know you're gay?"

"I'm not gay."

"Okay." Ginny tucked the hair again, even though it didn't need tucking.

Harry's hand slid off the table. Out of all the wizards in the world, Harry didn't know why Draco Malfoy had to be attractive in a way that was so trenchant, so disconcertingly direct. It wasn't that Malfoy had pushed him into the realization, not at all. He had known before. But when he had seen that first Witch Weekly article, a year ago, now—that was the first time he had known that it was unavoidable. If he could find Malfoy—even Draco Malfoy, despite who he was, despite what he was—attractive, then Harry couldn't really deny what was going on.

Ginny's eyes were piercing with patience, and Harry's voice was dull when he said, "I'm bisexual."

"I'm proud of you."

"Don't." Harry felt like he might sick up.

"I don't mean to be patronizing."

"Just don't."

Ginny spelled the coffee clean, put the dishes in the sink.

“I know who I am,” said Harry.

“Okay,” she said a third time, and put the water on for more coffee.

“I do what I want.”

Ginny set the dishes to wash. “Have you thought about your—”

“You’re going to say my job.”

“I was going to mention it.” She wiped the table clean.

“I always wanted to be an Auror,” Harry said.

“Your father was an Auror.”

“So I’m an Auror just because my dad was, and I was in love with you just because everyone thought I should be, and I’m friends with Hermione and Ron because—why, exactly?”

Ginny shook her head, preparing the filter in the coffee. “Not Hermione and Ron. That was just you.”

“Great. Very nice to hear. Do you understand you’re telling me I don’t have a life?”

She slammed the filter down. “Yes! Yes, that’s what I’m telling you.” Whirling on him, she said, “Hunting dark wizards, that’s not all there is. You live in this house and you say you want me to be your wife—”

“What’s wrong with this house?”

“Harry, it hates you!”

“It’s a house.”

“Then why don’t you leave?”

“It belonged to Sirius.”

“You said it was just a house.”

Harry closed his eyes again. “I just want to be left alone.”

“Don’t you think I know that?” Ginny’s voice was shaking. “And you’re asking me to marry you.”

Harry opened his eyes, and there was Malfoy, Malfoy, Malfoy, cleaned bright white again with gleaming hair, a stunning smile, a white shirt open at the collar. He looked good enough that Harry didn’t understand why everyone wasn’t bisexual; he looked good enough that Harry hated him, he hated him. “Draco Malfoy,” he said.

“What?” said Ginny.

“Just, Draco fucking Malfoy. He can do whatever he wants. Be whoever he wants.”

“Harry.”

“It's no effort for him. It costs him nothing, and he has everything he ever wanted. Everything he always dreamed of. I gave my life away; I gave up everything, and I have nothing.” Harry looked down at the celebrity page, where his own angry picture was pushing away the camera. “I have nothing.”

“Harry,” Ginny said again.

“Don’t you say I have you.”

“You don’t have me,” Ginny said quietly.

“I told him to get a life, you know. I told him he could do better than live quietly, in a shop. And he did it. He went out and did it.”

“You could too.”

Slowly, Harry shook his head. “No.”

“You—”

“Ginny.” He swallowed and at last looked up. She was pale and gorgeous, miles of perfect legs and full pink lips and her hair, all the fire of sunset, blood, and the House of Gryffindor. “You were right. All I know how to do is hunt dark wizards—but you don’t understand. You don’t understand: it’s all I want. It’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

“You could do so much more.”

Harry shook his head. “Seventh year was awful. Hermione, Ron and I, we were all alone. Half-starved. Frightened for our lives and hunting.” He thought he might sick up. “I want that.”

“You can’t,” said Ginny. There were tears in her eyes.

“I do. All those times in school, when we almost died—it was terrible. I hated it. But at the same time, it—it was the only time I ever really felt alive. I was with them. We were fighting.”

Just past the point of overflowing, Ginny’s eyes let go; a trail of tears wound down either side of her face.

“I know who I am,” Harry said. “I’m just no good.”

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Autumn 2006

The next fifteen jobs Harry worked with Rabbit, they learned that Petra Kozić was buying rigged wands from their creator, then selling them north. A buyer in the north then sold the wands to Anthony Bayliff, the distributor in Britain. Bayliff had been taken down by Rabbit and Pegasus, but he wasn’t talking.

The Department also had them tracking a potions ring out of Russia, Veela slaves from France, and an exotic pet trade in Scotland that dealt with wild cats.

Harry also got to know Rabbit much better.

It took a while for Harry to get the knack of the way Rabbit worked. At first Rabbit had seemed like a hidebound bureaucrat hung up on regulation. Even after the fifth job, when Rabbit had taught him Retexticorpus, Harry didn’t know what to think. Someone who had developed a spell to turn human bodies inside-out wasn’t someone you necessarily trusted on instinct. At the same time, Rabbit had

given him the counter-spell—and he had saved Harry's life.

Rabbit, Harry eventually learned, didn't do things by the book. He did what he thought he had to do in order to do what he felt needed to get done. In that regard, he and Harry were exactly the same.

Harry was certainly far more impatient. More than once, Rabbit ordered Harry to pull out before Harry was willing to give up. Harry didn't always follow orders, but when he did, he found that Rabbit hadn't necessarily intended a retreat. He had merely engineered a means of distracting their quarry, or had discovered a back entrance, so that Harry could waltz right in and take the intelligence or weapon they had been after as easily as if it had belonged to him in the first place.

When Talon would have encouraged him to leap, Rabbit had him withdraw or move cautiously forward. When Talon would have been passionate, Rabbit was calculating.

Talon used to get really angry at the criminals Level Nine followed and tracked down. You could tell exactly why he had become an Unspeakable: he was disgusted by contraband potions dealers, personally affronted by illegal spell crafters, and completely unforgiving towards anyone who would hurt an innocent. Sometimes he had lost his temper, spewing obscenities over the Dictus Charm, or going speechless in impotent rage. It had not always been helpful, but Harry had understood. He'd always thought Talon must have lost someone in the war.

Rabbit rarely, if ever, lost his temper. Whenever Harry uncovered some new horror—Veela children sold into slavery, or another shipment of the killer wands—Rabbit only grew more cold and more precise over the Dictus. He always had a plan for everything, even the unexpected; sometimes Harry thought Rabbit must have developed some new kind of charm so that he could tell what was going to happen before it was going to happen.

In that way, Rabbit sort of reminded Harry of Hermione. Hermione had always been prepared for everything; she had always had all the spells, charms, and beaded bags ready before Harry knew they needed them. Harry had simply assumed he would never work like that with anyone again—Hermione was Hermione, after all. She was one of the best witches he had ever known, and no one could replace her.

But Rabbit came close—especially since Hermione wasn't like that any more. After the war, she didn't have to be. Of course she was as brilliant and prepared as ever, but these days, it was for politics, and Harry didn't understand and didn't care. What he had told Ginny three and a half years ago was true: sometimes he longed for the days in which he was just surviving. In those days, he had only trusted Ron and Hermione.

These days, Harry only trusted Rabbit.

Frequently, he chided himself for his first impression. So very little had changed for Harry, but if he had learned anything from the war, he should have learned not to judge people. That should have come easy, knowing Rabbit wore a guise, and yet Harry had jumped to conclusions, forcing Rabbit to prove himself.

And Rabbit proved himself. He was almost as prepared for him as Hermione had always been, and sometimes more able to follow Harry when he veered off in unexpected directions, or took unpredicted tacks against their foes. After that first time with Kozić, Rabbit always understood Harry's ulterior agendas, sometimes before Harry even understood them himself.

One time Rabbit even muttered an, Oh no you don't, over the Dictus, before Harry had even seen the temptation. He was in another guise at the Belgian Wizarding Embassy, pumping a dignitary for information on illegal potions trade. On a drawer at the dignitary's desk was a symbol—an eye and arrow, the mark of the groups making the killer wands they had been tracking. Rabbit saw it on the Spellveillance, assuming Harry had already noticed it. It was the first evidence they had that the potion trade could be connected to the wand trade.

Meanwhile, Harry was flirting madly with the dignitary, Philip Claret, trying to get him to spill intel on his contacts. Claret—oblivious, and quite impressed with Harry—was showing off his famous broom collection. After hearing Rabbit and seeing the symbol on the drawer, Harry had to change tack, convincing Claret to leave so that Harry could check out the drawer—meanwhile ignoring Rabbit cursing at him through the Dictus.

If Rabbit got annoyed at all, it mostly seemed to be in exasperation with Harry, and Harry never did obey every single command. Yet they still learned to work with each other; once Harry got rid of Claret, Rabbit got down to the business of helping him spring the lock—Rabbit was always better with technical spells that involved mechanics. And when Rabbit told him to Apparate the fuck out, Harry did. Even though

Rabbit hadn't wanted him to check out the drawer in the first place, Rabbit wouldn't abandon the job once it got started, unless absolutely necessary.

That was the thing Harry learned to trust the very most about Rabbit: he just didn't quit. Talon never would have quit either, but the thing about Talon was that he was just so human: he could be impatient and angry and exhausted, and therefore it was so much easier for him to lose sight of the mission. Rabbit never seemed to lose sight of the mission. When Rabbit became quite cool and exacting in the face of criminal cruelty and ugliness, Harry knew it was because he was focusing. He was zeroing in on a way to win—and he would succeed.

Sometimes Harry wondered what Rabbit's actual life was like. He wondered what had made him this way, why he seemed to have given himself so completely to the job. He reminded Harry of himself in that way, and since the war, Harry hadn't known anyone else like that. Instead, he had met a bunch of people who expected him to be normal; his friends, even Ron and Hermione, wanted to live like the war was over.

Harry had tried it. He had thought he wanted it, and yet it hadn't worked out. Whoever Rabbit was, it must not have worked out either. Only a person who didn't have anything else could give the dedication Rabbit gave.

The other thing Harry learned about Rabbit was that he was clever. He wasn't just good at getting Harry out of sticky situations, or predicting Harry's every move. Rabbit was sharp-witted, even funny. They didn't have good laughs, the way Harry had had with Talon, the way he still did with Ron. Rabbit was subtle and sharper; sometimes it took a while for Harry to catch on.

Yet in his years of tracking dark wizards, learning to play the games Unspeakables played, pretending to be something else, Harry had gained a finesse he hadn't had in school. Delicacy and artifice were skills he had never really valued before trying to get information out of Slughorn, but once Snape had died, Harry had realized how much of those abilities Snape must have had just to survive. Now he appreciated it, and admired it in Rabbit at the strangest times.

Sometimes it was in the way Rabbit could navigate him through a difficult conversation; sometimes it was in the way Rabbit just let him stumble through the difficulties himself and took pot-shots at him through the Dictus Charm. Sometimes it was in Rabbit's observations of a certain situation, or in the

impressions and snide comments Rabbit made through the Dictus.

When Harry came back from the Belgian Wizarding Embassy, where he had been flirting with Philip Claret and had to abort his examination of the mysterious drawer, he told Rabbit—who was sitting calmly at another hotel desk, writing his report—"You nearly fucked that up!"

Rabbit just dipped his quill. "I thought it went rather swimmingly."

"You almost made me laugh!"

"Laughter would not have been remiss in your particular method of seduction," Rabbit said.

"It wouldn't have if he knew I was laughing because of the ten different ways you suggested I might polish his broom collection!"

Rabbit only dipped his quill again. "Then you would do well to only mention one or two methods of polish," he said.

"'Dipping the end in' is not a preferred method of polish!"

"Blackbird," said Rabbit, spelling sand on the parchment to dry the ink, "how exceedingly crude."

"You're the one who said it!"

"I merely mentioned finding the vein in the wood on the underside." Rabbit didn't even smirk, didn't even look up, just gently blew on the ink.

“You’re a bastard, you know that?”

Rabbit's nose twitched. “I should have mentioned to take especial care of the bristles at the root of the wood.”

“Also, you’re twelve.”

Rabbit shrugged. “You’re the one who laughed.”

“I didn’t.”

“You’re right.” Rabbit blew on the parchment again. “It was a titter.”

“Prick.”

“No.” Rolling up the parchment, Rabbit corrected him. “Broomstick.”

“For the last time, I’m not polishing his broomstick.”

“Though it sounded as if you might like to.”

“Wanker.”

“I am merely suggesting that it is fortunate that you are willing to play on both sides of the Quidditch team.”

“Not with that walrus.” Harry flopped down into the uncomfortable hotel chair, taking the flask from his pocket so he could renew his guise. The potion washed through him, repressing more firmly all the parts of him that looked like Harry Potter.

It made Harry feel more like himself.

It was easy to admit to Rabbit that he was bisexual. It was easy when he was just Blackbird, not Harry Potter, the man everyone expected to hunker down with a picket fence, a wife, two kids.

It was easier to be everything when he was Blackbird, really.

Rabbit was quiet for so long that Harry tipped his head back up, cracking open an eye. Rabbit was watching him. “Is it a problem?” Harry asked quietly. It hadn’t occurred to him that Rabbit might be disturbed by the revelation.

“No,” Rabbit said, and looked away.

Harry watched Rabbit put the scroll in his satchel and drew out his newspaper. His brow was furrowed. He looked unhappy. “Are you sure?” Harry’s voice was still quiet.

“Yes.” Rabbit unfolded the paper, but didn’t really look at it. “Do you think the potions ring is connected to the wands?”

Harry shrugged. “Could go either way.”

The corners of Rabbit’s mouth tightened, but he stuck to the subject at hand. “We would do well to find out.”

Harry sighed, tipping his head back again. “Remember that time those wizards got the jump on me at

the warehouse?”

“Which time?” Rabbit’s tone was perfectly innocent, and just that easily, Harry knew that Rabbit didn't mind which gender he preferred.

Harry didn’t crack an eye open, that time. “You’re a ponce, you know that?”

“You are frequently fond of telling me.” Rabbit stood up; Harry could hear him moving around.

Probably going to make tea, Harry thought. Didn’t matter what hotel it was, or whether it was a hotel at all: Rabbit would find a way to make tea. They had been to safe houses Harry knew that Rabbit had never been to, but Rabbit still could unerringly find a kettle.

Harry didn’t open his eyes, deciding he liked the sounds of Rabbit clinking around the kitchen, even if it wasn’t a real kitchen, even if Rabbit wasn’t really—Rabbit. He had another name, another voice, another body, and yet Harry still felt comfortable around him. He trusted him, he realized. He liked Rabbit. He liked domestic noises in the kitchen; he liked Rabbit’s newspaper on the table, the smell of tea.

Harry stirred. “I mean that time when I almost died.”

Rabbit grunted. “Oh, that time,” he said.

“You said that they knew we were coming.”

There was a clatter of cups. “That time.” This time, Rabbit didn’t sound sarcastic.

“Do you think maybe I fucked up somehow? Let them know I was coming?”

For a while, there was just the clink of dishes, and then the sound of steam in the kettle. “You didn’t fuck up,” Rabbit finally said.

“You sure?”

“I'm sure.” There was another long pause; Harry could hear liquid being poured. “You’re very good at what you do.”

It was Harry’s turn to grunt. “You’re finally admitting it?”

“I knew it from the beginning. That first time you got the charm on Kozić.” Something warm touched Harry’s hand, and Rabbit was there, pressing the mug into it. Harry looked up, and for a long moment, Rabbit didn’t move.

Heat surged from Harry’s hand up his arm, and then it was everywhere, Rabbit looking down at him, his eyes inscrutable in his lean, rodent face. Not for the first time, Harry wondered what he really looked like, and then he realized that he didn't care. He didn't care in the least.

Then Rabbit was moving away, as though nothing had ever happened. “Why do you ask?” he said.

“I’m trying to put it together.” Harry blew on his tea. “Kozić is getting the wands from someone in Croatia. She’s selling them north, and the symbol on the drawer suggests that Claret’s the buyer. We know the northern buyer was selling to Bayliff, who’s in custody. Then there’s the potions ring—we don’t know if that’s connected at all, or whether Claret’s just got a little something on the side. If it is connected, Kozić could be in the potions trade as well.”

Rabbit went to go stand beside the window, sipping his tea. “I think she is.”

“Why?”

“The tracking charm.” Rabbit turned to look at him. “It didn't give us anything, and yet it should have done. I think she is far more clever than the Department has given her credit for.”

“Or else someone tipped her off.”

Rabbit nodded.

“They knew about me about the warehouse,” Harry said. “They knew about me just now, at the embassy.”

Rabbit shook his head. “They didn’t know about you at the embassy.”

“I set up a Notice Me Not. It was fairly powerful. Most people should’ve walked right by that room.” Harry had had to abort because Rabbit had seen someone coming over the Spellveillance; they would have only approached the room if they had had a strong reason to enter.

Rabbit shook his head again. “If there was sensitive intel in that drawer, they might’ve had other reasons to penetrate the Notice Me Not. It doesn’t mean they knew you were there.”

“Still,” Harry said, and finally tried the tea. As usual, it was bland and very English. “There could be someone on the inside.”

“Level Nine may have assigned you to check out Claret,” Rabbit said. He was looking out the window. “But only I knew you were in that room.”

There was a kind of silence, until the far-away sounds of Muggle traffic became apparent. A car alarm sounded in the distance, muffled by wind and the street. “Rabbit,” Harry said. He put down his tea. “I

trust you."

"Have you any reason to?" Rabbit stood looking out the window, leaning on one hip in a way that would have bespoken sex or power in a larger man, but on him just looked careless, casual.

"We're partners," Harry said, and stood up.

Suddenly, Rabbit turned from the window. "That day in the warehouse," he said.

Harry hooked a smile. "Which day?"

"You cast that spell without even questioning it."

Harry frowned. "It was an emergency situation."

"Yes. You were incredible. A moment's more hesitation, and you could have died."

"Thanks?" Harry said, still not getting why Rabbit was bringing this up.

Rabbit turned to the window again. "It was dangerous. You didn't know what that spell was for, what it could have done."

Harry came to stand beside him. "Something you're trying to tell me?"

Rabbit shook his head, hands wrapped around his tea cup. He was still looking out the window. "Don't cast a spell you don't know unless it's me who's giving it to you."

Harry just stared. “Do you know what you're saying?”

“Don’t you think I’ve thought of it before?” Rabbit slammed the cup down on the sill, and finally turned around. “That there’s an informant? Don’t you think it keeps me awake at night?”

Harry hadn’t ever really seen Rabbit get angry. “You’re afraid I could compromise the mission?”

Rabbit turned back to the window. “We can't lose. Not on this.”

“You don’t think I can handle it?”

“What?” Rabbit snapped. He turned back around, saw the look on Harry's face. His shoulders relaxed, and something about his face went softer. “No, that isn’t what I meant.” He looked back out the window. “That isn't what I meant at all.”

Harry frowned. “What did you mean?”

Rabbit put his hand on the strip of metal that split the panes of glass. “I trust you.”

“I—well. Thanks for that.”

Rabbit shook his head, but he didn't turn around. “I’ve never met someone like you before.”

It was the most personal thing Rabbit had ever said to him. “Like me?” Harry asked.

“You’ll go all the way.”

“So will you,” Harry said.

Rabbit was quiet for a long time. “I’ve never had—I usually don't work very well with other people. I'm too . . . I need to win. I'll do anything it takes.”

“I won't do anything,” Harry said.

Rabbit's voice was quiet. “You'll do enough.”

“Yes,” said Harry. Outside, the rain slid down the glass, winding in uneven streams, like tears. “If you weren't on my side, you would be very scary.”

“Are you frightened?” It was not the first time Rabbit had asked.

“No,” Harry said. “You're on my side.”

“I'm on your side,” Rabbit said. “And I'm on my own. But you should know this right now—I'm not on anyone else's.”

Harry released a breath. “I thought that might be the case.”

“It doesn't bother you?”

“It might have, once.” It might have, before Harry had learned about Snape. Snape hadn't been on Harry's side, or the Order of the Phoenix. He had only ever been on Lily's. Dumbledore had done

anything he could to win, and in the end, so had Harry. It wasn't good or right or just, and Harry wasn't convinced it was necessary. It certainly wasn't necessary once the war was over. The problem was, it was the only way Harry knew how to be.

“You don’t even know who I am,” Rabbit said. “I don’t know who you are.”

“I know who you are,” Harry said. Rabbit turned around, and Harry smiled. “We just can’t speak about it.”

*

Harry first started working for the Unspeakables in the autumn of 2004. He had broken up with Ginny over a year ago. During the course of that year, Robards had removed more and more of Harry’s responsibilities as Auror. By the time Harry almost quit, he wasn’t on the field at all. Instead, he was behind a desk, pushing papers.

Robards claimed they couldn’t put one of their best Aurors in danger. At the time, Harry had been convinced Robards meant they couldn’t put their figurehead in danger; politicians no doubt found Harry far more useful as a puppet than as a law enforcement officer. However, once Harry became an Unspeakable, Harry wondered whether Robards had been grooming him for the position all along.

When Harry began working for the Department, he didn’t quit the Aurors. Besides a guise that consisted of a code name, Polyjuice, and a new voice box, all new Unspeakables received or created a cover career. Many of these jobs were low profile Ministry positions.

Unspeakables were those people who held job titles that meant nothing at all. Supervisors all assumed they were under someone else’s supervision; coordinators assumed they were coordinating with someone else; representatives assumed the coordinators knew who they were representing, and on and on. The magical Ministry was a big enough bureaucracy to hide almost all of the Department of Mysteries in plain sight.

Harry, however, was already high profile. He couldn’t exactly become the Administrative Services Clerk to the Supervisor of Administrative Assistant Managers; there was always the possibility that the press

could dig into his career and find nothing behind it. Therefore Harry remained an Auror. Robards knew Harry took his orders from someone higher on the chain; Harry was pretty sure Robards thought it was the Minister. Meanwhile, the Minister thought Harry was working on projects for a minister of the cabinet; the minister of the cabinet thought Harry took orders from Robards.

Of course, no one talked about these things, which could very well mean that Harry actually did take orders from Robards, or the Minister for Magic himself, either of whom could actually be agents of the Department of Mysteries, called fondly the Department by Unspeakables, or Level Nine. Meanwhile everyone else thought Level Nine was a completely separate staff who worked on the ninth floor of the Ministry, when in actuality, all the Unspeakables faked their jobs in other departments or else were on the field.

Ron had stopped asking what Harry's special jobs were, and Harry had mostly stopped feeling bad about it. Either Ron had guessed he was an Unspeakable, or Ron himself was an Unspeakable. Either way, Robards was definitely preparing Ron to be the next Head Auror, and Harry was happy with his job, so Ron was happy too. Harry had thought once or twice that Ron might be Talon, but Talon had had far more experience than Ron could have had at their age, and Harry didn't think Ron was all that good at deception. Then again, Harry wouldn't have thought he would be good at it either.

Some Unspeakables definitely didn't work for the Ministry. They could have cover jobs as maintenance people, secretaries, research technicians. Harry assumed most of them were low profile careers, but his wasn't.

One of the best side effects of becoming an Unspeakable was that the public and the press began to get bored of Harry. They assumed he sat in an office all day, signing things and reviewing Auror reports, and the Unspeakables helped them think it, leaking stories to the Daily Prophet in the process. There were articles about how the Boy Who Lived was afraid to go on the field, lest the Wizarding World be deprived of their saviour, or how the Chosen One thought he was too good to work among the rabble. The more believable ones were about how the Golden Boy had been traumatized by the war and was unable to hunt down dark wizards, or about how the pressure of fame had turned him into a recluse.

The latter was in some ways true. After breaking up with Ginny and joining the Unspeakables, Harry's job became his life more than it had ever been. Working undercover, first with Talon and then with Rabbit, took a considerable amount of time. The rest of the time, Harry didn't exactly want to be bothered by fans or acquaintances with whom he had lost touch.

He remained close to Ron and Hermione, but they were married now and busy with Hugo, with another baby on the way. Ginny was a world famous Quidditch player and often travelled; Luna's job as a naturalist took her all around the world. Hagrid had moved to France to be with Maxine. Neville was still around, but he had also got married, and didn't live in London. The circle of people with whom Harry was close was relatively small, and the people he saw often was much smaller.

When Harry went out at all, he often did so among Muggles. When forced to go into the wizarding parts of the world, he frequently did so in disguise, even when not working. It was just easier. Harry put in face time with the Aurors every once in a while, and made his requisite Ministry appearances. Otherwise, he tried not to appear at all.

Overall, Harry was happy with it. In some ways, everything was just like it used to be, when all he had to do was fight, and he always knew what was right.

The rest of the world kept changing. Rose was born to Ron and Hermione, and in another couple years, Teddy would get his Hogwarts letter. George got married and Blaise Zabini got elected to the Wizengamot. Percy Weasley moved up through the ranks in the Ministry, and Luna Lovegood got engaged. Cho Chang became a Healer, and Zacharias Smith did something in sales; no one quite knew what.

Meanwhile, Draco Malfoy held charity balls and volunteered at orphanages. He did photo shoots for worthy causes and made Witch Weekly's Most Eligible Bachelor three times running. He supported a myriad of causes, which seemed to change about every other week: lawful treatment of Squibs and fair treatment of former criminals, Muggle cultural studies and preservation of wizarding tradition, disabled veterans and victims of Obliviate. Nothing seemed to hold his attention long, including women. A different witch was beside him in the gossip column every other week. Once, it was both the Patil twins, one on either arm.

Harry lost track after that. He wasn't really paying attention.

He wasn't good at living the side of his life in which he was Harry Potter. He wasn't good at having relationships, dealing with the press, reporting to Head Aurors or keeping track of what people he used to know were doing. He was better being Blackbird, and sometimes Harry thought that if he hadn't had a

scar, maybe he really would have been Blackbird all along.

In his more insightful moments, Harry knew it was the other way around. It was being Harry Potter that had made him Blackbird. Had he never had a scar, he might have had a normal life.

He might have even wanted it.

*

The twenty-first job Harry worked with Rabbit, Rabbit learned he was Harry Potter.

It was a stupid mistake, a dumb mistake, but a mistake Harry had made dozens of times before with Talon. He should have known better. Rabbit was more perceptive than Talon; he should have known he couldn't get away with it.

It happened because Harry was hiding in a corridor of a facility where they thought the rigged wands might be being made. He'd set up a Spellveillance, and Rabbit was monitoring. He'd jumped into the corridor when Rabbit warned him a group of witches was coming toward him.

Too late, Rabbit said in his ear. You'll have to abort.

Harry very deliberately moved into the blind spot of the Spellveillance, where Rabbit couldn't see him, and slipped on his Invisibility Cloak. He followed the witches to the end of the corridor, with Rabbit half-frantic in his ear.

Blackbird? Blackbird, where are you? Do you copy? State your location!

Then the witches passed him by; Harry took off the Cloak in the blind spot again, and he continued down in the direction he'd been going. At the end of the corridor was a workshop, where he carefully closed the door and set up a new Spellveillance.

Blackbird!

“They missed me,” Harry whispered. “I got to the end of the corridor. I think this is where they make the wands.”

There was a long silence from Rabbit as Harry moved around the workshop. There were different types of bark here—birch, willow, ash—as well as feathers, hair, threads of different shades, weeds and stems of flowers. It was certainly a wand workshop.

To your left, Rabbit said finally, because his eyes always had been quicker than Harry’s. His voice sounded strange.

At his left were long, thin boxes full of finished wands. Level Nine would test them to see whether they were the wands they were after. Harry took five, and Apparated back to the new hotel.

Rabbit wasn’t there.

Harry put down the wands. “Rabbit?” He looked around. “Rabbit? Where are you?” He knew Rabbit could hear him through the Dictus Charm if his end was still active. He tapped his ear. “Rabbit!”

Fifteen minutes, was all Rabbit said.

Frowning, Harry sat down to wait. Of course it was possible that Rabbit had somehow been nabbed, but so few people knew about the Dictus Charm that it seemed unlikely Rabbit would have given him a time for his return if he was in actual trouble. Still, Harry didn’t like it. He took one of the wands out of its box, turning it over and over again as he waited.

When Rabbit returned, it was through the door to the room, and quietly.

Harry looked up. “Where did you go?”

“Non Dicatus,” Rabbit said.

“Non Dicatus,” said Harry.

Rabbit nodded, as though he had been half in doubt that Harry was his agent. He fumbled with the phial in his pouch, gulping the Polyjuice all in one go.

“You look like shit,” Harry said. “Did something happen?”

Slowly, Rabbit turned away.

Harry’s frown deepened. Rabbit looked exhausted, but the mission had been a fairly quick one—not to mention successful. He had seemed fine when Harry left. “Where did you go?” he asked again.

“When I tell you to get out, you get out.” Rabbit's voice was low.

The old argument barely irked him; Harry was just relieved that that was all Rabbit was upset about. “I got away. It wasn’t a big deal. What—”

Rabbit’s nose twitched. “You could have revealed yourself to everyone.”

Harry shrugged. “They didn’t see me. I’m positive.”

“You idiot.” Rabbit whirled on Harry, thin lips gone white in fury. “Do you think the guises, the

aliases—do you think they're just for fun?"

Harry's brow furrowed. "What do you—"

Rabbit's lips twisted; Harry had mostly forgot, but he remembered now that Rabbit was not a handsome man. "Do you think this is a game?"

"What's your problem?" said Harry. "Where were—"

"Damn you!" Rabbit trembled with rage. "There's only one person in the world I know of who has an Invisibility Cloak."

"Oh," said Harry.

The silence grew between them.

"I guess it would be pointless to say it wasn't an Invisibility Cloak," Harry said finally.

"How could you be so stupid?"

Harry swallowed. "I . . ."

"Idiot." Rabbit sank down into the chair beside the table. "What if I was a spy? What if I was going to double-cross you, and now I know who you really are, and it's not just some nobody, someone I can—you're a fucking idiot. You're such a fucking idiot."

Harry's brain still wasn't working right. The first thing he had learned as an Unspeakable was that no one

could learn his true identity. No one should ever know. “You’re not a spy,” was all he could think of to say.

“Fuckwit,” Rabbit said. “Of course I’m a spy.”

Well, true. There was that. “For the Department,” Harry said. “I said I trusted—”

“Yes, for the Department,” said Rabbit. “But if I wasn’t for the Department, do you realize how much power I have over you now? Do you realize how much power I still have over you?”

“I said, I trust you.”

Rabbit shuddered. It went all the way through his body, as though the disgust he felt were over-powering. “Dammit. Dammit. Why do you have to say things like that?”

“I do, though.”

“Don’t say it.”

“I said it before.”

“I didn’t know you were—” Rabbit balked, just came up against a brick wall, as though he couldn’t say Harry’s name even alone together in the room, as though even that were too much a violation. “I didn’t know who you were.”

“It doesn’t change that I trust you.”

“But I didn’t know you were . . . him.”

Harry looked at him curiously. “Do you know him?” he asked, as though Harry Potter were a different person.

Rabbit just shook his head. “Do you realize, if I were tortured—”

“I won’t let that happen.”

“How are you going to stop it? You think because you killed the Dark—”

“No.” Rabbit looked frail somehow, pale and defeated, sitting there. Harry had always guessed that Rabbit was younger than his guise, but sometimes it was hard to believe; he seemed so worn. “But I would give my life for you,” Harry said.

Rabbit made a sound, and Harry couldn’t tell what it meant, only that it was a pained sound, like actual suffering, from somewhere deep inside. “I can’t do this,” Rabbit said, standing up. “I can’t do this.”

Harry frowned. “Look, if you get captured—”

Rabbit’s head jerked swiftly. “It isn’t that.”

Harry watched him, watched the way Rabbit seemed to be in actual, physical pain. “What is it, then?” he asked quietly.

“It’s this.” Rabbit waved a vague hand. “It’s you.”

Suddenly, Harry saw the problem. He was Harry Potter, after all. Since the flash mobs had long since stopped forming, and the fan mail was only at a trickle now, he had almost forgotten the way it was, the

way it could be. Mostly, he didn't go out in public enough to remember, and the Prophet had helped sabotage his name enough that he could forget.

His voice was still quiet when he said, "I thought that you, of all people, wouldn't care that it was me."

"I, of all people, care!"

Silence bloomed in the wake of his words, and for the thousandth time, Harry wondered who Rabbit was. He wondered whether he had known him in school: a professor, a classmate, a friend. He could be a former lover, for all that Harry knew, and yet it didn't seem possible that he could have known him in any other capacity.

He would have recognized him.

Even without knowledge of his face, his voice, his name, Harry felt sure that he would recognize him.

"You're the best partner I ever had," was all that Harry could think to say. "You're one of my best friends."

Rabbit laughed then, a slightly hysterical sound.

"Please," said Harry.

Quiet for a long time, Rabbit scrubbed his face with a bony hand. At last, he sighed. "You need to take your dose."

Slowly, Harry took out his flask, and looked at it.

“Don’t you dare,” said Rabbit.

“If you know who I am,” said Harry.

“I shouldn’t,” said Rabbit.

“I could Obliviate you,” Harry said.

“I . . .” Rabbit finally turned to look at him. “It would be for the best.”

“Do you want me to?”

Rabbit swallowed convulsively. “You should.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

Rabbit’s eyes dropped.

“It’s okay with me that you know,” Harry said, coming closer. “It wouldn’t be with anybody else. But it’s okay with you.”

“You can’t ever skip your dose. Not even when we’re alone together.”

Harry shook his head. “I wouldn’t anyway.” Opening the flask, Harry tipped it back, swallowing the potion. As the Polyjuice reinforced his guise, Rabbit frowned, obviously not believing him. “I like my

guise," Harry said.

"You . . . what?"

Harry shrugged, putting away the flask. "I like it."

"But you're . . . why?"

Harry just looked at him. "My other one has scars."

He would know what scars. Everyone knew Harry Potter's scars.

Rabbit shivered, still not looking at him. "You're far too trusting."

"There's no reason I shouldn't be. Not with you."

At last, Rabbit lifted his eyes. "No. There's no reason you shouldn't be." For the barest of moments, Rabbit's eyes weren't on his. They were on Harry's lips. Then they lifted again, and Rabbit's voice was husky. "I won't disappoint you."

Harry reached out, but Rabbit stepped away. "I've never been disappointed in you," Harry said, hand falling.

Rabbit shook his head, the movement vehement. "I promise. I won't fail you."

"I don't think you could," said Harry.

“Also,” said Rabbit, “if you ever pull that shit again, I will kill you dead.”

Harry opened his mouth.

“Don’t you dare say that it worked. If I can recognize that Invisibility Cloak, anyone can.”

“Yes, but,” Harry said. He made a hazy gesture. “Invisibility.”

“I don’t care. Taking it on or off is just too dangerous.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?” Rabbit’s eyes narrowed. “How can I trust you?”

Harry affected a hurt expression. “So I trust you, but you don’t trust me?”

The eyes remained narrowed. “Not one bit.”

Maybe Rabbit was Ginny, actually; she was very compelling, in a rage. Harry reached in his robes and pulled out the cloak. “Here.”

“I—” Rabbit took a step back, his eyes gone almost comically wide. “I didn’t mean you should give it to me.”

“I’ll be tempted,” said Harry. “Here.”

Taking another step back, Rabbit said, “You can’t give me that.”

“It’s just for safe-keeping.”

Rabbit gave a half-shake of his head. “Your father,” he began, and stopped.

It didn’t mean anything that Rabbit knew; by now, everyone knew the story of the Invisibility Cloak. “And Dumbledore,” Harry said, coming closer to Rabbit and tugging on his hands. “Here.”

Looking down at the shimmering cloth in his hands, Rabbit said again, “You can’t give me this.”

“I just did.”

“You,” Rabbit began, and didn’t finish. Shivering, he looked down at the cloak again, pulled it through his hands. One of his arms disappeared as he drew the cloak over it.

Harry smirked. “Suits you.”

Rabbit rolled his eyes. “Thanks.”

Harry pressed his shoulder. “Keep it safe.”

“I promise,” Rabbit said again.

*

II.

*

The second time Harry spoke to Draco Malfoy after the Death Eater Trials, Harry had seen Malfoy in a thousand articles in daily papers, full page spreads in catalogues, wizarding photos the size of billboards on building walls featuring his charity photo shoots for Taliesin's Talents, but he didn't speak to him until the Ministry gala.

"Hey," Harry had said to Rabbit, three days earlier. "You should come."

"To the Ministry gala?" Rabbit had looked up. He had been reading the paper, ever-present tea by his elbow.

"Yeah," said Harry. "It'll be fun."

Rabbit went back to his paper. "Does the concept of 'secret identity' mean nothing to you?"

Harry threw a Bertie bean in Rabbit's general direction. "You wouldn't wear your guise," Harry said. "Just come as you."

"Again. I think you failed the incognito part of school."

"There wasn't a school. Just that weird training program."

"It wasn't weird." Rabbit frowned down at the newspaper. "I liked it."

Harry rolled his eyes. “Because you aced all the examinations, probably. You’re just like Her—” He stopped. Though Rabbit knew perfectly well who he was, neither of them ever said names. “A friend I have.”

Rabbit turned a page. “Sometimes it worries me how bad at this you are.”

“Come,” said Harry.

“What if I’m not invited?” Rabbit asked.

“I can get you a blank invitation. Just charm it with your real name. No one will know you’re not supposed to be there. And if you were invited, never mind.”

“You won’t know who I am, in that case.” Rabbit turned another page.

Harry just shrugged, eating more every flavour beans. “I won’t know who you are in any case.”

“Perhaps all your Ministry friends will know I don’t belong there.”

Harry snorted. “They’re not my friends.”

Rabbit paused to glare.

“Well, I mean,” Harry added, because Ron, and Hermione, and sundry. “Most of them aren’t.”

Rabbit just went on reading.

“Besides,” Harry said, “it’s unlikely.”

Rabbit didn’t even look up. “What’s unlikely?”

“That they’ll think you don’t belong. Most Unspeakables have cover jobs in the Ministry.”

Rabbit’s nose twitched. “Now you’re fishing.”

“You don’t think it’s unfair that you know who I am, but I don’t know who you are?”

Rabbit’s nose twitched again. They had had this conversation before (it was their twenty-ninth job), and it had moved long past Rabbit’s fear in knowing Harry’s true identity, and well into gentle teasing. “If I told you,” Rabbit murmured, and didn’t bother finishing.

“Yeah, yeah.” Harry sighed. “I just wish—I wish,” he said.

“I wish I had an agent with more common sense,” Rabbit said.

“You know you love me.”

Rabbit didn’t say anything. When Harry lifted his head to look at him, Rabbit was studiously bent over the Daily Prophet.

“Why do you even read that rag?” said Harry.

“I stay informed.”

“I’m sure the gala will inform you plenty.”

“We’ve already established that you won’t know who I am.”

“Maybe I’ll recognize you.”

“Excellent. Now that you’re in constant danger, you’d like to compromise my identity as well. Smashing plan.”

“Sometimes you’re a ponce.”

Rabbit folded up his paper. “Then don’t invite me to your parties.”

“But I want you to come.”

“I’m not a real person, you know. This just happens to be my guise.”

“I would recognize you if you went around saying things like ‘smashing plan’.”

“I wouldn’t.”

Harry sighed. “You know, just knowing you’re there would make me feel better.”

Rabbit, still folding up his paper, paused. “Why?”

“Because.”

“As ever, I delight in your powers of reasoning.”

Harry had been unable to extract a promise from Rabbit that he would come. It wasn’t until Harry started getting ready for the gala that Harry had realized Rabbit had never quite said he wouldn’t come. It had excited Harry; what he had said was true: just knowing that Rabbit was there would make him feel better.

Whenever Harry was on a job, he knew that Rabbit was out there, like a friend watching out for him. It would have been like that, except without the Dictus charm.

Instead, there was Draco Malfoy.

Harry didn’t really go to many Ministry functions. He would not have gone to any of them, but for his job; showing up just several times a year where everyone could see him was an easy way to convince people he was up to nothing special. They snapped his picture, hovered around him, decided whether all the articles in the Prophet were true. Then they got bored, and left him alone for at least a month or two.

Harry first realized Malfoy had arrived because the commotion suddenly shifted from being centred around him to being centred around the entrance to the hall. Despite the fact that Harry had fallen far from his height of public appeal, there were still very few people who could steal the limelight from the hero of the wizarding world. Apparently, Draco Malfoy was one of those people.

Though Malfoy still occasionally threw cash at various causes, he was famous now more for being rich and beautiful than he was for the touching story of the former Death Eater turned social justice hero. He threw enormous charity balls—half of which, it was rumoured, ended in orgies. He dated political figures and music stars, but never for longer than a week. He did photo shoots and advertisements for various auctions and causes; he spent thousands of Galleons on cologne and designer robes, then gave it all to

orphanages that couldn't use them. He was generally outrageous and desirable, so of course the wizarding world loved him even more than when it had appeared that he had actually been trying.

Relieved to be spared the adulation, Harry tried to stay as far away as possible for the rest of the night.

He thought he had succeeded, until late in the evening he heard a low voice behind him. “Hullo, Harry Potter,” said the voice.

The problem was that Draco Malfoy was more gorgeous than he had any right to be: more gorgeous in person than he was in any celebrity gossip column, and ten times more gorgeous than he had been when Harry had last seen him face to face. Malfoy had been in a holding cell then, accused of potions fraud.

“Malfoy,” Harry said, and turned away.

Malfoy didn’t take the hint. “Great party,” he said.

“Not really.”

“We’ve been having very fine weather.”

Harry turned back. “What do you want?”

There had been a smile on Malfoy’s face; now it faltered. “I’m not sure,” he said, sounding sarcastic. “Fancy a dance?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “No thanks.”

Malfoy stood there for a while, and Harry could feel the presence of him behind him: tall and beautiful and caustic, thinking of ways to diminish Harry Potter. He must have had a good idea of how to do it, because he said, “Waiting for someone, Potter?”

Harry stiffened. “No.”

“It looks like you are.” Malfoy’s voice sounded softer.

“I’m not waiting for anyone.” When Malfoy still didn’t leave, Harry eventually turned again. “Why are you here?”

Malfoy grimaced. “I was invited.”

“Then why aren't you spending time with your adoring fans? I'm sure they miss you.”

Malfoy’s cheeks went pink. “Speaking of adoring fans, where are yours? Oh, that's right. You don't have any any more.”

“Maybe I don't pay them as much as you do.”

Malfoy laughed, a sudden, sharp sound, like ice breaking. “Maybe they just like me better.”

“I'm sure it's your sparkling personality they fawn all over.”

“You haven't changed a bit, Potter.”

“Neither have you.”

“How do you know? You don't even know me.”

“That's right. I don't.” Harry turned back to look at him again, and realized that it was true; he didn't know this person. He didn't know Malfoy any more at all. “You volunteer at orphanages,” Harry said, by way of reconciliation.

“Oh, that.” Malfoy laughed again. “How tiresome. Then again, perhaps all children act that way when they don't have parents. As I recall, when they admitted you to Hogwarts, you were practically savage.”

“I'm sure even wild animals know enough to stay away from you,” Harry said. “Particularly when you run screaming from them.”

Malfoy pinked further still. “Perhaps if people had kept a leash on their pets, they might not have been a danger to school children.”

“Do you mean Buckbeak, or do you mean Fang? Because I remember you ran like a girl from both.”

Malfoy sneered. “Why, Potter. I should think it was obvious; I meant Hagrid. Though now that you mention it, a certain godfather comes to—”

“Shut the fuck up, Malfoy.”

“You think because you’re Harry Potter, you can say whatever you want. It must be wonderful to be so bloody special.”

“You don’t know anything about me.”

Malfoy laughed again. “I know about you. I know all about you.”

“I’m sure you do.” Harry felt more vicious than he had in a good long while. “You’ve always known all about me. I’m sure Daddy taught you so much.”

Malfoy’s voice went arctic. “Don’t talk about my father.”

“Then don’t talk to me.”

Malfoy sneered again. “Then I won't. Apparently, I'm not missing much.”

Malfoy walked away. Harry's eyes scanned the crowds again, again and again and again, but Rabbit had been right. He could be here, only Harry wouldn’t know it. He had thought he would be able to feel it, and then wondered when he had started to feel that way about his handler, whose real name he didn’t even know.

*

“It was horrible,” Harry told Rabbit later. They were in a safe house this time, but it was still just as colourless and anonymous as all the hotel rooms. “You didn’t come.”

Rabbit was doing wandwork, rigging a bit of metal so that it would get Harry into the place he needed to go. He didn’t look up. “How do you know I didn’t?”

Harry sighed. “I don’t.”

Rabbit just grunted, bending closer to cast a particularly difficult part of the charm.

“It couldn’t have been so bloody awful if you were there.” Harry was casting disillusionments on the clothes he'd be wearing for the coming job. “You weren’t there, were you?”

“No.” Rabbit went on casting.

Harry sighed again.

At last, Rabbit finished the charm. “This should work.”

As Rabbit gave him the bit of metal, their hands touched. Rabbit pulled quickly away, and Harry watched him. “Do you think we’ll ever meet? Not like this, I mean.”

Rabbit turned away. “How do you know we haven’t?”

“I don’t,” said Harry. “But I know.”

“Tantum dico tibi,” Rabbit whispered, and pointed his wand.

Harry sighed again. “Tantum dico tibi,” he said, and finished the Dictus Charm. “I missed you,” he said, and knew that Rabbit could hear the words in the room and echoed again in the charm at his ear.

“I know,” said Rabbit. I know.

“Let’s do it,” said Harry, and Apparated.

Level Nine had finally finished processing the wands Harry had confiscated from the facility in which he

had used his Invisibility Cloak. Unfortunately, though they had found the Unforgiveables woven into the construction of the wand, they hadn't found any clues as to who was making the wands, and Harry and Rabbit were back to following the illicit potions trade, hoping that they could find further connections through Claret.

The job—Harry's thirtieth with Rabbit—was just a stake-out. He was watching Kozić again; she was due to meet a party who remained as yet unknown. Harry was supposed to watch and collect any evidence he could after the culprits vacated the premises—thus Rabbit's charmed key. Later, Level Nine would examine his Pensieved memories for any further clues. Meanwhile, Rabbit was monitoring Spellveillance.

Apparently, Harry was early.

I don't like it, said Rabbit.

"Maybe they missed their trains," Harry said, keeping his voice low in case Kozić happened to walk in. He was in the warehouse under the heavy net of spells he had woven on his clothes. The main portion of the meet and greet would probably be in the office, which was usually kept locked. Harry had an Extendable Ear charmed invisible and ready.

The Department got the time wrong, said Rabbit.

"It happens."

It happens, said Rabbit. It can happen to dead people.

"Are you worried?" Harry found himself smirking.

No. It sounded defensive. Yes.

“I’ll be okay.”

I don’t like it, Rabbit said again.

“How about this,” said Harry. “If I survive, you buy me a pint.”

There was a silence. Are you betting? On your life?

“Possibly.”

For a pint.

“With me.”

Another silence. We can’t.

Harry shifted, drawing patterns in the dust on the warehouse floor. “I know. Say you will anyway.”

The pause stretched out. This isn’t real.

Harry frowned, looked around the warehouse. He was cramped behind the concealment spells; the spot was dusty and uncomfortable. “Then this is a shitty dream,” he said.

You know it isn’t real.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Yes, you do.

“Then what?” When Rabbit didn't answer, Harry shifted in the dust. “Just say you’ll go out with me. I know we can't. Just say you'll do it.”

What’s your problem?

Harry didn’t know. “It would be nice,” he said finally. “To just be an ordinary bloke. For once.”

The silence went on.

“You know,” Harry said, “you’re the only friend I’ve ever made all by myself.”

You keep forgetting that I know who you are.

Harry drew more things in the dust. “I know. And I know who you’re thinking about. You’re right; they’re the best friends I’ve ever had. They’re the best friends anyone can ever have. But they knew who I was before I was friends with them. I was famous for them before I was friends with them.”

A pause, and then, One of them wasn’t raised in the wizarding world. You can’t honestly think she became friends with you out of hero worship.

“No. Of course I don’t. And he didn’t either. But they’re famous too. I never get to be . . . just me. When I’m not in a guise, I mean.”

Another long pause. I'm sorry. About the gala.

"Don't bother about it. I know it was stupid to ask. I just . . . sometimes I wish things were different."

Rabbit's voice went low. Sometimes I wish that too.

*

The third time Harry spoke to Draco Malfoy after the Death Eater Trials, it was a week after job number thirty. Kozić had never showed, and neither had her mysterious cohort. There were a million reasons the meeting could have changed, but Rabbit still hadn't liked it. After it was clear that no one was coming, Harry had checked out the office, but it had been cleaned up.

Harry had come back from Belgium to Number 12, Grimmauld Place, disappointed and frustrated. He'd gone to the Ministry once or twice in the last week to fake the idea that he actually worked there. Afterwards, he went to the pub. Ron and Hermione would have welcomed his company, but Harry knew they also would have been perfectly happy without him. They were busy with Rose and Hugo to take care of, and there was no one else in particular that Harry really wanted to see.

The St. George and Dragon was Muggle, and Harry went there sometimes because no one would recognize him. The pub was nothing fancy, complete with a menu of greasy fish and chips, bangers and mash, and an endless supply of lager. Harry had just settled in when Draco Malfoy came up to his table.

"Is that," said Malfoy, "—why, yes it is! It's Harry Potter." Then he began unwinding his scarf, exactly as though Harry had asked him to sit down.

"Why are you here?" Harry said.

"Me?" Malfoy took off his cloak, hanging it on the hook of the booth. "I was just passing through." He slid in across from Harry.

“They’re all going to notice you,” Harry said.

“Why?”

They wouldn’t notice him after all, Harry realized suddenly. They didn’t know that Draco Malfoy wasn’t supposed to look this good, all long legs and rich, aristocratic grace.

The waitress appeared at the table, and Malfoy flashed her a Lumos-level smile, as though he gave them to everybody; it didn't matter who.

“What’ll you have?” said the waitress.

“A pint,” said Malfoy, and waved an airy hand. “Something dark. Can you bring me something from the Thames?”

The waitress laughed. “How long have you got to live?”

“All the time in the world,” Malfoy said, and lounged.

“Stout?”

Malfoy grinned. “I’ve always considered myself tall.”

The waitress laughed again. “We have a good oyster stout.”

“That sounds divine. Have you ordered yet, Harry?”

“I’m not having any,” said Harry.

Malfoy winked at the waitress. “Better make that a chaser. Add a cognac, neat, room temperature. 1896 De La Main, if you have it.”

“Er,” said the waitress.

“Of course. I’m sorry. I—” Inexplicably, Malfoy glanced at Harry. “Vodka.” He pouted. “Tell me there's vodka?”

“There's vodka,” the waitress said, and Malfoy flashed her another brilliant smile.

“What are you doing, Malfoy?” Harry said, when she was gone.

“Ordering drinks?” Malfoy managed to look innocent.

“Fine.” Harry supposed Malfoy would get on with it, if there was anything to get on with. Then again he supposed it might be just like Malfoy to have nothing to get on with. He could be here just to annoy him; there was always that option.

The smile slipped off of Malfoy’s face. For a while, he just traced patterns on the wood of the table with long, elegant fingers. When he spoke again, his voice sounded strangely distant, as though speaking of someone else. “Did you ever think we got started off on the wrong foot?”

Harry frowned. “Not really.”

“The day on the train, when we first met. I was . . .” Malfoy lifted his eyes with their pretty, pretty lashes. “I was a snot to you. I’m sorry.”

Harry stared at him. “You were always a snot.”

“Yes. I was, rather.” Malfoy smiled—a smaller, strange smile, not like the others. “I let Death Eaters into Hogwarts.”

“Strangely, I remember that,” Harry said.

“I tried to kill Dumbledore. Even if I didn’t succeed, I hurt a lot of people in the process,” Malfoy said. “My whole world view, everything I believed in or tried to do, was wrong.”

“Yeah,” Harry said.

When the silence stretched too long, Malfoy said, “Shall I go down on my knees?”

Harry pictured Malfoy on his knees, and then wiped his mind right clean and didn’t think of anything. “What for?” he said.

Malfoy smirked faintly. “Why, Harry, don't you think we should start over?”

“Why?”

Draco Malfoy was famous, the wizarding world apparently having either forgiven or forgotten his dodgy past. He'd got on with his life, and done a bang up job of it, as far as Harry could tell. He might sleep with different Quidditch teams every week and totally misconstrue the idea of non-profits, but he still threw

his money occasionally at charities, or showed up to volunteer in hospital in one thousand Galleon dress robes. He still did photo shoots, sometimes. Even if he wasn't really making a difference, he was at least doing something different.

Everyone else had changed, so could Draco Malfoy. Harry just wasn't clear on why it suddenly had to have anything to do with him.

“I just meant that maybe we can let bygones be bygones,” Malfoy said, cutting through Harry's thoughts.

“Do you mean I'm holding a grudge?”

Malfoy was still wearing that strange smile. “Aren't you?”

Harry frowned. “Malfoy, how can I hold a grudge? I don't ever think about you.”

The smile fell away. “That's right. You have more important things to think of, don't you.”

“Frankly, yes.”

“No time for the hoi polloi.”

“Come off it. I wasn't the one who acted like I was too good for everyone.”

“No? That wasn't you parading about Hogwarts for six of seven years? Whoever he was, he bore a striking resemblance.”

“You were a prat.”

Malfoy sneered. “I was more creative at calling names.”

“'Potter stinks'?”

Malfoy put his nose in the air. “Diggory was the true Hogwarts champion.”

“You mentioned the train,” Harry said. “When I think of you on the train, mostly what I remember is you making fun of Cedric. Who had only recently died, if you’ll recall.”

“I never made fun of Diggory!”

“But you were very proud that your father was party to murder, weren't you.”

“So then, Potter.” Malfoy's face was white. “You never blamed yourself for Diggory's death?”

“Every day,” Harry said, and Malfoy deflated, just like that.

His eyes went soft as velvet; his hand moved on the table, aborted half-way across. “Harry,” he said, and there was something strange about his voice, something pleading and half-familiar—

“Vodka and stout,” the waitress said, setting the drinks on the table.

Malfoy glanced up at her quickly, colour coming back into his cheeks. “Thank you,” he said.

“Straight from the Thames.” The waitress grinned.

Smiling faintly, Malfoy said, “Did you dredge it yourself?”

Laughing, the waitress said, “You wanted it dredged?”

“Ah. Then this is full body?”

“You wish,” said the waitress. “Can I get you anything else?”

“That depends.” Malfoy looked at her from under his lashes.

The waitress just laughed again. “Keep your eye on this one,” she told Harry.

When she was gone, the smile on Malfoy's face slipped away. He looked down at the table, wearing a pinched little frown.

Harry sighed. “Look, Malfoy . . .”

“Never bother.” Malfoy grabbed the shot of vodka and gulped it all in one go.

It didn’t seem very Malfoyish, drinking like that. It exposed the long line of his throat, his Adam’s apple, the vulnerable skin just under his chin. His throat was smooth and perfect, golden in the light.

Harry looked away. “Why do you keep flirting with the waitress?”

Malfoy's unexpected bark of laughter brought Harry's eyes back to his face. “Flirting,” he said.

Harry shrugged uncomfortably. “If that's what you want to call it.”

“Maybe she's cute,” Malfoy said.

“She's Muggle.”

“Is she? I hadn't noticed.”

Harry's eyes narrowed. “No one changes that much.”

The smile that had been playing about Malfoy's mouth deepened into a grin. “You don't like her, Harry?”

“You don't like her either.”

“It's true,” Malfoy said. “I’m not interested in her—but it's not because she’s a Muggle woman. It’s mostly just because she’s a woman.” He smiled peaceably, and Harry stared.

Malfoy only continued to look amused, running a slow, sultry finger up the frosty side of his pint.

“You sleep with women all the time,” Harry said, because he didn't know what else to say. “It's in all the papers.”

“Never trust anything you read, Harry.” Malfoy smiled.

All at once, Harry knew why Malfoy was there, why Malfoy had followed him to the pub, why Malfoy had apologized, ordered drinks, flirted with the waitress. Harry had never even considered it—or perhaps he

had, in passing; Malfoy was so good-looking, and in so many newspapers and magazines, it was hard not to think of it from time to time: what it might be like. But Harry had never seriously considered it a possibility. He was not considering it now—but Malfoy was.

It didn’t seem to make sense, that Malfoy would choose him. Malfoy could have had anyone he wanted. Apparently, he wanted Harry.

“You’re bored,” Harry said, surprised.

Malfoy looked surprised as well, then laughed. “Do you think so? I suppose ministers and mediwitches are in finite supply. Why can't I have the hero of the wizarding world?”

Harry's voice was flat. “Because I'm not for sale.”

“Oh no, Harry.” Malfoy smiled. “I don't buy them.”

“No. I don't suppose you do.”

Malfoy leaned in, his voice dropping into a low drawl. “I seduce them.”

Harry hadn't realized he had leaned forward also, but when he tried to pull back, Malfoy's hand clamped down hard on his wrist. “It's hardly any effort at all, Harry, getting them to bed,” Malfoy said, his voice husky and warm. Harry felt as though it crawled all over him, clung to him. “It's so easy for me to lie; I say everything they want to hear. The sex is just like honey, when they think you're good—and they give it up so sweetly, when I show them I can be bad—Merlin, the way they moan for it, it's like they've wanted it all along. What about you, Harry?” Malfoy released him then, and smirked. “How long have you wanted it?”

For a moment, Harry was tempted. He thought about Malfoy’s mouth on his, brutal and hard, Malfoy’s nails raking across his skin. He thought of Malfoy naked, bucking against him, fighting him; he thought of

Malfoy above him, cruel and beautiful. He thought of Malfoy taking him from behind, biting him; he thought of all the sweat and subtle cries, the pain, the panic, the release. He thought of bruises and of sleep, and how good it all would feel.

Then, inexplicably, Harry thought of Rabbit.

“Thanks,” Harry said. “But no thanks.” He stood up. “I've got to get going.”

“This is all so sudden,” Malfoy said, looking up at him. “I’m usually not that kind of girl.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, even though he didn't know what he was going to say.

“But if you insist.” Malfoy made no move to get up.

“Don't follow me,” Harry said.

“Perish the thought.” Malfoy drank his stout, baring his throat again. Harry wondered whether it was on purpose.

“Good bye, Malfoy,” Harry said, and walked out.

He could have fucked him. It would have felt fantastic, and it didn’t matter any more who Draco Malfoy was. Malfoy shouldn't matter at all any more, really.

Even if he didn't have sex with Malfoy, maybe he really should just have sex with someone. There were plenty of others, and it had been a while. Just thinking of how he could go to sleep afterwards made it tempting, and yet somehow it wasn’t what he wanted.

What he wanted was to Apparate back to Belgium. He wanted to track dark wizards through rainy, muddy streets; he wanted to infiltrate secret societies; he wanted to narrowly escape AKs. He wanted Rabbit on the Dictus, bitching at him, guiding, teasing; he wanted Rabbit's flashes of brilliance, expert planning, cutting repartee.

He wanted Rabbit's steaming tea, and quiet, unassuming presence, the way they could both be in a room writing reports without talking. He wanted Rabbit's steel grit and determination, Rabbit's tunnel-vision dedication to the cause; he wanted Rabbit's scary perseverance and willingness to manipulate just about anything to get what he wanted. He wanted the way that Rabbit knew what he was going to do and always understood the way that he was thinking; he wanted Rabbit's ill-fitting clothes and his twitching nose, his sharp, narrow face, big eyes.

Trouble was, that wasn't Rabbit's face and those weren't Rabbit's—whoever he really was—clothes; that wasn't Rabbit's nose. Harry wanted a person who didn't actually exist. It should have been more upsetting, but it wasn't.

Draco Malfoy wanted Harry Potter, but Harry Potter didn't exist either.

*

On Harry's twenty-fifth job with Rabbit, Harry spontaneously grabbed the arm of Yurik Morchenko, a potions dealer (who may or may not also be involved in the wand trading) in Niznhy-Novgorod, as he was Apparating. Then Harry was in the midst of a whole nest of wizards, and before he could move, Morchenko cast an anti-Apparition charm.

Idiot, Rabbit said into the Dictus. Window to your right. Go!

Harry kind of sort of jumped out the window, cushioning his fall with a spell. Then he took off running.

Give me the street, said Rabbit.

Harry looked up, rounded a corner. He cast a Spellveillance so that Rabbit could see the street sign; it wasn't like he could read it. It was in Cyrillic. Morchenko and the other wizards were already following him, and taking off an anti-Apparition charm required at least several moments of standstill—long enough for the wizards to simply cast another one.

This was it, what Harry lived for—the chase, out in front of everyone, the breakneck pace, just trying to stay ahead.

It was going to take a moment for Rabbit to even find out where he was, and that much longer to find a safe house, an escape route, something to help him. Rabbit likely didn't even have the map out; Harry wasn't supposed to leave the warehouse; he'd have those schematics in front of him, and Harry just didn't have the time to—

Right, said Rabbit. Turn right.

Harry didn't even think about it. He turned.

There's a shop. An apothecary. Run through it. On your left, just—now.

An impossible thrill rushed through Harry as he swerved. Rabbit was with him; he was with him—

Keep going. Over the counter.

Harry leapt, adrenaline pumping his heart hard, like a drum in his head, his feet, his hands.

To your right, there's a door.

Harry opened the door, and ran.

Three blocks, there’s a market. I’ll be a moment.

Harry ran faster than he thought he might have ever run, as though running to reach Rabbit's next destination. There were Muggles everywhere, selling vegetables and hawking wares. Harry didn't even stop to think that Rabbit might not know what he was doing.

Go back, Rabbit said.

Harry kept running.

Eight stalls. Ten, go back, Blackbird, that’s a direct order. Twelve, Blackbird, trust me.

Harry turned. Morchenko and the others were just entering the market.

“They're coming,” Harry said.

Do it.

“If you say so,” Harry said, and ran towards them. Muggles pushed back against him. In a hurry, not wanting to hurt them, Harry hesitated to use magic to clear his path. The wizards trying to reach him would have no such qualms, particularly if they were the sort involved in the wands trade.

He ran into a woman carrying a bag of tomatoes. Dropping the bag, she screamed, and Harry slipped in the slime, only catching himself with a quick spell. “Where am I going?” Harry demanded.

Alley on the left. Almost there.

Morchenko was almost upon him. A cart full of watches and jewellery was in Harry's way, and Harry felt a sudden surge of understanding for what it must be like, finding Muggles inferior. They were slow, clumsy, so very ignorant and fragile, desperately fragile; he could break them with a flick of his wrist—

Then Harry was pushing the cart behind him into the wizards and hating himself, hating himself, because it was Morchenko and his cohorts he should be angry at, not Muggles—not just for getting in the way; they were only innocents. He shouldn't understand; he should never understand how someone could want to hurt them, even in a moment of sheer panic. Harry didn't want to understand.

Left! Left! Rabbit was yelling in his ear.

Harry dashed left, not knowing where Rabbit was taking him. It had been madness to turn back, and yet it didn't matter, because Rabbit knew what he was doing; he was just as fast as Harry was.—

—and there it was: a broom shop. Bursting in, Harry grabbed the first length of wood he saw. Then he was back out the door, and up in the air. “Brilliant,” he said, when he’d got some height.

Not out yet, said Rabbit. Here they come.

Morchenko and the other wizards had all grabbed brooms, and were angling up behind him—but this part was easy. Ginny Weasley may have far surpassed him at the actual playing of Quidditch, but still no one surpassed him when it came to pure flying.

Holy shit, said Rabbit.

“What?” Harry was already past the first layer of clouds. When angled the broom just so—

I’d forgotten.

“What?”

You're losing them.

“I already lost them.” Harry spun his broom.

Only just.

Suddenly, Harry knew: Rabbit had forgotten the way he flew. Rabbit had seen him fly before. For a moment, it thrilled Harry right down to the tips of his toes. Then he realized that of course, Rabbit had seen him fly before; they used to cover Hogwarts Quidditch in the Daily Prophet, and Rabbit always read the paper.

It didn't matter. The wind cut coldly into Harry's face, and here he could forget everything—those things that he had thought, the person that he was. Rabbit would have understood; he was the same. Here there was only the rush of air, the headlong dive, the weightless turns on nothing. Here there was no direction, and even the winter sun felt close.

Now you’re just showing off.

“Come fly with me,” Harry said.

I'm only suicidal on Tuesdays, thanks.

Harry stood on his broom. “Watch this.” As soon as he was steady, as though surfing, he dispelled the anti-Apparition charm. Then he Apparated mid-air, and landed hard on the floor of yet another hotel

room, legs braced.

Rabbit slammed him against a wall. “What the fuck were you thinking?”

Harry looked at him, startled. “Your eyes are grey.”

Rabbit’s fist was in his shirt, his other hand braced on Harry’s shoulder. Holding him like that, he shook him. “You don't just grab onto people and Apparate where the fuck ever. You’re going to get yourself killed.”

“Promises,” said Harry.

“Do you care at all?” Rabbit was close, and hard, hot all over. Harry was surprised by his wiry strength. “Do you care about anything?”

Harry looked at him curiously. “I care about getting those bastards.”

“Justice.” Rabbit let him go with a shudder.

“You don’t like justice?” said Harry, straightening his robes.

Turning away from Harry, Rabbit sat down at the hotel’s one tiny table, with just the one chair. “It’s people like you who are dangerous.”

Harry frowned. “People like me?”

Rabbit slumped in the chair. He had on a shabby tweed coat and an exhausted expression; his limp hair

somewhat mussed. Harry failed to see how he could have thought so little of Rabbit at first, when he at times so strongly reminded him of Remus Lupin.

“The Dark Lord thought he could tell right from wrong, too,” said Rabbit.

Harry kept his mind carefully blank. “Did you seriously just compare me to Voldemort?”

Rabbit flinched at the name. “No. Yes.” His nose twitched. “You can’t just fly off the handle like that. You can’t just do whatever you want.”

“I didn’t fly off the handle,” Harry said. “Did you notice I found Morchenko's home base?”

“You could have died!”

“I didn’t, though.”

“Is your own life so unimportant to you?”

Harry opened his mouth, and shut it. He thought about his life outside of the Department, and then didn't. There wasn't much to think of. “You’re one to talk.”

Rabbit recoiled. “Me?”

“You wouldn’t stop at anything,” Harry said.

“I, on the other hand, am responsible!”

“No.” Harry moved closer, crowding Rabbit as Rabbit had crowded him. “You’re not. You’re just like me. You don’t follow the rules. You can’t.”

Rabbit didn’t back down, didn’t cower, despite how slender he was against the bulk of Harry’s guise. He just looked up, his eyes like flint. “You don't know anything about me.”

“I know,” Harry said, and leaned in. Then he was stumbling back, and Rabbit was stepping away.

“Come on,” Rabbit said. “We've got to put up tracking wards around that base.”

*

The next time Harry saw Draco Malfoy, Harry was out for a fly on his broomstick. After his mad flight from Morchenko, he had remembered how much he loved it.

He had remembered too that he needed to get shagged; it was probably partly why he had come on so strong to Rabbit. It wasn't fair, especially to Rabbit, forcing him to admit to wanting something they could never have.

Flying was in some ways better than sex; it consumed all of the energy and aggression, and all the sweat was wicked away by wind. Most of all, he didn't have to think of anyone but himself.

But that day Malfoy was waiting for him at the edge of the forest, leaning against a tree, his own broom in hand. Harry didn’t know how long Malfoy had been standing there before he saw him, or how Malfoy had found him. The woods was in a secluded spot, not so very far from Hogwarts; Harry came there because no one else did. The only reasonable explanation was that somehow Malfoy had got a tracking charm on him.

Usually Harry was pretty careful about things like that. He’d been stalked enough by paparazzi after the war that he grew wary of strangers and people touching him; he’d been through enough battles to be

aware of it, when someone aimed a wand in his direction. The only thing Harry could think was that somehow, he'd let his guard down around Malfoy. It made sense, he guessed. He knew Malfoy from before and hadn't really had a reason to expect this from him; he'd treated him as he had in school instead as a potential threat to his privacy.

Harry landed his broom and walked over to Malfoy, who was lounging against a tree, looking as immaculate as ever. "What are you doing here, Malfoy?" Harry asked.

"Watching you fly." Malfoy smiled. "Very nice, by the way."

"Quit following me." Turning, Harry went to get his cloak and the Quidditch equipment, which he hadn't actually used.

Malfoy trailed after him. "Fancy a match?"

"No," Harry said, putting the Snitch in its case.

"We could race, if you prefer."

"I don't."

Malfoy smiled. "Sight-seeing, then."

"I don't want to sight-see."

"Afraid I'll outshine you?"

“On sight-seeing? Go right ahead.”

“Come on, Harry. Don't be a chicken. Your House is known for bravery, isn't it? Still afraid of Dementors?” Malfoy stood with hips slung to one side, casual and defiant, as though he owned the world.

Slamming the lid on the Bludgers box closed, Harry stood. “What are you doing here?”

“I was asking you to fly with me.” Malfoy came closer, still wearing a faint, ironic smile. “Having deemed that pointless, I've moved on to baiting you.”

“Why? What do you even want from me?”

“Why, Harry.” Malfoy's mouth curved, his eyes wandering down Harry's body until they rested at his hips. He came closer, resting his hand in the same place, fingers light on Harry's belt. “I thought you knew.”

Harry grabbed Malfoy's wrist, and twisted.

Smiling fiercely, Malfoy stepped even closer. “That's right,” he said, his voice soft. “Harder.”

Looking at Malfoy was almost too rich, like cake too thick with frosting, or eating too many sweets—there was no reason just one person should look so good, his skin as smooth and silky as cream, his mouth so finely formed, as though painted by an artist. In comparison, Rabbit was plain in every way. Dropping his hand, Harry stepped away.

Malfoy's smile twisted into a sneer. “What's the matter, Harry? Afraid?”

Harry scrubbed a hand over his face. “I don't understand. You have a life. You're rich; you're in the papers. You've got what you've always wanted. You're big and important. What do you want from me?”

“It isn't real.”

For a moment, the world tilted sickly. Harry pulled his hand down from his face. “What?”

Malfoy spoke smoothly, without expression. “The person that everyone sees—that's not really me.”

“Oh, are you misunderstood?” Harry said, but it was perfunctory. He was still thinking of something else, the words Malfoy had said an echo from another pair of lips. “You mean you throw charity balls?”

“That's exactly what I mean. Drop a couple thousand Galleons here or there, and people begin to think you're different. It's so easy, and they believe it. It's a lie.”

Harry's brows rose. “You do give to charities.”

“Enough to keep up appearances.” Malfoy's voice was flat. “Don't you think that if I wanted to make a difference, I would actually be doing something worthwhile with my time?”

“I don't know,” said Harry. “It's not my business.”

“Yes, it is.” Malfoy stepped closer. “You told me I was more than this.”

They were going to fuck.

Harry saw it with sudden, startling clarity. Malfoy could have had his pick, had he wanted. Harry probably would have had very little trouble finding someone also, had he wanted to make the effort. But Malfoy had picked him precisely because he wanted the challenge; he wanted the buck and bite of it. He didn't

want someone who wanted him. He didn't want it to be easy.

Harry knew why Malfoy had chosen him—because five—almost six—years ago, now, Harry had told him he wasn't good enough, and Malfoy had been trying ever since then to meet that challenge.

It was a challenge, however, to which Harry had long since ceased to hold him. Harry had been angry then, angrier than he was these days. Then, he had blamed Malfoy for—for everything, for Ginny, for his job, for nothing turning out the way it should have. These days, he didn't blame anyone. He was the way he was. He had Rabbit.

Harry sighed. “You can do what you want. You can be who you want. You know that, right?”

All the toneless distance slipped from Malfoy's voice; he smirked. “Of course. My place or yours?”

Harry stared. Malfoy was long and lean, standing under the autumn leaves, like something that could twist into a thousand different shapes. Harry thought of Rabbit slamming him against the wall, the hard heat of him, his wiry frame, and said, “Yours.”

Malfoy tilted his head. “Then again, I've always longed to see yours. They say it's the headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix.”

“There isn’t any Order of the Phoenix any more.”

“Maybe there should be.” Malfoy was still smirking.

It looked like sex.

Harry swallowed thickly. “Okay.”

“I knew you'd see it my way,” Malfoy said, and beamed.

Harry picked up his bag and held out his hand. For a moment, Malfoy just looked at it. Then he took it, and they Disapparated.

Grimmauld Place had not changed much in the years since the war. The windows of the Muggle houses were still grimy, the facades still worn down. Malfoy looked around him in surprise, his eyes skipping again and again over the spot where Number 12 should have been. Harry leaned in close to his ear. As though instinctively, Malfoy put a hand on Harry’s shoulder. “Number twelve,” Harry whispered, and watched Malfoy’s eyes widen as Number 12 wedged its way in between 11 and 13.

They went up the steps, Harry opening the door with his wand. “After you,” he told Malfoy.

Malfoy stepped inside, and Old Mrs. Black began to scream.

“Children of filth! Vile traitors of infamy! Poison in the blood of—well, hello dearie. You must be Narcissa's darling boy.”

“Charming,” Malfoy said.

“She likes you,” Harry said, dropping his bag.

“I was an adorable baby.” Malfoy made a face. “Why do you have my great-aunt's portrait in your hall?” He looked around. “For that matter, why are you living in my great-aunt's house?”

“I got used to the old bat,” Harry said.

“Half-blood scum!” Mrs. Black screamed.

“After you.” Harry gestured Malfoy forward.

“And how is your Mummy?” said Mrs. Black. “She always was such a good little girl, in her buckle shoes.”

A brow rising, Malfoy looked back at Harry. “I don't know. This is rather killing the mood.”

Harry's brow rose also. “There was a mood?”

“Yes,” Malfoy said. “Which way to the bedroom?”

“Defiler of the steps of the Ancient House of Black! Perverts of unnatural design!”

Malfoy walked along the hall, looking at the house-elf heads. When he came to the door on the right, he paused, opening it.

“That's the parlour,” Harry said. The biggest thing in it was the Black family tapestry, which could be seen from where Malfoy was standing. “Do you want to go in?”

“No,” Malfoy said, and shut the door.

Down the hall, Walburga Black stopped screaming.

Harry led Malfoy down the corridor. “It's just up the steps,” he said, and began to climb.

Malfoy followed, catching his hand half-way, at the landing. “Harry.”

“What—?”

Then Malfoy was kissing him as though he had been waiting to do it this whole time, as though he couldn't even wait to get all the way up the stairs. It was not at all the sort of kiss Harry had anticipated. Malfoy was unexpectedly soft, melting against him, moulding to fit him; his mouth was gentle and exploratory, licking Harry's lips, sucking on the bottom one, nipping the corners of his mouth.

“Harry,” he whispered again, kissed Harry’s jaw, his mouth. He pulled off Harry's glasses, slipping them into his pocket, then kissed his nose, the spaces beside his eyes.

“Malfoy,” Harry said, not really understanding.

“I've been waiting,” Malfoy said, which was exactly what his mouth felt like with its sweet kisses, wreathing his face. “I've been waiting for so long—let me. Let me.” Then his hands were at Harry’s belt, and Harry was surprised to notice that those hands were shaking.

Malfoy just whispered his name and slid to his knees. Surprised, Harry began to move away, but Malfoy held his hips, said his name some more, as though this was who he really was—on his knees and gagging for it. Harry had known it was going to happen, but he hadn’t imagined it quite like this: Malfoy went down as though he loved it, as though he needed it desperately.

Then Malfoy had Harry’s cock out and his cheek was pressed against it, and there was something wrong in that, something awful, because it looked so loving. His face moved along Harry's cock, dragging slowly until his mouth was in Harry's groin, nuzzling there, breathing in, as though he couldn't get enough; this shouldn't be happening. Then his mouth opened, hot in the wiry hair, then dragging back along Harry's length. Malfoy was holding his cock, and when he reached the head and put out his tongue, he closed his eyes, as though it was all too much for him. Harry couldn't even blink.

Malfoy's tongue swirled about the tip, as though to savour the taste, as though he couldn't get enough of it, and then he was moaning, kissing down Harry's length again. “Harry,” Malfoy said, and kept on

doing it.

It wasn't right. This was nothing like Harry had thought it would be; he had thought Malfoy wanted angry sex, old school rivals; he'd thought Malfoy would want to slam him down and scratch his back, call him names—nothing like this loving, moaning wreck Malfoy seemed to be down here, on his knees, not even halfway up the stairs before he lost it, all for the love of Harry's cock.

But when Harry's tried to pull his head away, Malfoy made a sound and took him down, and then Harry wouldn't have pulled him away for the world. Instead, his hands sunk deeper into Malfoy's hair without quite knowing how they got there. It was thinner than he had thought it would be, considering how lustrous it looked, and then he couldn't think all over again, because Malfoy was swallowing again.

"God," said Harry. "God," because Malfoy was looking up at him. He was sort of blurry without glasses, but Harry could see his eyes, hungry and on fire. Harry hadn't known Malfoy's eyes could look like that. "Just suck it," Harry said, and looked away, because he could not keep looking at Malfoy when he looked like that, pink lips stretched around red cock. "Suck it, Malfoy; yes, like that."

Malfoy moaned and took it even farther, as though if he could get enough cock in his mouth, the rest of the world would simply fade away. He kept moaning like that, and Harry thought that maybe he was trying to hurt himself, except that Malfoy sounded like he was loving it, like he couldn't get enough of it, like he had wanted it, always.

Then Harry's hips were jerking, and he couldn't stop; Malfoy just took it and took it and took it. Harry yanked on his hair, said, "Please. I'm going to come. Just—please," but Malfoy wouldn't stop. His hand came up under Harry's testicles and held him there, just held him, gentle squeezed, and that was the end; Harry couldn't stop it, not even for the sake of his own dignity; he came. His hips were wild against Malfoy's face, jerking, and he still couldn't stop, until Malfoy at last came off, licking his lips, wiping come from his face and licking that too.

Malfoy said something, his voice a murmur too low for Harry to catch, then he was kissing Harry's hip bone, tongue laving around it, stopping to kiss it again and again. It was something a lover would do, until Harry calmed down.

Harry pulled up on his arm, but instead of resisting, Malfoy came up easily, and then he was kissing him. His mouth was full on Harry's, his tongue pressing deep in Harry's mouth, and he tasted all over of come. His tongue stroked insistent against Harry's own; Harry could feel Malfoy's hardness against his thigh. “Brilliant,” Malfoy said again, into the corner of his mouth. He kissed that too. “You're brilliant.”

Harry pulled him off and pushed him against the wall.

Malfoy reached for him. “That's right, Potter. Do it to me.” Harry pressed his knee between Malfoy's legs, and Malfoy's hips bucked wildly. “You always did want to take me down.”

Harry pulled away a little. “I don't want to take you down.”

Malfoy grabbed Harry's hand, pulling it into his robes, under his shirt, onto his stomach, his chest. Harry felt the smooth warm skin, sparse hair, and then the bump—the long, thin lines, raised marks on his perfect skin. Malfoy rolled his hips against his own. “Fuck me like you hate me, Potter.”

Harry pulled his hand away as though it had been burned. “I didn't mean to. I—”

“I don't care.” Malfoy jerked his hand again, holding it to all that hot, hot skin. “Just fuck me.”

“I don't,” Harry began.

“Don't you?” Malfoy rolled his hips again. “You always did in school.”

Harry tried to pull away again, but Malfoy held his hand tight against scarred skin, and bucked his hips again. Harry could already feel himself getting hard again; he hadn't thought he would. “I didn't.”

“Then fuck me because I'm here,” Malfoy said. “I'm here; I need a fucking; I'm pathetic. I'll beg you.”

“You don't need to beg,” Harry said, feeling off-kilter. He'd thought that he had understood Malfoy, in the clearing in the woods. He'd thought they'd understood what each other wanted, how this was going to be. But then Malfoy had slid to his knees, and it had been different, so completely different, and this was different too.

“I am pathetic, though,” Malfoy said. “I'll take you anyway I can get you.”

Harry thought he should tell him he wasn't pathetic, maybe kiss him; they should have a good talk out about Malfoy's scars, school, confidence issues that seemed so obvious. Instead, he opened Malfoy’s pants and reached inside. Malfoy was hard and waiting, and Harry wondered how long it had been that way; it was leaking at the tip. His hand slid down Malfoy’s prick, wrapping around it, squeezing. “Is this okay?” he said.

“Anything.” Malfoy shuddered. “I'll take anything.”

Harry crowded him against the wall, and then Malfoy didn’t say anything at all. He bit his lip, eyes shut very tightly. Harry couldn’t stop looking at his face—averted though it was: that expression, as though he were in pain, as though it grew more painful every time Harry’s hand stroked down, hard around his cock.

“God,” Harry said, “you really need it.”

“Yes.” Malfoy's hand wrapped around Harry's fist, tight on Malfoy's cock. Nails dug into the back of Harry's hand, and Malfoy gasped. “Yes, I need it; I need you—”

“That's right,” Harry said. “Show me how to fuck you.”

Malfoy made a high, tight, whining sound. This was Malfoy very quickly losing all control, Malfoy going into overdrive, Malfoy losing all reason as his cheeks became so flushed they looked almost rouged, and

sweat began on his brow.

Harry hadn’t known, or else he had forgot, how it was to see someone looked so tangled up with need and unspoken desire. He didn’t know why he was seeing it with Malfoy, here and now. He did know that a part of him felt the same—yearning and so helpless, desperate for release, an inarticulate expression of something he was never going to have or be.

“Come on,” Harry said. “You can do it.”

Then Malfoy finally opened his mouth, letting out a hoarse cry, and came. Grunting, Harry slammed him back against the wall. Malfoy shuddered, shaking; Harry held him there and let him writhe.

Malfoy’s breath at last came down to shivery, shallow gasps, and then he opened up his eyes. They were so clear that they looked like unclear skies: heavy, thick with rain.

Harry pulled away, cleaning his hand with his wand. Malfoy pulled him back and then was kissing him again—a slow, deep kiss, his tongue a languid imitation of thrusts, strong and supple against Harry's own. When at last he pulled away, he whispered wetly into Harry's mouth. “Let's go upstairs.”

Harry followed him, frowning, trying to think of all the ways in which this was wrong, how Malfoy should be acting. At the top of the stairs, Malfoy kissed him again, like a lover who couldn't get enough, like this was a consummation of a relation he cared for deeply, like a newly-wed. Harry pulled away. “Malfoy,” he began.

Malfoy arched against him. “Potter, I don't care. Use me for anything you need. Pretend I'm anyone you want. Just use me.”

Harry thought of Rabbit. “I don't have lube,” he said.

“I have it,” Malfoy said, and kissed him again.

They went into the bedroom, and Malfoy broke away long enough to look around. Harry knew what he saw—or didn't see; there was just the bed, the desk, the chair, the waste bin with nothing in it. “Why don't you get ready,” Harry told him, and went into the wash room.

He rinsed his face, looked at himself in the mirror. He didn't know what he was doing; this didn't feel right; this didn't feel real. And yet, it had been so long since he was with another person. Malfoy was beautiful and warm, and wanted him for some reason, and Rabbit could be a thousand miles away, for all that Harry knew. He didn't even know what Rabbit looked like—and yet, those moments of trust, when they so perfectly understood each other, those moments of exhilaration, when they worked perfectly in sync—he knew Rabbit better than anyone else. He wanted Rabbit more than anyone else. Yet Rabbit wasn't the one taking off his clothes in the other room.

When Harry came back in his bedroom, Malfoy was naked on the bed. His legs were long, long long, and white, covered in sparse golden hair. They were spread wide, waiting, his cock nestled pink and almost pretty between, and Harry thought he had never seen another man look so wanton, and he had seen some.

“Good,” was all that Harry said.

“It's all slicked up and ready, Master.” Malfoy opened his legs, impossibly, still wider. “It just needs you to come fill it.”

“Okay,” Harry said, ignoring Malfoy's smirk. He went over to the bed, checking Malfoy's hole with his fingers anyway, because Malfoy was a smartass. But Malfoy had told the truth; Harry's fingers sank in easily—hot, wet; it was ready, so ready for him.

“Harry.” Malfoy didn't sound like a prat any more; he sounded just like it could be his first time, even though it so very obviously wasn't. “Oh God, Harry. I need you inside of me.”

“A little eager, aren't you?” said Harry, pulling out his fingers. Wiping them on the bed, he knelt between

Malfoy's legs.

“Yes.” Malfoy arched again, his body a bow.

He had placed a pillow under him; still Harry reach under and gripped Malfoy's buttocks, lifting him a little before he pushed inside, hard. Malfoy cried out. “Is that what you want?” Harry asked.

“Merlin, yes. Harry, please—”

“Like this?” Harry thrust again. “You want me to use you?”

“Yes.” Malfoy cried out, his hole even tighter than he had been for Harry’s fingers, hot and wet and clinging to Harry’s cock. “Yes!”

Harry pushed on one of Malfoy's long, lean thighs, angling it out, then lifting at the knee. Malfoy got the picture and wrapped both legs around him, pale and tight, pulling him inside his eager, wet heat. “You like being used?” Harry asked him, his thrusts hard and slow.

“More. Oh please, more.”

“You're greedy for it. I should have known that you'd be greedy.”

Malfoy arched, urging him deeper with his heels, digging into Harry's back. “Ever since I found out it was you.”

Harry felt dizzy, the world spinning too fast sensation of earlier—it was everything, Malfoy's hot skin, the grip of his body around Harry's cock; it had been so long since he had been this close to someone; he felt faint. “Found out?” He faltered.

“Don't stop fucking me.” One of Malfoy's heels pressed in sharply, hips bucking until Harry found his rhythm again, and the world righted. “Don't you dare stop fucking me.”

“You're—”

“Just a fuck.” Malfoy arched again. “I'm just a fuck for you.” His hips met Harry's own, his body clenching around Harry's cock. “God, I don't even care.”

Why should you? Harry should have asked, but he didn't; he just said, “Tight; you're so fucking tight—” He was really drilling Malfoy now, hips meeting hard on every thrust, and he couldn't seem to stop.

“Yes, oh, that's good.” Malfoy's heels dug hard into Harry's back, his body bucking under Harry's, his head thrown back, throat exposed. “It's so good. Even better than I thought it would be.”

Harry also should have asked exactly how Malfoy had thought it would be, but he couldn't seem to; his balls were tight, and Malfoy was wet and warm and so very perfect, and all that Harry could think was, “Slut, you're like a slut for it, you're like an eager little—”

And Malfoy just moaned, and agreed. “Merlin, that's what I am; I'll take anything I can get, anything, anything—”

“Christ,” Harry said; he didn't even know what Malfoy was saying, but he was coming, hips snapping and Malfoy taking all that come inside his body and Malfoy was moaning, moaning, moaning—

“Want you, want you, want you, want you—”

And by the time Harry could think enough to see straight, Malfoy was coming, without Harry having ever reached down for Malfoy's cock.

Harry did touch him, then—his hand on Malfoy's sweat-slick skin, his hand in Malfoy's come on his stomach, then further up, tracing Malfoy's scars as Malfoy came down, shuddering and shaking. “Christ,” Harry said again. “Malfoy,” because it was incredible that that had been so close to what he wanted—so good and hot and close, almost tender in the way that it had been so desperately raw.

Eventually Malfoy got his breath back, and Harry had to pull out, wet and limp and sticky. Sighing, Harry rolled over beside him on the bed. “I need a drink,” he said.

Mafloy didn’t say anything, and Harry at last looked over at him, edges still blurry without his glasses. In Malfoy’s stupid photographs he looked all wound up, tight and ready to go; now he looked used up. He looked loose, somehow, strung-out, like something that had been kneaded and stretched, and now was worn. It looked good on him—Malfoy pink and vulnerable, Malfoy well-fucked.

Harry touched his hair. It was wet with sweat, which made it looser too. He hesitated, then carded his fingers through it, treasuring the silky limpness of it. “I didn't know it was going to be that way,” he said.

Malfoy stared up at the ceiling. “My father would be so fucking proud.”

Harry took his hand away. “Don't think of him.”

Still without looking at him, Malfoy shook his head. “Mother would be delighted also.”

Harry didn't know what to say. “She loves you,” he said.

Malfoy shook his head again. “She’s always loved me, but she was never proud of me. Of course she wasn’t; I never did anything to deserve it. But after the war—we lost the Manor—I wanted to deserve it.”

Harry sat up and put his cock away.

“Our name was in the mud. I did what I thought best—I started up the potions shop. I knew that it was nothing, nothing to what we had been, but at least it was something. I thought that Father—that he—but he didn’t. He was so disappointed.”

The pink was fading from Malfoy's skin, the sweat drying. Already he looked less soft, less like someone you could touch. Harry wanted to touch him again, and yet couldn’t bring himself to do so. “It doesn’t matter what he said,” Harry said instead.

“But it does.” Malfoy at last turned to look at Harry. His face was carefully blank. “He told me that it was a disgrace. I was a disgrace. He told me I could never live up to my family’s name.”

“So don’t live up to it,” Harry said. “It doesn’t matter.”

Malfoy looked away again. “It does to me.”

“Why? Lucius Malfoy is a waste of space.”

“Lucius Malfoy is my father.”

“Your father is an arse.”

“He’s still my father.”

“He’s worthless,” Harry said, and reached out.

Malfoy jerked away. “Just because you don’t have parents doesn’t give you leave to make fun of mine.”

Harry snorted. “What's so great about parents if they're going to make you feel like shit?”

“That isn't what I meant. They love me.”

Harry got off the bed. “What good is people loving you, if they're just going to hold you up to an unreasonable expectation?”

Malfoy put his nose in the air. “I suppose you wouldn't know, would you.”

“Fuck them,” Harry heard himself say. “Just, fuck them. If you can't make them happy, it's their own fucking fault. No use bending over backwards.”

Malfoy blinked. “You're talking about your friends, aren't you. They think you're a fuck up.”

Suddenly, Harry remembered that this was Malfoy, and the way that Malfoy talked about his friends. “Don’t even start. You're not fit to even say their names.”

Malfoy blinked some more, then looked away. “I should be going,” he said, gathering up his clothes. “I have a photo shoot. They only like this look on Tuesdays.” He tilted his head, as though for Harry's inspection. Harry didn't get the joke; there was a bruise on Malfoy’s neck; his lips looked as though they had been fucked even more recently than they had been.

“You don't know anything about my friends.” Harry came closer. “You don't have any.”

Malfoy smirked. “I will always have the Kneazle Needs calendar girls. What do you have, Harry? A shameful shag you hate.”

Harry felt his stomach twist. “I don't hate you, Malfoy.”

“Mm. You're not going to keep me a dirty secret? Going to share me with your friends, then? Tell them how I lay back and moaned for it, just like a whore? Tell me, Harry. How often do you tell them who you really are?”

“Get out,” Harry said.

Malfoy tossed his head. “It’s just as well. I’m having tea with Mother after the the revue—I’m sure you don’t know how it is, and I really must meet Pansy for shopping soon.”

“Get out,” Harry said again.

“Really, darling.” Malfoy blinked his long long lashes. “I’ll just show myself out.” He turned and swaggered out the door, clothes in hand, naked body long and gorgeous from behind—still looking so well fucked.

Harry watched him leave.

*

You’re in a foul mood, Rabbit told him over the Dictus. It was their thirty-fifth job, and Harry was supposed to be looking at secret files about Philip Claret. They already knew the Belgian dignitary was involved in both the rigged wands business and illegal potions trade. Since Harry had grabbed the arm of Yurik Morchenko, Apparating directly into the lair of a crew of illegal potions dealers, Level Nine had been able to track Morchenko back to Kozić.

That meant that the potions and the wands were connected, and it all came back to Philip Claret. Since Harry’s aborted attempt at the drawer at the Belgian magic embassy, Claret had tightened up security. The Department hadn’t been able to find anything on Claret at all. Then Morchenko had met with Claret

in St. Petersburg, and Level Nine had learned Morchenko had a whole desk full of files fit for stealing.

The files would hopefully reveal the creators of the wands, and how the potions and the wands were connected. Sadly, Harry was in a cupboard in a palace in St. Petersburg, and couldn't get to the files locked in the desk, upon which a couple was currently having sex.

"Aren't they done already?" Harry whispered. He'd already cast a Silencing Charm on the cupboard.

Don't you think that'd be a little premature? Rabbit sounded amused. Besides, girls take forever to come—or so they say.

"I guess you just don't have the magic touch."

Not with girls.

There was a roaring in Harry's ears, and it had nothing to do with the couple outside. He had not been sure about what he was feeling for Rabbit, these emotions that kept building, bittersweet, in the general vicinity of his chest; he had no way of knowing if Rabbit felt the same way. To hear, so easily, Rabbit admit that he was gay produced a sudden surge of hope so strong he couldn't see, until he remembered that he was in the dark. "Rabbit," Harry's voice sounded harsh even to himself, "do you—"

What do you suppose they're saying?

Harry couldn't hear the couple very well through the cupboard, so Rabbit couldn't hear them over the Dictus, though he could watch them over Spellveillance while Harry couldn't. Harry didn't really care. "Rabbit," he said again. "Do you think that we could—"

'Don't be ridiculous, darling!' Rabbit said, his voice high. 'We can't have sex in here!' His voice dropped. 'Why ever not, my dear?' Then it rose again. 'The fellow in the cupboard!' Dropped. 'Ah, but my sweet! If we have sex for long enough, we will prevent the fellow in the cupboard from ever uncovering our

secret!’

Harry frowned, disconcerted. “Is that what you call a Russian accent?”

Hush up, said Rabbit. It’s about to get good. His hand is on her thigh. ‘Bruno, love of my life, do you mean the secret files about the rigged wands?’ His voice dropped again. ‘No, Marietta, my love! The secret that I am your long lost husband!’

“Jig’s up,” Harry said. “Bruno just told me.”

’Ah, Marietta! He cannot hear us! The door is too thick!

Harry grit his teeth, and tried to let it go. It was very clear, what Rabbit was telling him: this wasn't real, this thing between them. They couldn't take it any further.

'The sound of my heavy breathing overwhelms even a Dictus Charm!’ Rabbit said, in his Bruno voice.

Harry sighed. “I wish Bruno would just dictus her.”

’I do not know if I can! Are you not surprised to learn that I am the lover of your youth?’

“’But Bruno,’” said Harry, picking up the thread, “’You have grown such a large beard!”

’My love! My life! That was why you did not recognize me!

“Wow. Bruno’s beard really turns her on,” Harry said, because outside, the woman was moaning.

She was convinced for so long that Bruno murdered her father, Rabbit said.

“This is a very complicated story,” said Harry.

That’s why it’s taking so long.

Harry listened to the moans for a while, and against his will, began to think of Malfoy. He supposed that that was over with. Malfoy didn’t want him, not really, and Harry certainly didn’t want Malfoy.

And yet, Harry couldn’t stop thinking of it. He’d felt good for a week after—unexpectedly good, as though something had loosened inside of him. It had made doing his job easier, that unspiralling of tension; he could relax, and let himself do the work. He'd even felt more at ease around Rabbit.

He really had needed a shag, he supposed. The problem was, pressure felt as though it was building in his shoulders. It was starting to feel like he needed to get fucked all over again. Harry wondered if Malfoy—

The man outside was groaning in Russian, and Harry asked a question just to take his mind off things. “If she thought he killed her father, why is she sleeping with him?”

Rabbit was silent for another moment. Well, she did just find out he’s her long lost husband.

“But that doesn’t change him murdering her father. Besides, where did he go?”

He was lost at sea.

“I’d be more suspicious if I were her.”

Another silence, and then Rabbit’s voice was soft. Have you no romance?

“Mostly I just fuck.”

This time, the silence lasted so long Harry began to think the fucking outside the door had ceased, until he heard another moan. Charming, Rabbit said.

Harry didn't think of Malfoy. “What do you want me to do?”

Me? Rabbit sounded surprised. I have no opinion on the matter.

“Don’t you?” Harry said, feeling savage. “You’re not going to tell me I should only sleep with the person I care about?”

Far be it from me. Now Rabbit’s voice sounded faint.

“Then don’t judge me.”

Another little silence. Did I do something wrong?

Harry let out another noisy sigh. “It’s not you. I’m sorry. I—my mind is somewhere else.”

Pause. Any chance I can bring it back?

There was gentleness in his tone, something Harry hadn't heard before, and it made him ache. “Tell me,” Harry said. “Tell me how you’d be if—if it was someone you cared about.”

Another pause. I don’t think that’s a very good idea.

“Come on, Bruno. Show me what you’ve got.”

The silence was so long, Harry was afraid that this time the couple on the other side really would be finished, and Rabbit wouldn’t do it.

’I want to kiss your lips, Marietta,’ said Rabbit, finally. ’I want to taste your mouth. I want to lick your throat, Marietta, and find your pulse; I want to hold my mouth there until our hearts beat as one.

“Well,” said Harry, shifting in his cupboard. “That’s just cheesy.”

Shut it, I’m warming up. ‘I’ll put my fingers inside of you, Marietta; you’ll be warm and tight; I’ll stroke you there until my hand is wet; you’re crying out. My cock is hard for you, so hard, and when I push inside you, you’ll wrap around me until we can barely breathe.’

In the other room, the woman moaned.

’You’ll be so hot, gripping my cock, taking me inside of you. Marietta, I’ll fuck you so slow and long and hard, you’ll come and cry for more. Your cunt will be so wet it’s on your thighs; it will be torture, the long, thick pull of my cock. You need it so very badly.’

This had been a terrible idea. “Rabbit,” Harry said. His voice felt like it cut his throat.

’You asked for this, Marietta,’ Rabbit said, ’because this was the way I used to give it to you, when I was your husband. Remember we were lovers? Even then, you hated me; you thought I killed your father,

Marietta, my love. And yet, when I'm with you . . . I find myself. You are the best of me, my love. You always have been.' Then there's a lot of fucking from there, Rabbit said, quite suddenly. A lot of, 'Bruno! I have always loved you!' and 'Fuck me with your huge cock!' You understand.

Harry shifted, uncomfortable and too hot, far too hot. He swallowed hard. "Does Bruno think Marietta doesn't love him?"

You tell me.

Harry swallowed again. "I think she does."

Rabbit just laughed, the sound sharp and unkind. She has a funny way of showing it.

"I didn't mean what I said." Harry felt awful. "I mean, before."

Which part?

Harry tried to wipe off his sweaty hands. "I want to sleep with someone that I care about."

Tell me about it. Rabbit's voice had dropped about an octave.

Rabbit had never spoken this way before, and Harry didn't know why he was now. Nothing could come of it, nothing. "Rabbit. What if we met outside of—"

Too late. Marietta, you can't speak. Your mouth is full.

"What?"

Her throat, too, I think.

Harry's chest felt too tight, like he couldn't breathe—but Rabbit was right. It was unfair of Harry to even think it; he never should have said it.

That would explain the sounds he’s making, anyway, Rabbit said, and his tone was more gentle. Maybe he shouldn’t have said those things. To Marietta.

Harry listened to the noises coming from the other room. “I’m glad he did.”

Thank Merlin. He’s coming.

“Well. Finally.”

My jaw aches in sympathy.

In the other room, Bruno—whoever he was—was done, and the silence was deafening.

Harry couldn't stop thinking about Rabbit's jaw.

“Rabbit,” he said, voice strained. “I want—”

They’re leaving, said Rabbit. Best to go now.

Harry never did say what he wanted.

*

It wasn’t over with Malfoy.

He showed up on the stoop to Number 12, late at night. Harry had just got back from St. Petersburg. The files on Morchenko in the desk hadn’t given them as many leads as they had thought, but Harry had been able to find out about several meetings scheduled between Morchenko, Kozić, and an unnamed associate. Rabbit speculated that the associate was the person whom Kozić had been meeting in the warehouse, the day Kozić had failed to show—the day Harry had asked Rabbit out for a pint. Still, it wasn’t much to go on.

That wasn’t why Harry was in a bad mood. Mostly, he was in a bad mood because he kept hearing Rabbit talk to Marietta in his ear.

But then there was Malfoy on his doorstep, lounging against the entry-way, as though he didn’t even feel the cold. He looked clean and perfect, out of place on the grimy stoop. Harry should have asked what he was doing there, and yet he knew exactly; Malfoy just slid his hands into his pockets and said, “Are you going to invite me in?”

Harry opened the door.

Malfoy looked him over while Walburga Black screamed at them, calling them perverts. “I was going to give you back your glasses,” Malfoy said eventually. “But now I think not.”

Harry was wearing his old ones, the ones that used to have tape across the bridge. “Give it up, Malfoy.”

“Well.” Malfoy smirked. “If you insist.” He slipped his hand into his pocket again and gave Harry back his glasses. Then he moved on down the hall, exactly as if he owned it. “I think I'll go in here now,” he said, opening the door to the parlour.

Harry just shrugged, following Malfoy in. He never used this room. Hermione had covered most of the furniture with sheets in a fit of neatness (“if you're not going to use it, you can at least keep it clean”), but it was otherwise not much changed from what it had been before Sirius had died. The old tapestry still hung, tattered by doxies, burned by madness—dustier now than it had been.

Malfoy stood looking at it for a while. “Well, this is homey,” he said eventually, turning back to Harry.

A smile ghosted over Harry’s lips. “Thanks.”

Malfoy looked back at the tapestry, tracing the lines with a finger, stopping where Andromeda had been burned away. “She’s my aunt, you know,” he said, without turning back around. “He’s my cousin.”

He didn’t say Teddy, but Harry knew who he meant.

“I haven’t bothered to get to know him,” Malfoy said. When Harry didn’t say anything, Malfoy turned around. “Do you think I should have done?”

Harry thought Malfoy might be trying to provoke him, but if he was, it wasn't working. Harry just shrugged, waiting for the other shoe to drop. “I didn’t really either.”

Malfoy turned back to the wall. “I never knew Regulus, you know.” His voice held that same distant quality as before. “I suppose I might have liked him, only I hear he actually was a turncoat in the end. Snape was a turncoat too. I suppose that means you think he was one of the good guys. You might even think that you knew him, but you didn’t. I knew him. That’s the thing about spies.”

“You don’t know anything about it,” Harry heard himself say. He wasn’t thinking of Snape at all.

“You think they’re secretly someone else,” Malfoy said. “You think there’s another man underneath. But that’s not how it works, not exactly. They’re also still the person they pretend to be. They’re that too.

Snape was our friend, and he hated you. That was really who he—”

Harry moved until Malfoy was between him and the wall. “Stop talking.”

Malfoy looked pleased. “Make me.”

Harry started to turn away, but Malfoy caught his wrist, and then Malfoy was kissing him in that hungry, desperate way. Harry, thinking of Marietta, was instantly aroused.

“God,” Malfoy said, pulling his mouth away. “It's been torture. I wanted you all night.”

Harry tried to pull away.

“Please don't.” Malfoy's hand was clamped around his arm; he slipped his leg between Harry's. “You want it too.”

Harry tried to shake him off. “Find someone else to fuck.”

“I don't want anyone else.” Malfoy kissed him again. “You have to understand, Harry; it's only you. I only want you.” His mouth dragged, fire-hot, up the side of Harry’s neck, latching to his pulse. Then he didn’t move, sucking softly, his hand moving again and again in Harry’s hair.

Until our hearts beat as one.

“Don’t do that,” Harry said, and pulled Malfoy away from his throat.

“I have to have you.” Malfoy kissed him again, his mouth soft and warm. “Please, Harry. Let me fuck

you.”

Harry thought again of Marietta, and closed his eyes.

“I'll make it worth your while,” Malfoy said. “Let me prove it to you; I'll do anything.”

Harry said, “Okay.”

“Oh, God.” Malfoy leaned in and nipped Harry's earlobe, sucking, and then his voice was right in Harry's ear, like the Dictus Charm. “I practically wanked myself raw, just thinking about it, just thinking of all the things I was going to do tonight.”

“Why tonight?” Harry said.

Malfoy seemed distracted by putting his tongue in Harry's ear. “What?”

Harry pulled him away a little. “Why tonight?”

“Well.” Malfoy kissed him, and then he laughed, dry huffs of breathe right into the crook of Harry's neck. “Well,” he said again, “I was with a calendar girl—July, you know, for the Kneazle Needs charity campaign. She has these tits; you should have seen them. We drank diamonds in Chardonnay—”

Harry shook his head. “You can't drink diamonds.”

Malfoy wasn't look at him. He was looking at Harry's cheekbone, quite close, his smile vacant. “I'm getting to that. But anyway, we were speaking of August and September—those are good months—and I was laying back on my satin sheets, when suddenly I thought: Harry Potter. That's who I would really like to fuck tonight, Harry Potter.”

“What did July say?”

Malfoy frowned, and finally met his eyes. “July?”

Harry raised his brows. “The Kneazle calendar girl?”

“Oh.” Malfoy started playing with Harry's t-shirt. “She went to see October.”

“What about August and September?”

“Merlin, Harry,” Malfoy said, his hands slipping down to Harry's belt, “what does it matter, anyway?”

“It doesn't,” Harry said, because it didn't.

Malfoy gave his belt a tug. “Please,” he said, and kissed Harry's cheek. “I want to come inside you.”

Harry took his hands away. “Don't talk like that.”

“Well, darling, if you're worried about getting pregnant, I always use protection. But you should know, we only name our children after constellations, and sometimes various astronomical phenomena—”

Harry glared. “If you're going to fuck me, Malfoy, fuck me.”

Malfoy caught his breath. “Let's go upstairs.”

“Malfoy,” Harry began.

“Please.” Wrapping his arms around Harry's neck, Malfoy kissed his ear again. “I want to take you upstairs. I want to open you up.”

Harry thought of last time, of how it had been with Malfoy, how unexpectedly good. For some reason, it annoyed him. “Can’t just fuck me, Malfoy?”

“No.” Malfoy kissed him again, his lips soft, and very warm. “I want to use my fingers, Harry. I want to fill you up with oil. I'm going to slick you up until it drips down your thighs.” Harry unbalanced for a moment, and Malfoy steadied him. “Easy, Harry.”

Harry tried to focus on him, but this prescription wasn't as strong as the ones that Malfoy had just given back. “What did you say?”

“I brought oil. It's better than lube.” Malfoy kissed the spot behind his ear. “Let's go upstairs.”

“Okay,” Harry said.

Upstairs, they got undressed, Malfoy flicked their clothes into neat, folded piles with his wand. Then he took Harry's glasses off and kissed him, pressing back until Harry had to get on the bed, and Malfoy moved on top of him. He cast the usual spells between Harry's legs and between his own, and then took the cap off the small bottle of oil.

“It's been a while,” Harry said, eyeing Malfoy's grease-slick fingers.

Malfoy stopped. “We don't have to.”

“No.” Harry could still hear Rabbit's voice inside his ear. “No, I want you to.”

“Good. Because frankly, I haven't been able to get this out of my mind.” Then Malfoy's hands were on Harry's arse, and Malfoy's fingers were at his hole, gentle, then Malfoy's finger was pushing up inside of him, slick and sure.

Harry gasped.

“Cassandra's tits, Harry.” Malfoy closed his eyes and swallowed. When he opened them again, they were very bright. “Just how long did you say it's been?”

“A while.” Harry twisted. Even Malfoy's finger felt thick and full. “Do another one.”

“Harry.” Malfoy sounded strained, despite the fact that it was Harry being stretched. “Do you realize how tight you are? You can barely take this one.”

“It's full.” Harry tilted his hips. “Do another.”

“You have to wait. When it's like this, you have to wait.” Malfoy moved further down on the bed, keeping his hand in place, but orienting himself so that he could kiss the base of Harry’s cock. Somehow Harry was already hard. He had been since Malfoy’s mouth had locked around his pulse.

Then Malfoy pulled his finger out completely, and Harry heard himself whine. It really had been a long time—and no one had ever done it for him quite like this. Malfoy was putting more oil on his fingers. At this rate he was going to use the whole bottle; he was going to put the whole bottle inside Harry's body. He was going to torture him, was what he was going to do.

It was so much what Harry had been needing, aching for tonight, that when two fingers pushed against

the rim, stretching, and Harry couldn't breathe.

“Shh,” Malfoy said again, as though to comfort him, but then he said, “Harry,” and suddenly sounded choked. “Oh, God, Harry.” He kissed the base of Harry’s cock again and then was kissing under it, gentle with Harry’s sac, soft. His hair was bright on his bent head, and Harry couldn’t understand why Malfoy was being so desperately tender. “When is the last time you let someone inside of you?” he said.

“I don’t know,” Harry said, and twisted against Malfoy's fingers.

Malfoy kissed him, then pulled his fingers out, poured more oil, and pushed three in. They went deeper this time, searching, and when they found a certain place inside, Harry heard himself cry out. “There.” Malfoy licked his sac, gently, then moved his fingers, touching it again. “There.”

It wasn't just the feeling of Malfoy stretching him or of Malfoy finding his prostate that was taking Harry apart: it had been too long since the last time he had felt this way, since the last time he had felt so full and ready, incomplete without this other person. Part of him wanted Malfoy just to hurry it up, and part of him wanted it to last forever.

It shouldn't be this way with Malfoy, Harry realized, not with Malfoy, but then Malfoy was moving back up along Harry’s body, fingers still firmly inside his body, and his mouth was right near Harry’s ear. “I’m going to get inside of you,” he said.

Harry tried to turn away, not wanting Malfoy to see the ways he wanted that. “Are you?” Harry said instead. “I thought you might just keep dithering.”

Malfoy chuckled, and Harry realized he had never heard Malfoy laugh that way, low and dry and warm. “I could play with your arse all day,” he said, and twisted his fingers.

Harry was startled into making a sound, almost arching off the bed.

“But I won't.” Malfoy’s voice still sounded husky with some unnamed emotion. “I’m going to get inside of you. I’ll be the first one in a long time, won’t I?”

“Does that turn you on?”

“Yes,” Malfoy said. “I don’t . . .” Malfoy moved on top of him, straddling him. Malfoy’s arm reached down between them, fingers still inside of Harry’s body, cock now running along-side Harry’s, a horribly hot friction that Harry couldn’t get enough of. “I know it’s stupid,” Malfoy said, “but I don’t want you to be with anybody else.”

Harry thought of Rabbit.

Then Malfoy was there, lifting up his hips again; Malfoy was there, positioning his cock. “God,” said Harry, because he was there, because it was him and not anybody else. “God, Malfoy, get it in me.”

“Yes.” Malfoy pushed in, and though he’d loosened Harry quite a bit, it still burned. It really had been forever, and then Malfoy’s lips were by his ear. “Say my name again.”

“Malfoy?” Harry pulled back to look at him, puzzled, even as Malfoy’s thick cock pressed him open.

Malfoy shuddered, the movement translating from Malfoy’s cock into Harry’s body, causing Harry to instinctively tighten, crying out. “Potter,” Malfoy said.

“Draco.”

Malfoy made a high, tight sound, and didn’t move for a long, drawn out moment. Harry felt hot, and so completely full. Malfoy thrust again in a long, tight slide that made Harry want to open his legs wider, open and give everything to him. “It’s me,” Malfoy said. “It’s me, Potter.” He pulled out as though he had all the time in the world.

“God,” said Harry. “You fill me up.”

“Mm,” said Malfoy, and kissed him again.

Harry liked it. He liked Malfoy slow and luxurious, taking him as though he had all the time in the world. He liked the way Malfoy looked, naked, kissed by the light, his face set in a gentle expression of pained concentration, as though being this slow with Harry was a serious effort. Harry wouldn’t have thought, it being Malfoy, that he would like it, but he did. He loved it.

He didn't understand why this was happening.

“Look at me,” Malfoy said, and turned Harry's chin.

Harry looked, watched Malfoy taking him, watched as his own hips came up to help him.

“I want you to know it’s me,” Malfoy said. “It’s me taking you. Me fucking you. Me packed tight inside of you. Hold on, Harry.” He was almost all the way out of Harry, he had pulled so far out, but now he slammed back in, head thrown back. It was harder and more brutal than his other thrusts, and it felt so deep and large, it hit the spot just perfectly, and Harry thought he might come without Malfoy even touching his cock. “That was a good one, wasn't it,” Malfoy said, and kissed him. “If you're good, I’ll give it to you again.”

“God, Malfoy. Do it.”

“I will,” Malfoy said, but now his thrusts were slow again, lazy. “Focus on me, Harry. Don’t think of anything else.” Then he did it again, thrusting hard and very fast, and Harry writhed.

“Jesus. Malfoy—”

“It’s me,” Malfoy said again. “Don’t think of anyone else. Don’t think of anything else. It’s me. You can only think of me.”

“Fuck,” Harry said. His hands scrambled for Malfoy’s hips, urging him forward, harder, faster, but Malfoy wasn’t compliant. “Fuck,” Harry said again, “just give it to me.”

“I will,” Malfoy said. “Think of me.”

“What?” Harry tugged on Malfoy’s hips some more.

“Hold on, I’ll fuck you faster,” Malfoy said. His hips were starting to rock. “I’ll fuck you good and hard. Hold on, Harry.”

“Jesus,” Harry writhed again, pulling Malfoy into him. He was so thick, and Harry felt so full; the slide of him was so hot, and when Malfoy hit that spot—“Jesus, do it, harder, give it to me harder—”

“It's me,” Malfoy said, fucking him now. He was fucking him good and proper, hips slamming into Harry. “It's me, no one but me, it's me.”

“It’s you,” Harry said. “Oh, God, fuck me, fuck me—”

“I'm the only one; I'm the only one.”

Harry was sweating, arms aching from the way he was pulling Malfoy into him, Malfoy fucking hard into him and hitting that spot every damn time.

“Malfoy. Malfoy.”

“I'm the only one who knows you,” Malfoy said, and wrapped his hand around Harry’s cock.

“God damn.” Harry twisted his hips, and couldn’t stop coming; he came all over Malfoy’s hand, his stomach. He was going crazy with it, Malfoy still inside of him, stretching him wide; Malfoy was coming too.

It took Harry a long time to come down. He thought that he might fall asleep, but then Malfoy pulled away from him and he didn’t feel like it any more; he felt sticky, as though he needed a shower.

Harry knew he should feel guilty. He had told Rabbit the truth: he wanted to have sex with someone he cared about. He didn’t care about Malfoy, and Malfoy didn’t care about him, and yet they both had said those things . . . .

Harry never had been good at expressing himself, and the times he could remember sharing his feelings had usually involved people dying. Anyone could say more than he intended in a desperate situation. It shouldn't matter, the things that he said during sex. Yet, Harry, lying there, feeling so well fucked and worn—feeling perfect, wet, and more fantastic than he'd felt in ages—wondered whether they could possibly have meant some of those things after all.

“How come you live here?” Malfoy asked, breaking into Harry's thoughts..

Harry looked up at the ceiling. It was cracked in places—throwing darts, he thought. It was Regulus's old room. “Maybe I just like it.”

Malfoy sat up. “There are ghosts now at the Manor.” He spoke in that same detached way he used whenever he spoke of himself. “Just like at Hogwarts.” He went over to the pile of clothes and found his trousers.

“I’m sorry,” Harry said. He couldn’t take his eyes away from Malfoy’s body, the pale thin legs slowly being covered by soft grey wool. It wasn’t clear what was wrong with him; Malfoy had just fucked him in a way he couldn't remember getting fucked since he first started getting interested in men, and he had come harder than he could remember ever doing. Yet Malfoy looked very soft, having just fucked him—just like he had last time, and Harry felt a pointless surge of something from out of nowhere, building in his heart.

Malfoy just said, “Don’t be.” He turned back to look at Harry, five hundred Galleon trousers on and shirtless—perfect, pale, scarred across the chest. He should do a photo shoot like that, if he was really going to make money for charity. “Those places both were filled with promises. The both of them. I couldn’t have stayed at the Manor. Even had we been allowed.”

“Why would you want to stay there?” Harry said, sitting up, pulling on his jeans. He thought his tone was gentle. He thought he was agreeing.

“Because it was my home.”

“I just mean . . . with Voldemort.”

Shivering, Malfoy picked up his shirt. “Of course, I didn’t want to stay at Hogwarts, either. It was an awful place.”

Harry stiffened, sitting on the bed. The warm feeling building in his chest died. “That was my home.”

Malfoy lifted his eyes. They were full of pity. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m not. At least Voldemort could never rule there.”

Malfoy's buttons were half-way done; he paused, silk caught in his hands. “You think it was my fault?”

Harry started. “No. I meant—”

“You meant it was my father’s. You think that we invited him?”

“Well.” Harry shifted uncomfortably. “Didn’t you?”

Malfoy did a spell with his shoes and socks that Harry hadn't seen before; a moment later, they were on his feet. “You think we wanted it?”

“No,” said Harry, getting off the bed, just in jeans. “I just meant . . . your dad, he kind of brought it on himself.”

“And what about your parents, Harry?”

Harry recoiled. “What do you mean, my parents?”

“You don’t think it was a bit their fault, trusting Wormtail?”

“He was their friend! How were they to know?”

“They didn’t know.” Malfoy looked so furious that his lips were nearly white. “And that can only mean one thing—they weren’t his friend. They didn’t know anyone, Potter. They didn’t care about anyone but themselves, and you know what? You’re just like them.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Malfoy just laughed. “Of course I don’t. So long, Harry Potter. Thanks ever so for the fuck.” Then suddenly he was close, kissing Harry’s cheek. “Same time next week, yeah?”

And then he was walking out the door.

*

Malfoy came the next week, not at the same time.

“You can't just come over here whenever you want,” Harry said, and Malfoy said that was okay.

He pushed on the door, and Harry let him in. He knew what was going to happen, and yet didn’t quite believe it was happening yet again, followed Malfoy to the kitchen and let him look around.

“Tea’s in the cupboard,” Harry told him.

Malfoy turned in that direction, then stopped. “I wasn’t going to make any tea,” he said. His voice was even.

Harry had felt this strange sense of vertigo before, never stopping to consider what it meant, his stomach lurching too strangely for rational thought. Of course Malfoy wasn’t making tea. There was no reason why he would be. “I thought,” Harry began, and had to stop.

Malfoy still had his hands in his pockets. “I dislike tea,” he said, and the world righted itself.

“Why are you here?” said Harry.

“Well,” said Malfoy, genial, “I thought you might bend me over the table, and fuck my brains out. Fancy

giving it a go?”

Harry bent him over the table, and fucked his brains out.

Malfoy showed up frequently after that. Each time, he came to Harry's door, looking impossibly pretty, and for some reason, Harry always let him inside.

It wasn’t a regular thing, because Harry’s schedule was irregular. Sometimes he wondered if Malfoy showed up when he was away on a job. Because Harry had always lived alone since becoming an Unspeakable, he had never needed excuses for his absences before. The only thing Malfoy did in deference to any difficulty he might have had in getting a hold of him was to give Harry his Floo address. “You can come over whenever you want,” he had said, and pressed it into Harry's hands.

“You're the one who always comes here.”

“I know,” said Malfoy. “But you could come to mine.”

Harry's voice felt wooden, practicing a line the Department might have given him, had he ever had a partner to come home to. “I'm often gone with work.”

Malfoy smiled faintly. “Yes. I've noticed. You don't have to, Harry. I just wanted you to have it. In case you ever—in case you wanted me.”

Harry folded up the address, put it in his pocket, and never used it. Malfoy never asked him to come. He just made sure that Harry had it, then continued to show up at Grimmauld Place. If Malfoy did show up when Harry wasn’t there, Malfoy didn’t ask, and Harry didn’t tell.

Mostly, they just fucked.

They had so little in common. Harry couldn't talk about his job. He didn't have the wealth of common language and memories that he had with Ron and Hermione. When they talked about family, school, the war, the past, the present, the future—inevitably, they fought. After sex they fought even when they weren't really talking about anything at all.

But during sex, they said things neither of them could admit to afterwards—private things, things like I need you and I want you and you're the only one who understands, things like love. When Harry said them, it was simply because he couldn't seem to help himself. Malfoy touched him deeply—physically, yet intimately, in ways that Harry hadn't been touched since Ginny. Even with Ginny, in the end, that had been missing. Malfoy touched him like a lover, and Harry hadn't realized how much he had missed it until Malfoy did it again.

He still wasn't sure why Malfoy fucked that way, why—when he had Malfoy bent over the table, and was pounding into him from behind, when Malfoy was humping the table like a slut and Harry was telling him to keep on doing it—why it still felt like making love. It should have felt dirty, and it should have felt cheap, but it only felt that way afterwards, when Harry wished he smoked and told himself that those things he had said to Malfoy—those private, treasured things—had all been meant for Rabbit.

That, of course, was why Harry did it.

It might not have been clear what Malfoy was getting out of it, but Harry knew why he himself did it: he had with Malfoy everything he couldn't have with Rabbit.

Of course, that meant he had with Rabbit everything he couldn't have with Malfoy—that included the emotional connection, and sometimes even the philosophic. Once, when they were sitting in the kitchen after sex, Malfoy said, “There's supposed to be a reward, in making donations. People don't talk about it; it's supposed to be so selfless, but they get something out of it.”

“No they don't,” Harry said. “That's why it's called a donation.”

Malfoy shook his head. “They get something out of it,” Malfoy said. “They feel happy.”

“That's not getting something out of it.”

“What is it, then?”

Harry snorted. “It's decency.”

Malfoy turned the glass of Firewhiskey Harry had brought him. “Well, I don't have it. Making other people happy doesn't make me happy. Giving people things doesn't make me happy. I'm happy when Mother has what she needs; I'm satisfied when Pansy gets spoiled. But I don't care about faceless masses. Does that mean I'm not decent?”

Harry frowned down at his glass. “You make donations.”

“Yes, and I've told you, it bores me. It bores me, and making any serious effort in that regard would be tantamount to torture for me, because there would be no reward. I'd feel no pleasure, building something for the community. The little I do, I do for the image.” Malfoy knocked back the shot. “I do it so they think I'm more like them.”

“You don't do it because it's right?”

Malfoy grimaced. “Define right.”

“Helping other people. That's right.”

Leaning across the table, Malfoy said, “Tell me, Harry. Do you do it so you can help other people?”

“Do what?” Harry said, backing away.

“You're an Auror aren't you?

Harry sat up straighter. “Of course I help other people.”

“Really? You don't do it for the thrill?”

“No.”

Malfoy leered. “Be honest, Harry. You don't feel it way down here when you get the bad guys?” His foot slid along Harry's thigh under the table, until the ball of it was on Harry's crotch. They'd just fucked on this table, and Harry was already hard again.

“I feel good,” Harry said. “But that's not why I do it. It's not the same as giving to charities just so people approve of you.” He meant to take Malfoy's foot off of him, he did, but instead he wrapped his hand around it and held it.

Malfoy ground his foot in. He had ground that same foot against Harry's nose, once, and Harry didn't care. Malfoy wore an ugly sneer, and Harry didn't care; Malfoy was cold, heartless—and Harry didn't care. “That's right, Potter.” Malfoy's voice was low and cruel. “I'm a petty, worthless person. But meanwhile you sit behind a desk, pushing very important papers.”

Harry paused, hand tightening. He'd been stroking Malfoy's ankle as Malfoy pushed his foot in. “You really want to talk about my job?”

“They say the Golden Boy doesn't go out on the field any more.”

Harry sighed, pushing down Malfoy's foot. “You don't know anything about me.”

“I know a lot about you—you and your self-righteous, perfect valour. You're such a fucking hypocrite.”

Harry stood. “It's better than being a superficial coward.”

Malfoy's face was pink. “People died, for your arrogance.”

“People would have died for yours,” Harry said, “but you were too spineless.”

It ended like that; it always ended like that. Everything turned ugly, and then the next day or several days later, Malfoy was back in the chair, writhing, and Harry's lips were locked around his cock, sucking for all that he was worth.

Sometimes, after the sex, Harry thought it could be different. Malfoy could look so wrung out and content, and Harry would feel that same strange surge of feeling, a sort of bittersweetness he couldn’t get to go away. It was because of Rabbit, Harry knew, and when he told himself that Rabbit didn't fight their enemies because it was the right thing to do either, he made himself stop thinking altogether.

Sometimes, though, Harry couldn't help but think about it, all the ways that Malfoy and Rabbit were different, and the few, singular ways in which they were the same. Sometimes, in the softer moments, Harry couldn't help but think of Malfoy as someone else, another man; he couldn't help but do to Malfoy all the things to him he so longed to do with Rabbit—drawn out kisses, the tender stroking of Malfoy's thigh while Harry fucked him, the soft, whispers against Malfoy's cock, after Harry deep throated him.

These were the things that Harry would do, if he could be with the person he really loved, and sometimes Harry gave himself to them so completely that he thought he might just be in love with Malfoy, by the end of them. He would think, for long, wet, exhausted moments afterwards that he didn’t even care who Malfoy had been, or what he had done. He didn’t care what Malfoy had become; Malfoy was just a man, trying to live his life, and sometimes Harry wished that he could be that too.

But when Harry tried to touch him, comfort him, inevitably Malfoy snapped, or else Harry said

something callous about his life or choices without quite meaning to. Then Malfoy would leave, and Harry would remember it was just Malfoy. Never, in all his fucked up life and fucked up choices, would he choose to feel something for Malfoy, and Malfoy was just . . . release. He was just something to do, in the time between jobs. A way to keep on going.

*

On the fortieth job with Rabbit, Harry was injured.

“Non Dicatus,” said Harry, when he Apparated back to the little hotel in Irkutsk.

“You’re bleeding,” said Rabbit, blankly. You’re bleeding.

Harry drew his wand, and Rabbit blinked. “Non Dicatus,” he said, and rushed forward. It was the longest Rabbit had ever taken to process a situation.

“No,” said Harry, as Rabbit's arm wrapped around him. “Can’t Apparate.”

“Side-along,” said Rabbit. “You need a hospital.”

“No time.”

“Now,” said Rabbit. His arm was around Harry’s waist, helping to hold him up. Blood gushed from Harry’s thigh.

“No. Morchenko has a meeting in two hours.” It was Kozić who had thrown the hex that cut him, but not before Harry had learned that Morchenko was meeting with the mysterious third party—the associate about which he and Rabbit had speculated before. It could be the creator of the wands, the final piece to the puzzle.

“Not like this, you’re not,” said Rabbit.

“I’ll be fine. Just help me get to that chair.”

Helping him to the chair, Rabbit looked down at him. “I could Side-along you whether you want me to or not.”

“You know I’ll just Apparate out, and then you won’t know where I am.”

Rabbit frowned. “I would hunt you down.”

“But would you do it in time?”

“Stupid,” said Rabbit, and pointed his wand to the corner where his satchel was sitting. “You’re impossible.” He started digging through the bag, hands emerging with various first aid equipment, a tourniquet.

“You’re sort of like Mary Poppins sometimes, you know that?” said Harry.

“I don’t know who that is. Hold still.” Rabbit tied the tourniquet high up on Harry’s thigh, then pulled Harry’s hands away. “Let me see.” He spelled the cut clean and put his face in close. His head was between Harry’s legs: his head with its dumb, dishwater hair, the nose that twitched sometimes just like his name, his narrow little mouth. The cut hurt like all fuck, but Harry could not help but be aware of Rabbit’s breath on his thigh.

Rabbit’s hand extended left, and a pillowcase came flying into it from the bed—wandless magic, Harry thought dizzily, and swayed. “Don’t you fucking faint. You’re going to have to hold this.” Rabbit put the pillowcase in Harry’s hands, and moved his hands to his thigh. “Put pressure on it; I’ve got to get you on

the bed."

"I've been thinking about that," said Harry, and his voice sounded distant, even to him.

Then he was floating. He thought for a moment he must have fainted after all, until he realized Rabbit was levitating him, and he was floating toward the bed.

What if Rabbit was actually Snape after all? Just a thought, Harry mused.

"Accio Pepper Up," said Rabbit, and pressed the tip of a bottle to Harry's lips. "Drink."

"Hm?"

"If you're unconscious, you idiot, I'll Apparate you to hospital, and you won't be able to do anything about it."

"Too right," Harry said, and drank.

Rabbit tugged on his hands, which still clutched the pillowcase to his thigh. "Let go." The tugging on Harry's hands was gentle. "My—Blackbird, let go."

"You know my real name." Harry blinked. "Okay, I'm awake."

"Good. You'll need stitches."

"Do you know that spell?"

“Be quiet. I’m thinking.” Rabbit spelled the area clean again, then he was touching him: Rabbit’s hands low on Harry’s inner thigh, where the cut began—or ended, depending on how you looked at it. His wand was there too, and amidst all the pain there was a tingling, and tightening.

That went on for several moments, with Rabbit’s wand occasionally swishing in a different way to flick away more blood. Otherwise the tip was against the seam of the cut, skating gently up Harry’s thigh; Rabbit’s fingers were there, nimble and clever, holding the skin together while the wand knit it up. Rabbit lifted his wand, banished Harry’s trousers, then continued his steady work.

“Feels better,” Harry said, when Rabbit reached the top of the cut, his hands and wand gentle, where pelvis met thigh.

“Hold on,” said Rabbit. He banished the rest of Harry’s clothes, except his boxer briefs; Harry wondered why until he realized blood was all over him. Then Rabbit was gone for a moment, and Harry didn’t feel like turning enough to find out what he was doing. Several moments later Rabbit was back with a wet cloth, cleaning the cut once more. “I’m going to do it again,” he said, “just to be sure.”

Harry didn’t know what the spell was—some sort of sewing thing, he guessed, but healing as well; this time the tingle-and-tighten were more definite, and the pain much less so. “Where did you learn to do healing spells?” he asked.

“When I was younger,” said Rabbit, and began to apply some sort of paste to the cut.

The scent caused Harry to blink several times, and then say, “Dittany.”

“It prevents scarring.” Rabbit went on smearing the paste, his hands competent and cool on Harry’s marred thigh. “I know that you don’t like them.”

“I like them.” It was an effort for Harry to keep his eyes open. He was thinking of the lines on Malfoy’s

chest. “Do you have any scars?”

“This guise does,” said Rabbit, and went on smearing.

Harry wanted to say, But do you? and didn’t. His eyes drifted closed, and he thought of the slender, raised white marks on Malfoy’s body—completely different from the Dark Mark, which Malfoy didn’t have. Malfoy’s father had told him he was a disappointment.

Harry had told him that too.

He opened his eyes when Rabbit began touching him all over. “Oh, hello,” Harry said.

“Don’t get excited. I’m checking to make sure you didn’t get cut anywhere else.”

“I’m fine, I think.”

“You always think you’re fine.”

“I think you’re fine,” Harry said, and possibly drifted off a little bit.

The thing about Rabbit was competence, mostly. Maybe it was because Harry didn’t know what he was doing, after the war, except when he was an Auror or Unspeakable; maybe it was a childhood spent fighting a war. Or maybe it was just because he had been raised cooking, cleaning, sewing, making things so he could have things at all, and Dudley had just seemed so helpless.

Whatever it was, Harry liked the way that Rabbit knew things, could do things; Hermione was like that, but she couldn’t do Bruno and Marietta, could she; she couldn’t do impressions at all, and Ginny and Ron never could have got him through the streets of Nihzny Novogorod, like Rabbit had that one time, and not a boyfriend he had ever had had made him feel this way with just a touch on his thigh—it was the

blood, possibly, the pain, the possibility of more blood and more pain—

Ginny had been horrified when he had told her about the times in which he felt most alive.

It must have been only several minutes later when he awoke to Rabbit's hands again on his thigh. "Oh, God, that feels so good," he said, before thinking about it at all.

The spell under Rabbit's wand and fingers was warm, soothing, and felt like it was being woven into him in waves that sang like fire through his veins, rushing down again to rest right in his belly, then sink down, down into his cock.

"I told you not to get excited." Rabbit sounded vaguely amused.

"What is that spell?"

Rabbit laughed. "I never understood how someone like you manages to charm so many hardened criminals. Now I see it's because you're so sensitive."

"I'm not sens—oh, God."

"It's just a salve charm."

"Oh, God."

Then Rabbit was done, and Harry looked at him, and Rabbit's hand lingered on his upper thigh.

Harry thought something was going to happen. He thought something had to happen, the way Rabbit

was looking at him: Rabbit's hand was going to travel up his thigh, inward toward his cock. He was going to rub his hand over Harry's pants, then lean in and kiss him. He wasn't going to stop touching him, because he couldn't, and Harry wouldn't let him.

Rabbit's gaze slid away with his hand, and he stood up, one fluid movement. "You need a bandage," he said, and went to go search in his bag some more.

"Fuck a bandage," said Harry, flopping back on the bed in disappointment. "Can I have more of that salve?"

Rabbit came back to the bedside, and Harry anticipated more of the touching and the warmth and Rabbit's eyes, which were quick and intelligent and expressive behind big glasses. What if Rabbit's real eyes weren't like that; what if they were dull, and he was dull, or old and fat, or, or, or—and then Harry remembered that Rabbit was dull.

He was middle-aged, with a paunch, and thinning hair, and Harry wanted him, wanted him, wanted him. He'd heard about how what was on the outside didn't matter, but he'd never realized just how fully they didn't matter until right then.

But Rabbit didn't touch him again, just used his wand and several quick spells to paste the bandage to his thigh, and Harry knew beyond all doubt that he was in love with him. He thought of Rabbit talking into his ear, his cleverness, dry wit, his crudity at times, his stubborn refusal to quit. He thought of Rabbit's steadiness with a wand and quickness in a desperate situation; he thought of Rabbit's dangerous spells and his tea, and knew that it absolutely did not matter that Rabbit was someone else under the guise, under the alias. Harry was in love with him.

"How does that feel?" Rabbit asked.

"Confusing," said Harry, because he was thinking of Malfoy, the way Malfoy looked spread out under him, the way Malfoy felt, hot and tight around him. If he was in love with Rabbit, he should not be fucking Malfoy. And yet Malfoy was the one he could have.

“What?” Rabbit was frowning.

Harry sighed. “It feels fine.” He sat up. “I need clothes.”

Rabbit’s gaze changed, then, roamed all over Harry’s almost bare guise, and because those eyes missed nothing, he could surely see the response such a gaze provoked in Harry. But Rabbit only turned away, saying, “You do,” in clipped tones, and rummaged in his bag some more.

“I think I can stand up,” Harry said, and put his feet on the floor.

Rabbit came up beside him, helped him stand, warm arms around Harry’s torso. The wool of his shabby jumper scratched.

“I’m okay,” said Harry.

“Yes,” said Rabbit, and lingered.

“Rabbit.” Harry turned toward him.

“No.” Dropping his arms, Rabbit turned away.

“I want—”

“No.”

“But—”

“It’s not real,” Rabbit said, pulling a shirt out of his bag.

“You don’t even know what I was going to say.”

“I’m full of good ideas.” Turning, Rabbit handed him the clothes. “Put these on.”

“If I was someone else,” Harry began.

“You are someone else. I’m someone else too. Don’t ever forget it.”

Harry looked down at the clothes. “I just wish,” he said.

Rabbit turned away again. “Change,” was all he said.

*

When Malfoy showed up on Harry’s doorstep three nights after he had been injured, Harry tried to turn him away.

“It’s late,” he said.

Malfoy smirked, his skin smooth and silky-looking in the poor light of the stoop. “Didn’t you miss me?”

“No,” Harry said, but somehow couldn’t shut the door. He had gone to spy on Morchenko’s meeting after Rabbit had healed his cut. Though Harry hadn’t learned the identity of Morchenko’s rendezvous, he’d got a good memory for the Department to Pensieve. Sometimes they could go into the memory and clean it up with various spells, sharpening the images, making the sounds more crisp, catching things that Harry

himself had missed.

So, while the job hadn't been a complete success, he hadn't completely failed. That didn't matter to Harry, since Level Nine had taken him off missions for the next week to let the injury heal. Rabbit had temporarily been assigned another agent, and Harry thought he might go crazy. All he wanted was to get these bastards, and see his handler again.

He could not stop thinking of Rabbit's fingers on his thigh.

"You're letting in cold air," Malfoy pointed out.

Harry let him in. "I'm not in the mood," he said, once Malfoy was inside, and the door was shut behind him.

"That's okay." Malfoy unwound his scarf.

"I don't want you."

"That's okay," Malfoy said again. "We'll just sit. I'll read a book. Come on upstairs. Do you want—something to drink?"

"No," Harry said, and went upstairs.

Malfoy followed him into his bedroom and then was kissing him. His nose was cold and his mouth was warm, and for several long, wet moments, all Harry could think was that it felt good. Then he thought of Rabbit, what he had realized about Rabbit, and pulled away. "I said I don't want to," he said.

"That's okay," Malfoy said again. "Let me. I can make you feel good. All you would have to do is lie back."

His mouth was talking along Harry’s throat, warm, humid, human.

“No,” Harry said, but went where Malfoy guided him, sitting down on the bed with him, pulling him down.

“Let me, Harry. You won’t have to do a thing.”

“Fine,” Harry said. Malfoy took off his glasses, and laid him back.

Then he undressed. When he got on the bed, Malfoy kissed him; all he did was kiss him, his lips moving down Harry’s throat again. Malfoy’s cold fingers were curling under the hem of Harry’s shirt, pushing it up, pulling it off.

“I want to make you feel good,” Malfoy said. “I want to make you feel so good.” He leaned down to catch Harry's mouth again, hands drifting down between his legs to Harry’s jeans, unzipping the fly. Then he looked down, and quite deliberately, jerked on Harry’s pants.

Hissing in surprise, Harry grabbed Malfoy by the wrists. “Careful,” he said.

“What?” Malfoy bit his already swollen lower lip, glancing down at Harry’s groin.

“Just be careful,” Harry said, and let him go.

Then Malfoy was careful, very careful, and when he got them off, he sounded shocked. “What is that?”

Harry almost smiled. “They’re these Muggle things called stitches.”

Malfoy leaned closer in. “Those aren’t Muggle stitches.”

“No.” Harry shifted.

Malfoy leaned close and touched the stitches gently. “How did you get them?”

Harry almost smiled again. “You do remember I’m an Auror.”

“Does it hurt?”

Harry shivered. “When you do that.”

Malfoy’s fingers moved farther away from the cut, ghosting the perimeter of the wound. “No one should ever hurt you,” he said, and leaned in. Then he was kissing the places his fingers had been, and Harry sucked in all the air he could before he jerked Malfoy away.

“Don’t do that,” Harry said again.

“Did I hurt you?” Malfoy asked again.

“No,” Harry said, and let the air out.

“Then let me. I’ll be careful. Please.” Without waiting for an answer, he was back again, mouth ghosting over the wounded area, and Harry was sure it wasn’t sanitary. If he got an infection, Rabbit would be furious, but it felt good; it felt . . . like Malfoy cared. No one else would see this wound; Harry wouldn’t let them. It wasn’t in a place where anyone would find out, and he would put on his clothes and pretend to be Harry Potter.

“Is it okay?” Malfoy said.

“Yes,” Harry said, in a strained way.

“I want to make it feel better.”

Harry huffed a laugh. “Know any salve spells?”

Malfoy came up and looked at him, his eyes clear, and very bright. “No.”

“Didn’t think so.”

“I know this one.” Malfoy pulled his wand out from his robe on the floor, and pointed it at Harry, then himself. They were protection spells; then he cast another one at himself which caused him to arch his back, letting out a little sound.

“Of course you would know that one,” Harry said.

“You don’t like it?”

“If you don’t want to take the trouble,” Harry said.

“You're not going to take any trouble.” Malfoy very carefully settled himself across Harry's hips, positioning himself to sink down on Harry's cock. The spell had already lubricated his arse, and Harry's cock had been hard since Malfoy's tongue had touched the scar in the middle of his chest. “You're just going to lie back. I'll make you feel so good.”

“I want to,” Harry began.

“I know.” Malfoy pressed a hand on his chest. “Lie back and watch me. I'll do everything.” Then he was sinking down on Harry's cock, and it really was good, watching Malfoy take him like this, watching himself enter Malfoy's body, Malfoy's face racked with pleasure as Harry filled him up to the hilt.

Harry shuddered. The spell Malfoy had used had got him wet, but it really hadn't loosened him up very much at all.

“Don't move,” Malfoy said, his breathing shallow. “You can just lie there.”

“Hell, Malfoy.” Harry's hands slid up Malfoy's thighs as Malfoy rose up.

“Let me show you, Harry,” Malfoy said, and sank back down, stretching to accommodate the girth of Harry's cock again, tight.

“Malfoy,” Harry said again.

“Shh. Let me ride you.”

“Oh, God.” Every time Malfoy came back down Harry felt as though he was filling him completely for the first time all over again. “Please.”

“I'm going to take care of you. I wanted to, you have no idea how much I wanted to. Now I can do it, let me.”

“Malfoy.” Harry's chest felt tight. Everything felt tight, hot—the throbbing of the skin pulled taut on

Harry's thigh, the thickness of his cock filling up Malfoy's body, Malfoy's arse seated snug against his balls, Malfoy's eyes on him holding him, inescapable.

“Do you feel it, Harry?” Malfoy's voice was raw. “You fit inside of me. You were made to be inside of me.”

“Oh, God,” Harry said again, hands dragging up Malfoy's thighs to rest on his tilting hips. “Ride me, Malfoy. Come on and do it.”

“You need me, don't you.” At last, Malfoy was letting Harry's help, letting Harry grip his hips, steadying him as he came back down. “Tell me that you need me.”

“Draco,” Harry said.

Malfoy's flesh clinging greedily as he slowly brought his hips up. “Tell me you need me.”

“I need it,” Harry said, his hands bruising on Malfoy's hips. “I need it.”

“I'm all that you need,” Malfoy said, pushing back down.

“Jesus, Draco.”

“I'll always be here for you.” Malfoy took one of Harry's hands from his hip, lacing their fingers together. It was the first time they had ever held hands, and Malfoy held on, hard. His nails dug into the scars on the back of Harry's hand. “I'm the one who's here for you,” Malfoy said.

“Draco,” Harry said again, because his cock was pressing into Malfoy's body, stretching him out all over again, spreading apart his flesh in a slow, hot slide until Harry fit; he fit, just like Malfoy said.

“Tell me I'm the one,” Malfoy said. “Tell me I'm the only one.”

Malfoy's nails dug into his hand.

“Say it,” Malfoy said.

I will not tell lies.

Harry yanked his hand from Malfoy's grasp, clamping down instead on Malfoy's hips, holding him good and tight in a bruising grip. Then he flipped them, rolling over, Malfoy's legs splayed open on the bed, the look on Malfoy's face startled. But Harry was still inside Malfoy's greedy, clenching hole, and though his thigh was throbbing, Harry didn't care if he'd ripped the stitches, because he was pushing hot and hard in Malfoy's body. “You're the only one,” he said. “The only one.”

Malfoy made a sound, and Harry said it again. “God damn you, Malfoy; you're the only one.”

“Yes. Oh God.” Malfoy arched; arms locked around Harry's neck, he said, “Make love to me, Harry,” and it was infuriating because Harry had planned on fucking him. He'd been so convinced that was what he was going to do; he was going to lie Malfoy back and give him the pounding of his life, because the agonizing slide of Malfoy's flesh around him prick had made him insane—but it had made him too insane, apparently; it had made him insane enough to comply when Malfoy wrapped around him, sweaty and wet, and said again, “Make love to me.”

“Malfoy.” Harry shuddered and made love to him, thrusting slow and deep, then pulling back and giving it to Malfoy all over again. He could tell himself it was partly in deference to the stitches on his thigh, which still hurt, but mostly it was because of the way Malfoy arched under him, the way Malfoy's arms stayed locked around his neck, the way Malfoy littered kisses across his brow, and lingered on the lightning scar.

“Harry,” Malfoy said. “Harry, come inside of me. I need it inside of me, Harry. All of it.”

Harry shuddered again, and wondered what the fuck was wrong with Malfoy. He meant to say just that—Malfoy, what the fuck is wrong with you?—and what came out was, “Jesus, Malfoy. I want to fill you up with come.”

“Yes. Like that. Just like that.” Malfoy arched. “Fuck me like you love me.”

That's fucked up, Harry meant to say, but just said, “God, I'm going to—”

“I love you,” Malfoy said.

Harry came because he was too confused not to, because he didn't understand how they had got here and couldn't go any further, and Malfoy was not long behind, wild and erratic under him. For a moment, Harry was afraid he could hurt him, he finished off so hard, and Malfoy was thrashing like a drowning thing, like a trapped animal. Then Harry remembered he was the one with the injury, and held on and on and on until Malfoy calmed down.

Harry slumped on top him him. When the sweat began to dry, Harry wondered what Malfoy would say.

“Your leg.” His voice was very soft.

“It's fine,” Harry said.

Malfoy pushed up on him. “Please. I don't want to hurt you,” and Harry rolled off.

His cock slipped out of Malfoy, limp and wet; Harry couldn't help sighing.

Malfoy was up and rummaging around somewhere over near the clothes. Harry wondered how he had the energy, and then Malfoy's cleaning charms were washing over him, and Harry sighed again.

“Let me see,” Malfoy said, and opened Harry's legs.

Harry thought his cock might fall off if it decided to take interest any time soon, but Malfoy was just looking at his stitches, his cool, clean fingers softly stroking the puffy redness all around the wound. “I said it's fine,” Harry said.

“Yes,” said Malfoy. “They're good stitches.”

His fingers were so light and cool, they tickled.

“Who did it?”

Frowning, Harry looked down at him. “What?”

Malfoy looked the way he always did after sex: pink, flushed, ready for another go. “Who stitched it?” he asked. When Harry just looked at him, disbelieving, Malfoy ran his fingers over the area around the stitches until the flesh tingled. “Who did this?”

“What?” Harry didn't think of who had done it. He stopped thinking completely. “I’m an Auror. People attack Aurors.”

“No. Who stitched it up?”

Harry scowled down at him. “What business is it of yours?”

“It’s not. It’s—” Malfoy took his fingers away, sitting up. “I can’t do this.” His voice caught. “I can’t do this any more.”

Harry blinked. “Fuck?”

Malfoy looked at him. “Pretend.”

Harry thought of the way that Malfoy had told him he loved him, and said, “We don’t have to pretend. It’s just fucking.”

“Yes.” Malfoy laughed, but it caught somewhere in his throat. It sounded awful.

“You can do whatever you want,” Harry said.

“You mean I can come here to get fucked whenever I want.”

“That's not what I meant.” Harry sat up. “You fuck me too.”

“Don’t be stupid, Harry.” Standing up, Malfoy began to gather his clothes.

“I don’t understand,” Harry said.

Malfoy pulled his trousers on, turned away to pull on his shirt, buttoning it up. “All we do is fuck. I can't stand it any more.”

“No, we don't,” Harry said. Malfoy paused, but he didn't even stop buttoning. “We also fight.” When Malfoy was getting undressed, that was when the fucking happened. When Malfoy was getting dressed, that was when the fighting happened.

When Malfoy was naked, Harry was never sure what the hell was happening, but Harry wisely didn't point this out. “If you wanted more, why didn't you just say so?”

Malfoy grabbed around. “Don't you think I tried?”

“You didn't try very hard.”

Whirling, Malfoy faced him, robes still open at the front. “Don't you get it? This is me. This is a part of who I am. I'm tetchy. I'm sour. I'm impatient. I tried to make nice with you maybe a some total of two hours and here's what happened: I got bored.”

Harry hadn’t spoken in a while. “We could change.”

Malfoy laughed again. This time it wasn’t choked, though it was still not a merry sound. “Harry, you don't want to change. I thought I could—I thought I had, but I don't want to any more than I have done. Not any more. Not even to make you proud.”

“Malfoy,” Harry began, but he didn’t know what to say.

“I was lying to myself. I thought—I thought that I could show you I was different; I thought that I could make you recognize me—for who I really am; I thought . . . I thought that you would come to my flat. But you're not going to. I'm not going to, either.”

Harry kept hearing a crashing sound, but it wasn't in the room; it was inside his head. He didn't know

why it mattered; he couldn't think why it mattered; all he could think was, “We were just fucking around.”

Malfoy smiled. He actually smiled, and looked as though he pitied him. “I know you thought that. I’m sorry. I was just pretending.”

And then he was leaving, and Harry was alone.

*

III.

*

The forty-first, forty-second, and forty-third jobs with Rabbit were a nightmare.

Harry's thigh was healed—well enough for Ministry work, but there was a phantom throbbing he didn't tell anyone about. Harry half suspected that it was the memory of the scent of dittany, the warm caress of Rabbit's hands that still made it ache sometimes. The other half of his suspicion was that it was the memory of Malfoy's lips, and then Harry stopped suspecting things at all.

Malfoy, meanwhile, had stopped coming by.

Rabbit asked him what was wrong, but when Harry snapped at him, he didn't ask again. Whatever Rabbit felt, there wasn't any way that he could understand how hard it was, without the sex. Before Malfoy, Harry had lost a lot of interest in it. He'd let the thrill of the job work out his kinks; he'd taken out energy and aggression in chasing, fighting, hiding, sneaking around and never getting caught.

During Malfoy, there had still been work to do. In addition, when Harry went home—to what was supposed to be home, anyway—there had been Draco Malfoy, and Harry could work out twice the kinks,

with him. The way they fucked, the way they wrapped around each other, the things they said—Harry had buried pressure, tension, and frustration deep in Malfoy's body, pushed it deeper until the moment of release. He'd been using Malfoy, and he hadn't realized at the time that that had made working with Rabbit bearable.

After Draco Malfoy, it felt like there was nothing. There wasn't enough action in the jobs, no way to blow off extra steam, and every time Rabbit matched him, taunted him, exceeded him, Harry wanted something he could never have. The worst of it was the way Rabbit went on exactly as before, as though nothing had changed—and nothing had, just Malfoy. And yet, sometimes, Harry caught Rabbit looking at him, and he looked as though he did understand. Those times were the worst, because Rabbit's eyes were full of pity.

Then, just before Harry's forty-fourth job with Rabbit, Rabbit left him too.

They met just outside of London. While the Department's headquarters was ostensibly the Ministry, some agents never actually ever saw the ninth floor, except for their first trip down to pick their guise. Their business was all over the world, and as such, Harry hardly ever saw London when he was truly working.

Harry still met with Rabbit in a hotel—slightly nicer than their usual fare, though still quite desperately Muggle; Rabbit had the electric tea kettle piping when Harry walked in, its cord lying useless on the floor. A wizarding newspaper was open on a table.

Harry supposed they were going to discuss their headway on the wands case. The Department must have found something in his Pensieved memories of Morchenko; they must be meeting so that Rabbit could share the intel and they could plan the next move. When Rabbit poured his tea, however, he said, "I've been reassigned."

Harry's teacup clattered to the table. "What?"

Rabbit was steadily pouring his own tea. "I've been reassigned."

“What?” Harry said again. “But—where?”

Rabbit didn’t meet his eyes. “That’s classified.”

“Is it . . . something to do with Morchenko?” Harry asked.

“No. It’s—it’s nothing to do with that.”

Harry shook his head. “They can’t split us up.”

“They can,” Rabbit said.

“They can’t. I—”

“Why not?” Rabbit’s teacup clattered also. “Because you want so very badly to fuck me? Get a grip, Blackbird.”

Rabbit had never talked to him that way before. Harry just stared.

“I’m sorry.” Rabbit reached up to massage his own shoulder. It must ache, Harry gleaned, from the wince on Rabbit face. Suddenly he ached too from the thought of Rabbit in any pain. “I—I should not have put it that way,” Rabbit said quietly.

Harry spelled the table clean. “I suppose I thought you felt the same way.”

Standing, Rabbit moved away from Harry. “I never gave you any encouragement,” he said quietly.

“Still.” Harry stood up, moved closer. “I thought you felt the same.” He put his hand on Rabbit’s shoulder, squeezing gently until Rabbit turned around.

Rabbit couldn’t meet his eyes, his own only making it so far as Harry’s lips. “I never meant to,” Rabbit whispered.

Harry could have kissed him. He knew that in that moment, he could have kissed him, and that it was practically the only time that Rabbit would not have objected. Instead, Harry let him go.

Kissing could only make things worse.

“Where are you reassigned?” he asked again.

“I can’t tell you,” Rabbit said. Harry nodded, looking down, and this time it was Rabbit who pressed closer—Rabbit, who almost always kept a reasonable distance. “You know that if I could, I would tell you.”

“Is it—is it permanent?”

Rabbit shook his head.

“Oh, God.” Harry sagged in relief. He started to reach out, but Rabbit flinched away.

“Please, don’t touch me.”

“I'm sorry,” Harry said. He didn't know what to do with his hands. “I understand, if you don't feel for me

what I feel for—”

“Harry,” Rabbit said, and stopped himself.

For a moment, everything else seemed to stop with him, and Harry couldn’t hear anything. Then gradually he became aware that nothing at all had stopped, not even Rabbit—he looked perfectly miserable now, and the traffic went on outside, and his heart was still beating. He wondered whether Rabbit always thought of him as Harry.

“I can’t,” Rabbit said, though he didn't say what he couldn't do. “This new mission—it’s important.”

“Then why can’t we both do it?”

Rabbit shook his head. “It’s something only I can do.”

“What are you talking about? I’m the best.”

Rabbit laughed, a startled sound. He laughed so rarely that Harry smiled, even though Rabbit was laughing at him. “You really are an arrogant son of a bitch.”

“This is the only thing I’m good at.”

“Being full of yourself?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “You know what I mean.”

Rabbit nodded. “Yes.” He looked as though he wanted to come closer, and didn’t dare.

Harry went to the window, looking out at London traffic for a while. “Are you frightened?”

Though Harry was, Rabbit was not the sort of person to brush off a question like that. “Not of this mission,” he said after a while, his voice careful.

Harry frowned. “Then what?”

Rabbit did come closer then, standing by Harry, both of them looking out the window. “I fear losing,” Rabbit said, just as water began to lightly dot the panes.

“You won't lose,” Harry said.

“I—thank you.” For a while, he watched the rain. “I might have already lost more than I can stand.”

“What?” Harry looked back at him.

“Nothing. It's personal.”

Rabbit looked pinched, too drawn. Next to Malfoy, he was hopelessly plain. Harry loved every line of him, knowing the person beneath. “Rabbit.” Harry's voice was low, intense. He would have taken Rabbit's hand and pressed it, had it not been that it would make things worse. “If you were in trouble, I would help you.”

“Yes. I know that.”

“You would only have to ask.”

Rabbit’s nose twitched in his signature way. “I’ll take one trip to the Bahamas, please,” he said at last, his voice light.

“Also,” Harry said, “if you get hurt, I'll come find you.”

“Heaven forbid.”

“The mission. Is there a chance that—”

“I’ll do just fine. Please have mercy on my enemies, should any harm befall me.”

Harry snorted. “Mercy? Is that a thing of yours?”

“No. But it is for you.”

Harry looked at the rain, and wondered whether it would be. It was hard to think of mercy, when he thought of losing Rabbit. He wondered whether Hermione would have understood that, whether the world would have understood that. He didn't know whether he had understood it at seventeen; there hadn't been a choice. “Don't get hurt,” was the only thing he could conclude.

Rabbit’s nose twitched again. “It’s for two months. In the interim, you’ll be with Talon again.”

Rain slid in rivulets along the window panes. “I want to be with you.”

“You like Talon.”

“He’s not you,” Harry said, looking at Rabbit’s reflection in the glass.

“Yes. Well.” Rabbit actually smiled a real smile. “No one is.”

*

While Rabbit worked on his special mission, Harry worked with Talon again.

Talon had got off his personal leave about two months ago, and he and Harry fell back into working together rather easily. They had never worked a really long case, like the wand shipments Harry and Rabbit had been pursuing, but before those last few months, they had had plenty of successes on smaller jobs, and they had worked well together. As Rabbit had said, Harry had liked Talon.

He still liked Talon. Talon was just as amiable and easy to work with as Harry had remembered. Though they weren't given jobs related to the wands case—Harry assumed Rabbit's reassignment had something to do with that—they made headway on tracking a crystal ball stolen from the Department, and on cracking down on the dragon egg black market.

The job was just as good. It just wasn't the same.

Harry missed Rabbit. He missed Rabbit’s sly jokes, his cool way of speaking. He missed the way that Rabbit always understood exactly what he was doing, the way that Rabbit had it planned out to the letter how a job would go. Even if Harry never followed said plans, he missed them; he missed the way Rabbit wrote reports. He missed Rabbit’s tea.

He also missed coming home from missions and fucking Draco Malfoy senseless.

Rabbit and Malfoy had walked out of his life at different times, and obviously for different reasons, but Harry could not help but notice that he had lost the two most important people in his life within two weeks. He had Rabbit in the ways he had thought mattered; Rabbit was someone he could work with, someone he trusted. Though their philosophies were not always the same, Rabbit understood where

Harry was coming from, and in the end, their goals were the same.

And yet, Rabbit had never been the one that he could come home to. He had never been the one that Harry could touch or hold or kiss; he had never even been the one with whom he could talk about his personal life. He had thought it hadn't mattered; the Department was his life. The sounds of Rabbit making tea, writing their reports together in companionable silence, joking around about tracking wards and suspects—these were things Harry had started to think of as home.

And yet, now, Harry knew he wanted more. He never could have had more from Rabbit. He could have had more from Malfoy, and he'd thrown it all away.

Malfoy may have been vain and sarcastic. He was nothing at all like Harry; every good thing Malfoy did, he did just for himself—not because he felt it to be honest and good, not to be a better person. In some ways, he was still the spoiled child that he had been. And yet, he had obviously wanted more than something superficial with Harry. Harry wondered how deep it really went.

Once or twice—more than once or twice—Harry took out Malfoy's Floo address, wondering what Malfoy had really wanted from him, wondering if he had really suffered, if he still did. Then he heard bits and pieces about Malfoy and the Kneazle calendar—February, April, and May—and never did put his head through the hearth. Malfoy did an advert for wizarding cologne for Christmas. Proceeds went to build a war memorial.

Harry tried doing the normal things he was supposed to do: he saw Ron and Hermione a little more than he had been in the past few months. He tried visiting Teddy. He even went shopping with Luna, which was more than he had ventured out in public since the Ministry gala. Since she was so rarely in town, he felt like he ought to spend time with her, ashamed that spending time with friends felt like such an obligation.

He stopped cold in Diagon Alley when he came up against the advertisement on the side of Taliesin's Talents—a high end shop that was the epitome of wizard fashion. The ad was a picture of Malfoy in black and white, wearing nothing but a pair of trousers. Water sluiced down Malfoy's body, dripped from his hair. He'd donated the proceeds to Kneazle Needs.

“Let’s not go that way,” Harry asked.

Luna looked at the ad. “Why not?”

Harry steadfastly did not look at the ad. He kept thinking of the way Malfoy had looked over him, his face knit in concentration as he gently, ever so gently, entered Harry’s body. “Let’s just go another way,” he said.

Naturally, he should have supposed that saying so would cause Luna to wander closer to the ad. She had to tilt her head back to see the whole thing; from this distance, Malfoy was much larger than life. “I think it’s very pretty,” she said.

“I don’t even know what it’s advertising.”

“It’s advertising itself, isn’t it?” Luna’s buckle shoes were turned inward, her hands in her purple muff in front of her; with her head tilted up, she somehow looked very prim. Harry was beginning to feel very dirty. “It’s certainly striking,” she said.

“Why is it in black and white, for one thing?”

“Did you ever talk to him?” Luna looked as though she were talking to Malfoy. “After the Trials, I mean.”

Malfoy with his knees up by his ears as Harry pounded into him, saying things like, I need you, and please, don’t ever stop, please don’t stop. “Yes,” was all that Harry said.

“What did he say?”

“Nothing.”

Harry looked away. “He—he told me nothing had changed.”

Luna continued to look at Malfoy, her expression similar to how she regarded Thestrals, and Snorkacks, or animals that were never real to begin with. Harry could understand why. Looking at that picture, he began to go from dirty to thinking that Malfoy couldn’t possibly be real in the first place. “I think he’s a model,” Luna said.

“You could tell just by looking?” Harry said, feeling cynical.

Luna turned away. “I didn’t mean a fashion model.”

Her face was elfin; she was blond and so lovely, and all Harry wanted to do was look at the picture. He turned his back to the advert. “What did you mean?”

“Did you know that Draco Malfoy has freckles on his back?”

Harry just looked at her. There weren’t any freckles on Malfoy’s back. He had seen Malfoy’s bare back many times. It was smooth, pale, perfectly angled, and yet not sharp. It looked clean and—and perfect, just like soap.

Maybe Luna meant they were mythical freckles, sort of like Snorkacks, or whether they were invisible ones, sort of like Thestrals, or maybe—“Malfoy doesn’t have freckles,” he said.

Luna tilted her head. “How do you know?”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t.” Looking up at the ad, he said, “I bet his dad wouldn’t let him.”

Luna looked up at the huge picture of Malfoy. “I saw it in a magazine. He was advertising underwear. You’ve seen that one, haven’t you? It was several years ago, for the Green Magic Advocacy Auction.”

Diagon Alley was very crowded that day. Harry couldn’t breathe. “No.”

“It’s very good. I can loan it to you.”

“Luna,” he said, and someone pushed by him. Harry had to get closer to the giant Malfoy to stand up straight. “Luna, why do you have an underwear advert of Draco Malfoy?”

Luna shrugged. “It’s pretty. Would you like to go?” Someone else pushed by, and Harry and Luna began walking. “It’s a shame you have to wear a disguise,” she said eventually, when they reached a quieter corner of the street.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Say it louder, why don’t you.”

“Sorry. I just mean, it’s a shame no one can see the freckles on your back.”

“There aren’t any.”

“Oh,” said Luna. “That’s a shame too.”

This was more trouble than it was worth. Diagon Alley was too crowded, and there were pictures of Malfoy, and Luna always had been strange. As soon as he thought it, he was ashamed. “There’s nothing wrong with not having freckles,” he said.

“I don’t suppose there is,” said Luna, though she sounded like she didn’t believe it. “Do you think if you hadn’t been Harry Potter—”

“Luna!”

“Sorry. Do you think if you hadn’t been who you are, you would be in an underwear advertisement?”

“What? No. I don’t want to be in any—” His eyes bugged out for a moment. “Are you saying you want me to be in—in . . .”

“Underwear ads?” Luna smiled, pausing in the middle of the street. “No. Well, you would look very pretty, too, but you don’t have to. I’m just wondering, if you had another chance, what you would do.”

“I did have another chance.”

Luna peeled her eyes from the chaos of Diagon Alley. “What?”

“I did have another chance.” Harry was looking at the street. Owls were flying, sparks and ribbons were bursting and whirling around, Fortesque’s had a line around the block. He looked down at Luna. “The Killing Curse has hit me twice, you know.”

“Yes, I know. I just meant . . .” Luna looked out at the street. “What if it had never hit you at all?”

She sounded sad, in just the way that Hermione and Ginny always sounded sad, and Ron sometimes sounded sad, when they all asked whether Harry was always going to live alone.

*

One week later, Malfoy showed up at the door to Number 12. It was late in the evening, and he was soaked just like his ad, though he had a shirt on this time, and a tie. He really should have had on a coat as well, Harry thought distantly, watching him shiver. It was nearly winter, though the rain didn’t seem

inclined to stop.

Malfoy was even more gorgeous than the stupid picture, though he still looked black and white. The rain had washed his colours out, leaving him quite pale. His shirt was wet enough to stick, limning long lean lines in translucent white, just the slightest hint of warmer tones beneath.

“What,” Harry said, too shocked to come up with something better to say.

Malfoy lifted his eyes. “You said that you would help me.”

The world tilted again, and Harry suddenly remembered Malfoy in the kitchen, not meaning to make tea. Rabbit—he had told Rabbit he would—help him—and the world righted itself, because years ago, Malfoy had been in prison, and he had said:

People will help you. If you ask.

“Come inside,” Harry said, and opened the door wider.

Malfoy came in, dripping all over the floor. He just stood there shivering, like a half-drowned cat, wan under the waves of Walburga screaming.

“What’s wrong? What do you . . .” Harry made a helpless gesture. He cast drying charms, because Malfoy still wasn't doing anything, but he still didn't stop shivering. “Come on,” Harry said, taking Malfoy’s hand. Malfoy trailed after him, leaving little winding lines of water in his wake.

Malfoy was here. Harry’s chest ached with relief. He didn't know what Malfoy was doing here, what had brought him to his doorstep in such a state. He almost didn't care; he was here.

They got to the upstairs bathroom, and Harry let him go. “Let’s get you in the shower,” Harry suggested,

and started to untie Malfoy’s tie.

Malfoy nodded and began to help him, fingers numb with cold. Harry should have cast a warming charm, he supposed, but he’d left his wand downstairs. His own fingers were wildly clumsy; he was terrified that if he did something wrong, Malfoy would simply disappear.

He left Malfoy to take his trousers off, and started up the shower, testing the water with his hand to make sure it was warm. “In you go,” he said, once Malfoy was undressed.

Then he was inside under the hot spray, and Harry didn't know what to do, so he went downstairs to get his wand.

This was his chance; Harry knew that. He was never going to have with Rabbit everything that he wanted. Because he wanted Rabbit, he couldn't have everything he wanted with Malfoy, either—but he could have something. This was what he could have, and it was better than nothing—even if it was Malfoy. Even if they fought after every fuck.

He wanted it, Harry realized. He still wanted it.

Harry got his wand and went back upstairs. Malfoy was still in the shower. He was just standing there, his expression cleared of all emotion, letting the water pour over him and over him. He was exactly as Harry had left him. Harry stepped inside the shower.

Malfoy turned his head. “You’ll get your clothes wet.”

“I don't care,” Harry said, and pulled him into his arms.

For one long moment, Malfoy just stood there stiffly. Then he sagged against him, hands coming up to Harry's drenched shirt, just holding on. Harry’s arms tightened around him, and Malfoy shivered, the

water pouring down on top of them.

“I tried to stay away,” Malfoy said finally. “I tried.”

Harry kissed his hair, his temple, tasting the water running down his face. “Don't,” he said.

Malfoy's hands clenched and unclenched the hem of Harry's shirt. “I'm not going to. I give up.”

“What is it? Let me help.”

Malfoy shivered. “I can't do this alone.”

“You're not alone,” Harry said. “Whatever it is, I'm here. I'm here.” He kissed him again, his cheekbone, his jaw. Slowly, he sank to his knees, looking up. “I'm here.”

Malfoy looked down at him, eyes as grey as gravestones. His hands sank into Harry's hair.

Malfoy wasn't hard yet, and the sight of his soft, pink cock somehow filled Harry with desperate tenderness. Kissing the length of it, just lips, Harry tried to show him that he was grateful, so grateful that he had come back. Then he used his tongue, just gently, and tried to show him that he could help him, if Malfoy needed help; he could try to be there for him like people were supposed to be there, for each other.

Harry filled himself with the smell of it, the clean scent of the water, the warmth of Malfoy's private places, the tang of his building arousal. Harry wanted to be close, so close; when he took him into his mouth, he wanted to be still closer. It felt so good, to fill himself with this human taste, the feeling of another person, intimate inside of him, private, only them. He thought that if this was the best that he could have, it could almost be enough.

Malfoy's hands were tightening in Harry's hair, knuckles scraping Harry's scalp. He just kept saying, “Please.”

When he came, Harry swallowed as much as he could. He cleaned Malfoy's cock with his tongue, gently, and the shower still poured down. When at last Harry stood, he pulled Malfoy to him. “Stay,” he said.

Malfoy said okay.

They slept together in Harry's bed, and Harry dreamed of Rabbit.

*

When Harry woke up, he instinctively felt beside him on the bed. Malfoy had moved away, but he was there, back to Harry. The white sheets covered his legs, rucked up around his hips, exposing his back. It was a beautiful back, as Harry remembered, ending in a long, slender neck, and shock of near-white hair.

Then Harry saw them: there were indeed freckles.

He had never seen them before, but he felt sure he would have noticed them. There were at least a hundred of them: tiny little specks of sun-coloured skin, only slightly darker than the rest of Malfoy’s back. Malfoy must keep them covered by charms, and somehow, it broke Harry’s heart, Malfoy hiding his freckles.

Harry touched him, his fingers lightly touching the tiny dots, one by one. Then he was kissing them, laying his lips over them again and again.

Malfoy made a low humming sound, and turned around. Then Harry was kissing him, Malfoy’s warm mouth, pliant lips. Malfoy immediately opened for him, lips still lazy with sleep. It was deeper and more sloppy than Harry had ever kissed him, and he moved closer under the sheets.

Malfoy was warm and so close. This was morning sex, Harry realized; they were going to have morning sex, and they had never had it before because Malfoy usually came in the evenings. Then they always argued; Malfoy had never stayed the night before.

“Malfoy.” Harry kissed Malfoy’s jaw, down his throat, until he found what he was looking for; he could taste Malfoy's pulse, blood rushing in his veins, the hard thump of Malfoy's heart.

Malfoy’s hands buried themselves in his hair, carding through it again and again. “I dreamed of this,” he whispered.

Harry kissed his neck. “It's real.”

*

Harry's fifth job with Talon, after Rabbit was reassigned, was to do with exotic creatures trade. It was important, since magic creatures could be dangerous—or else sentient, in which cases the trade was actually slavery. Still, Harry was anxious to get back to the case of the rigged wands. He felt certain that that was what Rabbit was working on. The Department, however, didn’t seem to think that Harry could help. The only job they gave them remotely relating to the case was planting more charms on Philip Claret.

“If you don’t have an assignment, you don’t have an assignment,” Talon said, when Harry once again brought it up.

“But I still know where Morchenko’s base is,” Harry said. “Maybe I can get a tracking charm on him.”

Talon just laughed. “Think you can seduce him, eh? I see you haven't changed.” Harry flinched, and Talon saw. He looked at him curiously. “Don't let's deny it, Bird. You always could use that guise to get what you wanted.”

“There are other ways,” Harry said, and thought of Malfoy.

“Hit a nerve there?” Talon's voice was jovial, but his eyes were still keen.

Harry shook his head. “Morchenko and Kozić are the centre of this case. We have enough information on them to be doing something about it.”

Talon shrugged. “They’re just pushers. They don’t know anything.”

“If they’re just pushers,” Harry said, “they’re closer to the wand creator than Claret. Claret is just a go-between.”

“Sure,” Talon said easily. “But he’s the one getting the wands into the UK.”

“We already know that,” Harry said. “If the Department wanted to get him, they could turn evidence to the Ministry in Belgium.” He shook his head. “They’re looking for the wands’ creators, and to get to them, they’re going to have to go through Morchenko and Kozić. I know it.”

Talon gave him a wiley smile. “How ‘bout that Kozić, huh? Think she’d take me?”

Harry just shook his head, smiling. Talon always had been incorrigible, when it came to ladies. Harry could not help thinking of Rabbit, who was largely indifferent to almost everyone, when it came to doing a job—except Bruno and Marietta.

Except him.

Harry could not help feeling guilty toward Rabbit. The morning after Malfoy had come to him, soaking wet and shaking, they had been with each other in a way that—well, felt much like making love. They hadn’t argued afterwards. Harry had made him coffee—because Malfoy didn’t like tea; he remembered—and Malfoy had talked about his father.

Malfoy had been in the kitchen, sitting at the table at which Sirius had once sat, upon which Harry had not so very long ago fucked him senseless. Malfoy's long, elegant fingers had been wrapped around the mug, but he hadn't been drinking any coffee. Instead, he started talking in that toneless voice he always used to talk about his past.

Harry had drunk his coffee and kept quiet. In the past, when Malfoy had spoken about these things, Harry had tried to comfort him. He'd wanted to assure him that Lucius Malfoy was a horrible person, Malfoy Manor didn't matter anyway, Pureblood status and social standing wasn't important—but Harry had forgotten that Malfoy already knew all of that. He'd told him that that day at the pub, when he'd apologized for everything he had done, and the person he had been. Malfoy knew just how awful all of it was. It didn't stop the way he felt.

So Malfoy talked, and for the first time, Harry tried very hard just to listen. He didn't offer any judgement, but he didn't make any sounds of understanding, either. He just drank his coffee, and listened.

"I believed you," Malfoy had said, in his blank voice. "That day when I was arrested, when you said that I could change. I believed it, and I tried."

"I know," said Harry.

"But I wasn't good at anything that could make up for what I'd done. It doesn't occur to me to think of other people. It's not instinctive for me to be . . . nice."

Harry thought that Malfoy had been quite nice to him, when he'd been trying to start over with him. But Harry didn't say anything. He just drank his coffee.

"I had to find something where I could use the things I am good at—except this time, I was going to be on the right side."

“I don't care what you do,” Harry said.

Malfoy was staring at the table. Looking up, he said, “Don't you?”

“You don't have to change,” Harry said, and drank his coffee. Eventually he asked Malfoy if he wanted breakfast. Then he fried Malfoy up some eggs, and made toast.

*

After that, things were much different with Malfoy. They didn’t argue after they had sex. Harry tried not to comment on Malfoy’s choices, and Malfoy seemed to be trying not to take everything Harry said the wrong way. Harry was out a lot on missions with Talon, and Malfoy disappeared from time to time too, but a lot of Harry’s downtime, he spent with Malfoy.

Before, Harry wouldn’t have been able to say what he could do with Malfoy, besides have a lot of sex. And the sex, it was true, was fantastic: Malfoy still writhed and cried out under him as though he’d been waiting for it his whole life; he still whispered needy, incredibly dirty things in Harry’s ear. He did things to Harry’s body that no one had ever done before, and Harry loved them; he loved the feeling of being taken and filled and so thoroughly fucked by Malfoy.

Yet now there were times when they were not having sex at all, when Malfoy was just at Number 12, reading, or eating, listening to the wireless while Harry slept. They put together puzzles and talked about Quidditch, and for the first time, Harry began to learn about Malfoy, really learn.

Malfoy was soft around the edges in the morning, and liked to touch much more. He also liked to sleep in, and when he woke, he always wanted coffee. He liked chocolate and chess, and often missed his mum. He didn't see her as often as he would like, because he did not at all like to visit his father. He still tried to make it work with them, and sometimes agonized over writing owls. Malfoy was often cold, and liked to take long baths. He missed Crabbe a lot, and rarely talked about orgies, charities, or Kneazle calendar girls.

He hated the Daily Prophet almost as much as Harry, which seemed strange, since Malfoy was often in it. He had nothing against magazines—though the Quidditch ones seemed to bore him. Usually he passed

them off to Harry and read all the gossip rags, Harry lounging on the couch with his head in Malfoy's lap as they both read. Malfoy stroked his hair, eventually putting down his reading so that he could put both of his hands against Harry's skull. Then a gentle finger wandered down, tracing Harry's scar over and over again.

Harry sat up, putting the magazine aside. He pulled Malfoy to him and began kissing him, kissing him and kissing him, until at last, he pushed Malfoy down to his knees, and opened up his legs. Malfoy eagerly opened up Harry's trousers, and swallowed him down almost in one go. Then Harry's hands were in Malfoy's hair, and he knew now that Malfoy also used charms to keep it looking thick.

Malfoy's throat was warm and slick, and Harry didn't care. He touched it as Malfoy took him down, felt it flexing beneath his hand, and came, saying Malfoy's name.

Number 12 was a different place with Malfoy in it. Just the presence of another person made a difference—Harry's bed was warm beside him in the morning; Malfoy's dishes were sometimes in the sink. Malfoy wore his clothes a lot, and didn't seem to care that they weren't silk or linen. Harry could hear him moving about in the kitchen, splashing in the washroom, lightly snoring on the couch sometimes. They were comforting sounds. They sounded like home.

Number 12 was also different because Malfoy started making changes. One day he spent hours closed up in the parlour, wand pointed at the tapestry. "It's inaccurate," was all he said, by way of explanation.

After the third hour, Harry sent his Patronus in to fetch Malfoy for lunch.

Malfoy came in several moments later. "Your Patronus is a bunny," he said sounding sulky. He sat down at the table.

"It's a rabbit," Harry said. It had changed form over a month ago.

"It's a bunny," Malfoy said.

“Do you have anything against rabbits?” Harry cut the sandwiches in half.

“They’re dumb,” Malfoy said. “Couldn’t you pick something interesting?”

“Like what?” Harry poured them both milk, and brought the food to the table.

Malfoy was staring sullenly at the wood. “I don’t know. A dragon.”

Harry smiled. When Malfoy was ridiculous, it was easier not to think of Rabbit. “Isn’t that yours?”

“No.” Malfoy pouted. “Mine is stupid too.”

“What’s yours?”

“I’m not going to tell you.”

Harry shrugged.

Sighing, Malfoy picked at his sandwich. “Bunnies have stupid noses.”

“I like my bunny,” Harry said, without inflection, and chewed on his ham.

“Yeah.” Malfoy muttered under his breath. “I bet you do.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Malfoy gave an exaggerated sigh again. “Bunnies are all right, I suppose.”

“Good,” Harry said.

Malfoy raised a brow. He always looked snooty when he did that. “Good?”

“Yes.” Harry went on eating his sandwich. “I like my bunny very much.”

Malfoy looked at him a while. “Oh, Harry,” he said finally. “Sometimes I would like to rim you so thoroughly you can’t even think any more.”

Harry drank his milk. “Eat your lunch. Then you can have dessert.”

“God, can you imagine my tongue in your—”

“Eat it.”

“That’s exactly what I want to do.” Malfoy pouted some more. “But you won’t let me.”

“You can eat all you want of my arse once you have had a sandwich like a normal person.”

“Merlin, you’re so kinky.” Malfoy took apart his sandwich, and put it back together. “Are you kinky with your bunny?”

“What I do with my bunny is none of your business.”

“I bet you are,” Malfoy said. “I bet you love your bunny. I bet you fuck it senseless. I bet you—”

“Shut it, Malfoy.”

“Why?” Malfoy looked innocent. “I’d like to watch. All that soft fur.”

Harry took another bite of sandwich. He didn’t really believe that they were having this conversation, but then again, he didn’t believe a lot of things when it came to Malfoy.

He didn’t believe that in his head, Malfoy was watching him fuck Rabbit in one of the kitchen chairs, and that it was one of the hottest things he had ever imagined.

Harry was sick and wrong. He had been wondering when he was going to face it.

“I thought you didn’t like my bunny,” was all Harry said.

“I like it okay,” Malfoy said. “Sometimes I don’t like that you like it.”

“That makes no sense.” Harry polished off the last of his sandwich.

“Sometimes it’s okay, too,” Malfoy said. “It’s very sweet. You loving your bunny that way.”

“Okay,” Harry finished his milk and stood. “Now you can fuck me with your tongue.”

“Harry!” Malfoy sounded scandalized. “I haven’t finished lunch!”

“Just one chance, Malfoy,” Harry said, unbuttoning his jeans.

Malfoy stood very suddenly, pushing his plate away hurriedly. “I—you’re really going to let me?”

“If you do it soon,” Harry said. “We wouldn’t want it to get cold, now, would we?”

Malfoy didn’t say anything about his awful jokes. He just stood there, staring, as Harry bent over the table. “You’re going to let me,” he said in awe.

“Yes,” Harry said, “I’m going to let you.”

And he did.

A few days later, Harry found Malfoy again in the parlour—having learned better than to let his Patronus out around Malfoy. It wasn’t that he minded that his Patronus looked like a rabbit. He liked it very much. He just didn’t like thinking about Rabbit and Malfoy in the same thought at all; it made him feel too guilty.

Meanwhile, Malfoy had been working on the tapestry assiduously, but Harry had not been paying much attention. Now he looked at it, and saw that Malfoy had knit the burnt spots back together with magic thread, and added Remus Lupin. He had added Harry Potter with a dotted line to Sirius, with words along the line that said, “Godson.” On the tree he had woven green leaves, and they were unfurling, growing.

“I want to fuck you,” Harry said, turning away from the tapestry so that he wouldn’t see the spot where Malfoy had added Teddy. “I want to fill you up with cock until you’re gagging for it.”

“Well,” said Malfoy. “If you insist.”

Harry came closer, pushing him down, until they were both on the threadbare carpet. “I’m going to fill you up so full, you won’t remember what it’s like to be empty.”

“I’m always empty without you,” Malfoy said, batting his lashes. Sometimes, when he said those ridiculous things, Harry was afraid he meant them.

They made love on the floor, Malfoy’s legs around his waist.

Later, they played wizarding chess on the same carpet, and Harry said, “You could give Ron a run for his Galleons.”

Malfoy paused, and Harry realized that they didn’t really talk about Ron and Hermione. Then Malfoy moved his piece, and said, “Thank you.”

Harry looked at the board. “I don’t see them much these days.”

“Why?” Malfoy said, also looking at the board.

Harry just shrugged. “We don’t have as much in common. They have kids, and I . . .”

For a long time, Malfoy didn’t say anything. Then he nudged a pawn. It yawned, and walked up a spot on the board. “Sometimes I wish that I had brothers and sisters,” Malfoy said.

Harry nodded. “Yeah. They’re like my family. But I don’t . . . we’re not together as often as we should be.”

Malfoy looked at him. “No one dictates how you spend time with family, Harry,” he said, and then, “Check.”

It was nice, spending time with Malfoy. They could talk, even about things like this, and most of the time they managed to avoid argument. Harry never would have thought that Malfoy could identify with the things that he was feeling, but he seemed to understand. Malfoy still talked sometimes too—about his father, about his family, things that he had dreamed.

The only difficulty in any of it was that Harry wished he could have talked to Rabbit this way. He wished he could have been with Rabbit this way, but when Harry got home from his missions with Talon, there was Malfoy again.

After working on the tapestry, Malfoy spent hours on Walburga, hours and hours of charms and knitting, weaving magic, until she finally came down, screaming. “We’ll put her in the attic,” Malfoy said, and Harry said:

“I haven’t shagged you there.”

They fucked in that attic, dusty and frantic, and they got each other off on the stairs. Harry blew Malfoy against the front door, when Malfoy finally got the house-elf heads out of the hall, and they made outside. There was a little walled-off courtyard in the back of Number 12, and Malfoy stood naked in the cold, face to the stones, while Harry took him from behind. They should not have been out there; it was winter, and the stones were very chilly, but Malfoy was as hot as the inside of Harry’s mouth and tea, and seemed to like it. He cried out louder than Harry had ever heard him, and wildly humped the stones, as though if he really could just fuck the wall, all his problems would be solved.

They fucked in the kitchen, and in Sirius’s bedroom, and in Malfoy’s flat.

The first time that Harry came there, Malfoy was shocked. “I . . . what are you doing?” he said, his door open, with Harry in the hall.

Harry raised his brows. “Visiting. Can I come in?”

“I,” Malfoy said again. “Yes.” He opened the door wider, and Harry came in. Then Malfoy slammed the door and pushed Harry up against it. He was a flurry of kisses.

“Well, hello,” Harry said.

“You came to my flat.” Malfoy was sucking on Harry’s pulse again. Harry was long past avoiding bruises there. When he worked, he wore the guise.

Rabbit would never see them anyway.

“You came to my flat,” Malfoy said again, kissing his cheek, his nose, his temple.

“Well, you always come to my place.”

“You came to mine.” Malfoy was still kissing him, and Harry couldn’t believe how happy Malfoy was. He felt a little guilty, that Malfoy had wanted it so badly.

Harry wondered whether Rabbit would have wanted it.

“You came,” Malfoy said again.

“I wanted you,” Harry said, because he would never know where Rabbit lived, and kissed him back.

Malfoy’s flat was what Harry would have expected, had he thought about it at all. It was posh, and very neat. Everything looked as though it had been purchased out of magazines, and though it seemed a little

cold, everything was comfortable. It was because everything was rich, Harry supposed, and spoke of luxury.

But then when they finally made their way to Malfoy's bedroom, and Harry looked around—the modern bed, the stylish desk—Malfoy waved his wand, and most of it melted away. Something about that room looked lived in, more like Ron and Hermione's house or the common room in Gryffindor than like Number 12 or Malfoy Manor, or anywhere Harry thought Malfoy might have chosen to live.

The bed was still there, but it had green and silver hangings. The desk looked older, scratched with age and rough wear, but covered in intricate and ornate carvings. It didn't match the wing back chair beside it, upholstered with rich, velvet cushions, also well-worn. There were wizarding photographs and laundry, used books and a wizard radio; there were soft blankets and an empty glass of wine, on the table beside the bed, next to a silly-looking clock.

Harry looked at Malfoy. Malfoy looked a little shy.

It was not a look Harry was used to seeing on Malfoy. "I like it," Harry said, and wondered exactly how much of himself Malfoy hid.

Malfoy shrugged, and didn't look at him. "It's home."

"Why are you showing me?"

Malfoy took his hand. "Because you're here." He dropped Harry's hand again. "It's Slytherin colours. I know it's stupid."

"It's not," Harry said. "It's . . ." who you are, he should have said, but instead he said, "I like green."

Malfoy caught his breath. "God, Potter. I want you to take me here. Take me in my room, please, I

want—”

“Okay,” Harry said.

“Merlin,” Malfoy breathed.

“Get on your bed,” Harry said.

Malfoy practically scrambled, taking off his clothes, hurrying up onto the bed. Harry followed more slowly, taking off his own clothes, casting a lubrication spell on his fingers. He got on the bed with Malfoy, climbed on top, straddling him. “You wanted me to fuck you here?” Harry asked, pushing a finger in.

Malfoy arched. “I wanted it to be me who was fucking you.”

“I'll fuck you.” Harry pushed another finger in. He wasn't being very careful. “I'll fuck you right here in your bed, where you sleep at night. Is that what you want?”

“Merlin, Potter.” Malfoy lifted his hips, allowing Harry even deeper access to his eager, clenching hole.

“You wanted me in your home,” Harry said, pushing a third finger in. “You wanted me where you can be all cozy and comfortable, act just like yourself.”

“Yes. Harry, yes.” Malfoy writhed.

Harry twisted his fingers. “You wanted me to see you. You want me to see you all pink and desperate and helpless, how much you really need me.”

“Yes, please, Harry, give it to me.” Malfoy's hands pulled on Harry's hair, pulling him closer, tighter. “Put it in me. I need it.”

Harry slowly easing his fingers out of Malfoy's stretched wet hole. “It's okay, love.” He kissed Malfoy's brow. “You're going to get it.”

Malfoy made a high, shocked sound as Harry thrust in, not particularly gently, and quite deep. He made it again when Harry pushed in again; he made it again and again and again, a frantic, helpless sound that seemed so utterly astonished, as though he hadn't believed Harry would give it to him, after all.

“Come in your bed, Malfoy,” Harry said, pushing in again, hard. “I'll fill you up, get you all messy. Then we'll go to sleep, and I'll get you clean in the morning.”

Malfoy made another wild sound, his hands locked tight about Harry's neck, holding on as though for dear life.

Harry gave him another long, hard thrust. “You're all muzzy in the morning,” he said, circling his hips, giving Malfoy and uneven rhythm. “You're all warm and sleepy; you—” Harry eased out, withdrawing almost completely, then slammed in so hard Malfoy squeaked. “You'll do anything I tell you in the morning. Did I ever tell you,” Harry circled his hips, “I love you in the morning?”

Malfoy actually convulsed, came without Harry even touching him. “I love it when you come,” Harry said. “I love the way you smell, the way you drink your coffee; I love it when you touch me,” he said, and came as well.

*

Two days later, there was a picture of Harry in the Prophet. He was leaving Malfoy’s flat, lips bruised, love bites necklaced about his throat, looking desperately untidy and exhausted.

Though Harry never read the Prophet, he knew that the picture was there because the newspaper was open on the table. Rabbit was sitting there, with tea, and Harry remembered why he never ventured out much as Harry Potter—even to the flats of people he was fucking.

He and Malfoy had spent almost that whole night shagging, and Harry had been exhausted. Malfoy had claimed he was showing him the flat—and he had done, Harry supposed. He'd shown Harry the dining room, and they'd fucked on the table; he'd shown Harry the kitchen, where he's sucked Harry off, until Harry thought he might just never come again. Then Malfoy had tried to make him tea; “a host should offer refreshment,” he said, but it was awful, swimming with leaves, and Harry wondered why he had tea at all if he disliked it so very much.

“It’s for guests, stupid,” and Harry forgot all about it because Malfoy had shown him the broom cupboard, where he ate Harry out until Harry was just a writhing mass of flesh, begging, incoherent. “You fuck me up so horribly,” Malfoy told him, and then fucked him. “You ruin me completely, Potter.”

By the time Harry left the next morning, he had barely slept at all. Malfoy was completely wiped—still in his bed where Harry had last fucked him, blissfully naked and sleeping like a baby. Harry, however, had a job with Talon in Belarus, and he desperately needed some form of caffeine. He was not thinking about it when he left Malfoy’s flat; there was a Muggle coffee shop just around the—

—corner, where three flashes blinded him, and Harry had his wand out instantly.

But it wasn’t an attack; it was just cameras, and the Muggles passing by stopped to gawk, thinking Harry must be some celebrity they hadn’t recognized. The wizards or witches who had snapped the photographs were already gone, and Harry knew exactly what pictures they had got: Harry Potter, leaving Draco Malfoy’s flat, looking like the most well-fucked man in all the United Kingdom.

Harry would have liked to have wasted time being angry, but he had had a job to do.

At least he had his guise, he had thought, but the job wasn’t with Talon.

It was with Rabbit, who read the paper. Who had always read the paper, even when Harry laughed at it,

and Harry felt his stomach sinking. The two months couldn’t be over already—it couldn’t be, he thought, because he would have known. He had been counting down the days. Even when he was with Malfoy, all he thought about was Rabbit. Even when he was fucking Malfoy over the back of the couch, or when they were drinking coffee and Malfoy was telling him about learning to fly, or when he held Malfoy as he told him about bad dreams—Harry had been really thinking of Rabbit.

Of course he had been thinking of Rabbit. It wasn't that he didn't care about Malfoy at all; it was just—Malfoy wasn't Rabbit.

“Hello, Blackbird,” Rabbit said. “It’s been a while.”

“I can explain.”

“Explain what?” Rabbit closed the paper. “Talon and I talked about your recent work. Well done.”

“The paper,” Harry said. “I can explain the paper.”

Rabbit stood up, taking his tea with him. “Let’s stick to business, shall we?” he said, not meeting Harry’s eyes. “The Department picked up some intel that the wands are being made here, in Minsk. Somewhere between Kozić and Morchenko, if you remember your geography.”

“It’s not what it looks like,” Harry said.

“It looks like you’re fucking Draco Malfoy.” Rabbit sipped his tea, still not looking at him. “Do you think I care?”

“I don't care.” Harry came closer. “About him.”

Rabbit just stood there. Then he slowly put down his tea.

“Believe me, Rabbit,” Harry said. “It doesn't mean anything. We’re just fucking. The only one I care about is you.”

Rabbit didn’t say anything. He didn’t move. Harry couldn’t read the line of his shoulders, and it bothered him, because usually he could. Of course, Rabbit had every reason to be upset. He had every reason to be furious. If Harry had found out Rabbit’s true form was with another man or woman, he—he didn’t know what he would have done.

Coming closer, Harry reached out, touching Rabbit’s shoulder. He turned Rabbit toward him. Rabbit’s face was utterly blank. “I never meant to hurt you,” Harry said.

“Quite,” Rabbit said. It sounded as though it was a tremendous effort for him to speak.

“Please,” Harry said. “I missed you so much.”

Rabbit moved away. “The third party that Kozić and Morchenko are working with. They think he’s here. In—in—” Rabbit was getting a map out from his satchel, but his hands were fumbling. “They think he’s—”

“Let me,” Harry said, taking the bag from him. He pulled out the map, handing it to Rabbit. “Can’t we—can’t we talk about this?”

“There’s nothing to talk about.” Rabbit appeared to be regaining some equilibrium, unrolling the map on the table. “The target is in a manor home, near a park. They think the wands are created in the basement.”

“I love you,” Harry said.

“You don’t have a very big window,” Rabbit said. “But I’ll be there on Dictus.”

“I’ll make it up to you.”

Rabbit pointed his wand at him. “Non Dicatus,” he said.

“Non Dicatus,” Harry said, and the spell tingled in his ear.

“You damn well better,” said Rabbit.

You damn well better.

*

The manor home was easy to infiltrate. One of the locks on the doors to the house-elf quarters was easily picked with an Alohomora, and then Harry was slipping in. Rabbit guided him through the house, his quiet, steady voice in Harry’s ear leading him to the basement.

It was on the stairs that they got him.

Pale hand came from nowhere, locking around Harry’s neck.

Harry cast a hex behind him, and whoever it was let go, but there was no going back up the stairs. Even if he hexed his attacker, it would take too long to get around the body; it was too dangerous if there were more people coming. So Harry took his only option—down.

The staircase was suddenly filled with wizards and witches.

Blackbird, Rabbit was saying. Talk to me. Talk to me!.

“Protego! It’s a set-up,” Harry said. “Someone set us up. Expelliarmus! Stupefy!”

No one knows you’re there, Rabbit said.

“Some one knew. Expelliarmus!”

Fuck, said Rabbit.

Harry cast more spells, and Rabbit didn’t say any more. “Rabbit?” Harry asked, still whirling around to fend off various attackers. He had got down the stairs, but now he didn’t know where to go. There had to be another way out of the basement—a window, something. “Rabbit? I could use your crazy mad skills right about—”

Then there were more witches and wizards, and Harry was surrounded.

“Retexticorpus!” Harry said, since nothing was forthcoming on the Dictus.

Blood began to flow, skin came off in ribbons, and then—

“Corpus Integrum!”

Harry whirled around to see who had cast it.

“Really, Blackbird,” said a voice. “You think I’m not to speed on all the Department’s little tricks?”

In an archway of stone, leading to deeper darkness than any basement, stood Talon.

*

Of course, it wasn’t Talon. Talon was a code name, a phial of Polyjuice, a voice from a box on a shelf in on the ninth floor of the Ministry.

They put Harry in a cell. Harry had been right about the basement; the cellar extended far beneath normal levels, and was far larger than the manor house could possibly be. He only knew he was somewhere under the park, thought not exactly where. The manor was old, at least a century or so; this must have been a dungeon—or worse. Harry was trying to come up with what would be worse than a dungeon when his guise at last wore off.

They had taken his flask of Polyjuice and his wand. With a little wandless magic, he could keep charms in place to conceal his identity, but since one of them was wearing Talon’s guise, they must know he wore a guise as well. They could easily banish any attempt he made to disguise himself, so he made no attempt.

Instead, he inspected his cell. It was about two meters in all directions. The walls were made of stone, the floor of dirt, the bars of iron. He had already felt along the seams of everything, and found them solid. The floor was hard-packed, but he had learned digging spells in training. When he tried to push with his wandless magic, though, he found that the floor was warded, as well as the walls and bars.

At first, Harry wondered where Rabbit was. Whatever had happened, the Dictus had been removed, though Harry supposed it was possible that Rabbit could still have the charm in his own ear, and hear whatever Harry was saying. So he said, very quietly, “I'm sorry, Rabbit.”

Harry was not so inexperienced or so lacking in hope as to believe that this was the end. Still, there was something that felt final about being lacked in a dank cell, and furthermore this was the first time that Rabbit hadn't been able to save him. Harry couldn't help but think that something had happened to him, and it made him regret their last moments together.

What he should have been regretting, he knew, was his last moments with Malfoy. That was what had caused his argument with Rabbit; that was why Rabbit's feelings had been hurt. But when Harry thought of just the other night with Malfoy—Malfoy kissing him, beaming, looking just so fucking happy; Malfoy squeaking under him and sounding so surprised, Harry couldn't regret it.

He didn't regret it, and yet he had lied to both of them.

Metal creaked, an awful sound that Harry later identified as a door. Steps sounded down the hall, and Talon came up to his cell.

“Well, well, well. What have we here. Harry Potter,” said Talon’s guise. “As many times as I’ve told myself it’s true, I just couldn’t believe it.”

If they had Talon’s guise, then they either had access to Level Nine, or Talon’s supply. If they had access to Talon’s supply, they had access to Talon. And if they had access to Talon—

Rabbit—

“I know what you’re thinking,” said Talon’s voice. “You’re thinking I’m not Talon.”

“Mostly I’m thinking this place stinks.” The only thing in the cell was a wooden bucket.

“You’re thinking I’m just Talon’s guise. Just some hair and fingernails, aren’t I?”

“Rather too much fingernails,” Harry said. “Haven't you got a nail file?”

Talon’s guise smiled. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you.”

Harry shrugged. “It would pass the time. I wouldn’t say no to a shovel, either.”

“You’re not getting out of here. We have your wand.” Talon’s smile deepened to a grin. “And we have your handler.”

Sometimes, Harry just could not control himself. He threw himself against the bars. “Where is he?”

“A friend of mine captured him. Trust me, Rabbit is no longer a threat.”

“If you hurt one hair—”

“I'm surprised at you.” Talon pursed his lips. “You're such a player, I never thought you cared. Does someone have a little crush?”

“The second I get out of here, I’m going to kill you.”

“Out of Blackbird, I'd believe it.” Talon shrugged. “But Harry Potter isn’t a murderer.”

“I'm Blackbird. In case you're too dense to figure that out.”

“Well, hello. I'm Talon. Just think, all that time when we were working together, and I so easily could have rid the world of the Boy Who Lives.”

“That wasn't you,” Harry said.

Talon just raised his brows. “Why? Because we got on so well together?”

“Talon never would have hurt anyone.”

“Sometimes I wonder whether people change,” Talon said. “Or whether they just stay the same, and we all learn more about everyone as we go.” He paused. “Muggles killed my sister, you know. With one of their automobile contraptions.”

Harry thought of Dumbledore, and of Snape, then shut a door in his mind. “If you've hurt Rabbit, I will kill you.”

“Perhaps you will. He told me you had changed.”

“Who?” Harry said, a thread of doubt winding in him.

“You’ll see,” said Talon. “Meanwhile, did you never wonder about your previous handler’s secret identity? I always wondered about yours—until my new friend told me all about you.”

Harry scowled. He didn’t think Talon was referring to the fact that his guise had worn off. “What are you talking about?”

“Oh, yes. I knew your true form, Blackbird. You know how these things are; I showed him mine; he showed me yours . . . but this isn’t fair. Let me slip into something a little more comfortable, shall I?” Talon pointed his wand. “Specialis Revelo.”

Where Talon had stood, Petra Kozić stood in his place.

“You’re not Talon,” Harry said.

Talon raised a brow. “You think I didn’t know you, in that bar in Sisak. I know all your tricks.” She batted her dark lashes, and Harry felt sick to his stomach. “Do you think a hardened criminal like me lets just anyone put tracking charms on her thigh?”

“You led us on,” Harry said slowly.

“Got it in one. Really, your handler should have known better than to let us get close.” Kozić made a pouty face, her dark lips full and beautiful.

“Why? You could have just killed me.”

Kozić laughed. “Is this the part where the criminal mastermind reveals all her secrets?”

“You were keeping us busy,” Harry said slowly. “You led us on a merry chase in order to keep Level Nine occupied.”

Kozić faked a yawn. “You're so very clever.”

“Why aren’t you still leading us on?”

“Like a dog with a bone, you are. You were always so tenacious.” Kozić laughed again. “Why, my pretty pet—your little Rabbit got in the way. He started wiggling that bony little nose of his into our business, and then he told me all about it. He thought I was Talon, of course.”

Harry wanted to slam up against the bars again. He still wasn’t convinced that Kozić had been Talon all along. Talon could have been any agent, and Kozić could have stolen his guise at any time. But if she had stolen it, she had stolen it from a real agent. That meant that Kozić might have access to Level Nine, and

all of their secrets.

Harry didn't care. He just cared about taking her down, her rigged wands with her, and getting Rabbit out of here.

"Who's your associate, then?" Harry finally asked, since Kozić appeared to be in a mood for talking. "Morchenko?"

"Him?" Kozić laughed. "He's brilliant. A genius, really—but not truly devoted to the cause. Yurik Morchenko could hardly be called a Death Eater."

"There aren't Death Eaters any more."

Kozić sighed. "Yes, you're right, and more's the pity. But we're starting something new. How about . . . oh, I don't know. Let's pick a Muggle movie. Your Department seems to like that."

"Terrorists," Harry said.

"We prefer the term wand proliferators." Kozić put her dark hair over her shoulder with her manicured hand. "It's so much less accusatory."

"So, you want to continue what Voldemort started."

"I think I have more vision than Voldemort." She made a face. "Also, more cash. And, come to think of it, more nose." Kozić was gorgeous: brunette, olive-skinned, dark eyes and red red lips. "It's true, though, that I've got some of what he had."

Metal creaked again, the sound of the door, and Harry felt a ray of hope. Rabbit wouldn't give up on him.

But Kozić smiled, turning toward the door. “Here’s my little Death Eater now! You see,” she said, turning back to Harry. “Just like the Dark Lord, I have a Malfoy.”

In walked Draco Malfoy.

Harry began to say his name, but could not finish, shock closing his throat.

Malfoy didn’t look right in this light. His pale skin gleamed sickly under the prison lights, and his pristine, almost shiny robes looked as though they would be soon stained by grime. He had a ghostly smile on his face. “Well, Harry,” he said. “Here we are.”

“Look at him.” Kozić seemed delighted. “He’s speechless.”

Malfoy tilted his head toward Kozić. “Do you think he’s sad because I fucked him?”

Kozić laughed. “How was he?”

Malfoy shrugged, a fluid, pretty movement across his shimmering shoulders. “A nice piece of arse. Why?” He smiled down at Kozić. “Do you want some?”

“Of Harry Potter?” Kozić laughed again. “I’m afraid I can never sacrifice as much for the cause as you do.”

Malfoy shrugged again. “It wasn’t that difficult. He’s really quite a slut, once you get to know him. Gives it up so sweetly.”

“I’m not surprised.” Kozić sighed. “Blackbird was practically a whore for it.”

Malfoy pursed his lips, and was silent.

Harry desperately tried to read something, anything into his expression.

“These Muggle-lovers have no morals,” Kozić went on. “Do you know, I think he’s a little attached to his handler?”

Malfoy pouted, and Harry had seen him pout in just that way across from him, over chess, beside him, as they fed each other breakfast, inside of him, as Malfoy fucked him. “But Harry,” Malfoy said. “I thought I was the only one?”

Tell me I’m the only one, Malfoy used to say sometimes, with Harry balls deep inside him. Tell me I’m the only one.

“You aren't Draco Malfoy,” he said, in belated realization. His voice was dull; his tongue felt thick, because of course it was Malfoy. He didn’t know why it wouldn’t be.

“He has a problem of thinking everyone is Polyjuiced,” Kozić said.

“Poor Potter.” Malfoy smirked. “Did you want to be boyfriends?”

Even though it wasn’t Malfoy—of course it wasn't Malfoy—it hurt, and he wanted to lash out. “You’re wrong if you think I ever gave a fuck about you.”

“I have to correct myself,” Kozić said, laughing. “The poor boy sounds like he has an attachment to everyone.”

“Of course he would,” Malfoy said. “I’m very charming.”

“Oh, no,” Kozić said, shaking her head. “You know, when he was my agent, he was an awful slag. Flirted to get any bit of intel he needed.”

“I was never your agent,” Harry said.

Kozić looked up at Malfoy, dark eyes dancing. “How much do you think we could get for him?”

Malfoy laughed, shaking his head at Kozić, just as if she were an incorrigible little sprite. “Arse like that, we could get a million.”

Now it was Kozić who pouted. “I don’t think his arse is so very attractive.”

“No,” Malfoy agreed. “He’s horribly scarred. But that’s exactly it: it’s Harry Potter’s arse. People would pay anything, just for a piece of it.”

Kozić laughed. “I suppose,” she said. “Shall we visit our new bunny?”

Malfoy offered her his arm.

*

It was his forty-forth job with Rabbit, but Rabbit wasn't with him any more. Harry sat in his cell, alone.

There was very little sound, besides the occasional dripping of water somewhere down the hall. The view through the bars was only of the opposite wall, stone. There were no visible windows along the corridor, though Harry could see sconces for a while, lit with cool blue elf fire. They did not shed enough light to see either end of the hall, and he could not put his head out between the bars far enough to see

whether there were cells beside him.

At any rate, Harry was done exploring the cell. For the time being, he was sitting on the floor, trying not to think of Draco Malfoy.

Malfoy was . . . no one. He did nothing except frolic about with Quidditch stars and get his picture taken. While Harry had never thought of that as a career, he had thought that was what Malfoy did all day. Every other waking moment, he spent with Harry.

Harry thought of Malfoy playing chess, Malfoy smiling distantly as he stroked Harry's hair. He thought of Malfoy in his t-shirts, Malfoy's tongue between his teeth as he'd patiently worked Walburga off the wall, ignoring all her insults as to his perversion. He thought of Malfoy slicking him up, earnestly and with gentle, loving fingers; he thought of the way Malfoy spoke of his father. For some reason, he thought of Malfoy at the pub, flirting with the waitress, and realized he should have taken Malfoy out to dinner. He should have danced with him in public; he should have told him he loved him, some time when they weren't just fucking.

Harry tried to think of how or why Malfoy might have used him, how he possibly could have learned that he was Blackbird, and told Kozić. Harry was very careful about work and guise. There was very little that Malfoy could have found in Grimmauld Place, or from anything that Harry said. Even if Malfoy had followed him—which he had, at first, Harry recalled—he would have to had lost the tracking charm as soon as Harry Apparated overseas—no tracking charms lasted across water. If Malfoy had been sleeping with him just to get intel about Blackbird and the Department, then he must have got very little.

Kozić had claimed that Malfoy had told her he was Harry, but if she had known, it seemed strange that Kozić would have come at him while he was on a job. She would have had much more luck coming at him as Harry—in their true forms, they were more vulnerable, which was a big reason Unspeakables used guises in the first place. Even photographers had been able to get at Harry, as much as he tried to avoid them.

Therefore, even if Malfoy had somehow known who he was, the information that Blackbird was actually Harry Potter hadn't benefited anyone. It might now, if they decided to ransom him, but that was beside the point. If Malfoy really was Malfoy, and knew that Harry was Blackbird, and Kozić really was Talon, they had decided not to act on Malfoy’s inside knowledge.

All around, it hardly seemed likely. Malfoy was not a criminal. Not this kind of criminal. This couldn't really be him.

Yet, if it wasn't, Harry didn't know who it was, or why they had chosen to Polyjuice themselves as Malfoy. The only reasonable explanation was that it was someone posing as Malfoy, in order to make Kozić believe they were on her side. Considering the way Kozić felt about Voldemort and Death Eaters, she obviously viewed former Death Eaters as assets. Even though Malfoy didn't have the Mark, his entire family was suspect; Kozić had said it herself: Voldemort had had Malfoys, and she had Malfoys too.

Whoever was posing as Malfoy, they wanted Kozić to trust them. It could be either someone who believed in Kozić's cause, Harry supposed, someone who wanted to quickly make his way to the inner circle. Or, it could be someone who wanted to quickly make his way to the inner circle in order to take it down from within.

Rabbit had been away on a difficult assignment for the last two months.

No wonder Rabbit had been so upset about Harry sleeping with Malfoy. If Rabbit had had to pose as Malfoy for so long, and Harry was sleeping with the real Malfoy—

Of course, there was another reason completely why Rabbit could have been hurt.

Harry had said that Malfoy meant nothing to him.

As soon as Harry thought of that, his mind went completely blank.

He couldn't even think about it, it was that crazy, and then the metal door creaked, and someone was coming into the hall.

“Harry Potter,” Malfoy said. He had on a cruel smile.

“Draco,” Harry said.

“So sorry about all the fucking.” He tilted his head. “Oh, wait. I’m really not. You are such a . . . vigorous shag, shall we say. And that cunt of yours. It’s magnificent.”

“Wish I could say the same,” Harry said, and yawned. If this was really Rabbit, he was saying it for the benefit of whatever listening devices Kozić had installed in the cell. If it was really Malfoy . . . Harry didn’t think about it. He just kept up the act.

Malfoy sneered. “I always hated you.”

“Hm. You gave a pretty good impression of the opposite.”

“I hated you since the moment we met.”

Harry tensed, false ease falling away quickly. It wasn’t something anyone would say if they weren’t Malfoy, because very, very few people had been there when they had met. Harry remembered; it had been on the train.

Malfoy had mentioned it at the pub—after the Ministry gala, when he had tracked Harry down and inexplicably sat down at the table with him.

If I survive, you buy me a pint.

Harry closed his eyes. This was too confusing.

He hadn't remembered exactly what had been said by Malfoy on the train that day, but Malfoy so obviously had.

"Remind me." Harry's voice was a croak.

Malfoy smirked. "I said I would introduce you to the right sort of people. Remember now?"

Harry did remember. There was a roaring in his ears.

"You should have listened to me. I showed you, didn't I? At the end of fourth year, and the Dark Lord had returned. I knew then that you would lose. Maybe not to the Dark Lord, but to me. Just like Diggory."

Harry closed his eyes. Malfoy had been that boy on the train, all those years ago. He had been the man in the pub. And he was the man before him now. Harry thought he might sick up.

"Don't look so broken up about it," Malfoy said.

Harry couldn't feel his limbs.

"You should have known better." A faint smile curved Malfoy's lips, but it was not a different smile than all his others: it was one that Harry had kissed. Harry realized now that it was also one that he had loved. "After all, your mother was just a Mudblood."

Harry lurched against the bars, and grinning, Malfoy took a step back. "Tell me, Potter. Do you really think you can escape?"

"Yes," said Harry. "First, I'm going to grab your wand. Then I'm going to stun you. That's . . . about as far

as I’ve got.”

“Smashing plan.” Malfoy's nose twitched. Sweeping his robes along with him, he walked away.

The world lurched crazily and crashed, all the way down around Harry's ears.

*

The ground was cold, but Harry had lost the energy to stand. He thought he had been here a day, maybe two. They had brought water twice.

He had barely been able to drink it, as thirsty as he was. He could not stop thinking about it.

Rabbit was Malfoy was Rabbit.

Of course he was.

Harry thunked his head back against the stones. He had asked Rabbit to the gala. Malfoy had come. He had asked Rabbit for a pint; Malfoy had come. He had even asked Rabbit to fly with him, and Malfoy had tried. Of course Rabbit was Malfoy; of course he was—but it was so unbelievably stupid, falling for the same person twice.

Despite being locked in a cold dungeon, for several hours of his imprisonment it was actually more upsetting that Harry didn’t know whether Malfoy liked tea or not than it was worrying that he might not actually escape. Rabbit also probably didn’t really like the Prophet. The nose-wiggle was Rabbit’s too—of course it was, because Malfoy had never done that in school. He must have invented it to go with his code name and his guise.

But they had the same way of standing: hip jutting out to the side. On Malfoy, it looked just like sex. On Rabbit, it looked carefree. They were both clever; Harry should have seen that too. And they both made

him crazy—with lust, with love, other emotions he couldn’t even name. He should have known.

He should have known, with the way Malfoy responded to his touch, as though he spent weeks at a time longing for it. Rabbit had been so insistent that what they had wasn't real. He had never shown Harry that he cared, never given him a bit of encouragement. Now Harry knew that Rabbit had returned his feelings as Malfoy—as Malfoy, for whom Harry hadn't had feelings at all.

Harry had used him. He'd fucked him like he didn't care, except for those last few times, and then he had told Rabbit it had meant nothing. He'd never even given Malfoy a chance.

Perhaps Malfoy hadn't given him a chance, either. He had lied, even though he hadn't been able to tell Harry the truth. In some ways, he had used Harry in a similar way to how Harry had used him. Malfoy had been a bastard, actually—wanting Harry to talk about who had given him the stitches, wanting Harry to tell him he was the only one he thought of when they fucked, when he must have known Harry was thinking of Rabbit. Malfoy must have known, and yet, he had wanted Harry all to himself. Which was strange, considering that Rabbit was himself.

Still, Harry understood the emotion behind it. Malfoy had wanted Harry to feel for him what he felt for Rabbit. He had wanted Harry to understand that they were the same person. There were two sides to them both, Rabbit and Malfoy, and each was deeper and more dimensional than Harry had given them credit for.

Rabbit was the one that Harry had fallen for; they were so alike in their determination, their goals, their way of life. Harry had felt at home with him in ways he had never felt with anyone before. And yet, he could never have been at home with Rabbit; it had been Malfoy, who had slowly crept into his life. It had been Malfoy who slept in his bed, made love to him, drank his coffee; it had been Malfoy who had laid himself bare, and asked to be loved. Malfoy, for all his lies, had been attempting to be honest, in his own way. He had wanted Harry to see him for who he really was.

And Harry had been blind. At the gala, at the pub, Harry had shut him out. In the end, Malfoy must have decided that sex was the only way he could have Harry—and he had taken what he could get.

Harry put his head on his knees and wrapped his arms around himself, seeing image after image behind

his eyes. Malfoy, telling him he loved him. Malfoy, telling him he had dreamed of him. Malfoy, spidering his hands along Harry's stitches, jealous of his other self—Malfoy making fun of Harry's Patronus: loving it and hating it at the same time.

Malfoy had been right. Harry hadn't known him.

He had never seen how utterly and completely Malfoy loved him, or how desperately Malfoy longed to be loved by him.

Quite suddenly, Harry understood why Rabbit had not been there, when Harry had used his Invisibility Cloak on his twenty-first mission with Rabbit. That was the mission Rabbit had figured out that Blackbird was Harry Potter. For Rabbit—Malfoy—it must have been a rather upsetting realization. He had left the room when Harry had Apparated back, so that Harry wouldn't see the distress on Rabbit's face. Rabbit had only come back into the room after taking some time to compose himself.

Harry understood needing fifteen minutes or so. In fact, he was sort of glad he had thirty hours in a cell, as cold and uncomfortable as it was. Trying to fathom the fact that the man he had been working with for the past half of a year and the man he had been fucking for the past several months were actually the same person was going to take some time.

He had been so eager to look underneath the surface of Rabbit, and it hadn't just been the guise. He had even marvelled at the fact that Rabbit's appearance had so utterly ceased to matter, thinking that it meant he was learning something, about judging by first impressions. And yet, he had made so very little effort to look deeper into Malfoy. He had thought he knew everything that was there. As it turned out, Malfoy hid himself just as truly as any guise. The freckles should have been a clue.

Luna probably had known. She was very good with creatures who weren't real, and she had probably seen another side of Malfoy when she was a prisoner at the Manor. Harry had just never bothered to look.

He remembered when Malfoy had shown up at Grimmauld Place, soaked with rain. I can't do this alone, he had said. He had been working under cover with Kozić three weeks by then, and as Malfoy, he had walked out on Harry. Harry understood why he had—it could not have been easy, feeling like nothing,

when Rabbit had meant so much to Harry. And yet, Malfoy had not been able to stay away. Harry still remembered the taste of him in the shower, the warmth of his body, the beat of his heart.

The only comfort in any of it was that Harry could look now, because he had no doubt that they were going to get out of this. There wasn't any question.

He was Harry Potter, and he had Draco Malfoy on his side.

And Harry had learned this about Draco Malfoy: Rabbit never quit.

*

Later, Harry learned that all of the rigged wands were steeped in potions.

Malfoy had joined the Department nearly six years ago, right around the time he began appearing in Witch Weekly. The cover had been arranged because Malfoy had always intended to be a deep cover operative, and—unlike most agents—would use his own identity in order to work with the criminal element. Having a very visible personal life made him a less likely suspect as a double agent.

When Anthony Bayliff, the distributor of the rigged wands in the UK, had been arrested, Malfoy's cover had almost been blown. He'd been taken out of cover completely, chosen a new guise, and been assigned to work as Harry's handler in order to take the suspicion off of him for a while. As Harry collected information, Malfoy had gradually worked his way back into Kozić's inner circle.

He had made his one and only mistake when he had accepted Harry's invitation to the gala. He hadn't been able to help himself, he told Harry later. He already wanted Blackbird, and finding out that he was Harry had made Malfoy think he . . . stood a chance.

When Harry rebuffed him at the gala, Malfoy said that he had convinced himself he shouldn't try again, and yet—he had been unable to stay away. When at last he realized he couldn't be friends with Harry, he had done exactly what Harry had suspected—he had done whatever he could to be in Harry's life. He'd

offered himself up for sex, and Harry had gladly accepted the offer.

In this way, Rabbit had put everything at risk. Draco Malfoy, the man that Kozić was learning to trust again, was supposed to be a dissatisfied former Death Eater who was disappointed by Voldemort's loss. Though it was easy enough to claim that he was fucking Harry Potter in order to bring Harry down, there would be hell to pay if Kozić every found out Harry was an agent.

Which, of course, she eventually did.

When Blackbird was captured, Malfoy adjusted Kozić's memories, making her think that Malfoy had long ago entrusted her with the secret that Harry was an agent for Level Nine. Soon enough, she would realize that there was something wrong with that, but by then, Malfoy planned to have them out.

Regarding the wands trade, Malfoy had learned that Yurik Morchenko supplied the potions, which were concoctions of his own design. They filled whoever touched them with discontent, and Morchenko had refined the potions so that the discontent was generally aimed at Muggles. Kozić wove the Unforgiveables right into the grain of the wood of the wands, complete with a signal to only fire at a specific time.

When unsuspecting witches and wizards bought their wands from wizarding suppliers in all of Europe and East Asia, the wands worked fine—for a while. It wasn't until the witch or wizard pointed their wands at Muggles, either to cast an Obliviate or some other simple spell, that the wands did their magic, as it were. Their ill-feelings towards Muggles—generated by the potions—triggered the wands to release their curses, and Muggles fell down dead.

Malfoy had discovered most of this by the time that Harry was captured. He had also known that Kozić had someone on the inside, but he hadn't known that Kozić was Talon. Malfoy had sent Harry to the base fully expecting that Harry would collect evidence and return, but he had told Talon about the plan. Talon had been ready.

When Malfoy had realized his mistake, he had come to Kozić claiming that he had abducted Harry's handler at the same time as she had abducted Harry. It had been the only way he could think of to save Harry, but there was a great deal of risk involved. Talon had not known Rabbit's location, and there

wasn’t really much reason Draco Malfoy would.

Also, Malfoy didn’t have Rabbit’s body to show for it—though he had plenty of phials of Polyjuice, in order to maintain his guise. When he had arrived at the manor, he had forced Polyjuice on one of the guards, spelling him unconscious and then bringing him down to Kozić. After that, he had to make sure that the Polyjuiced guard stayed unconscious whenever Kozić questioned him. Soon enough, though, she would expect the Polyjuice to wear off. When she found out her second prisoner was her own guard, the web of deceit would begin to tear.

The next thing Malfoy had to work out was how to spring Harry. The only thing he could do was convince Kozić that Harry Potter need to be taken to a more secure location. It would involve manoeuvring, considering the anti-Apparition wards woven all around the place, and Malfoy hoped that it would give him the confusion he needed to get the upper hand.

He would need Harry’s help to keep it. He could only hope that Harry understood.

Of course, Harry didn’t find any of this out until after he escaped, which he did the next time that Kozić came for him.

She had her wand pointed at Harry, Malfoy flanking her. Malfoy wore a sneer, and Harry glared at him the best he could.

God, Rabbit, his clever voice, his steel-hard determination—everything about him that Harry so loved, and it was all in Draco Malfoy, whom Harry had bent over kitchen tables and fucked against stone walls. It was Draco Malfoy who clutched him wildly and told him he loved him, and begged him not to ever, ever leave.

It was very hard to keep the glare, but Harry was a trained agent, and he did it.

“Open the door,” said Kozić.

Malfoy opened the door with his wand.

“Imperio,” said Kozić. “Come along now, Saviour.”

Kozić, apparently, had failed her very basic history, because Harry had been able to shake off Imperius since he was in school. Sometimes these evil villains just never learned. Harry, however, let the spell compel him for the moment, and followed Kozić down the hall.

Only once, he turned his head toward Malfoy.

For a moment, he saw a flicker in Malfoy’s eyes, and then nothing but the mask of disgust.

Malfoy was much better at this than Harry was. Then again, he had been doing it for longer.

It never occurred to Harry not to trust him completely.

They walked down the hall to the metal door, which creaked just as Harry had heard. The dungeon was a tunnel of mazes, and Kozić led them, occasionally saying things like, “This way, Boy Who Lived,” or “That way, Chosen One.”

She wasn’t a very happy lady, Harry thought. He hoped she enjoyed Azkaban. And yet, if she had been Talon, he had liked her quite a lot. Wondering whether what she had said about her sister had been true, Harry remembered what Malfoy had said, about spies.

You think they’re secretly someone else. You think there’s another man underneath. But that’s not how it works, not exactly. They’re also still the person they pretend to be. They’re that too.

Even if Talon had always been Kozić all along, she was still Talon, too. He had still liked her. A part of him still must. Maybe she didn't deserve Azkaban at all; maybe someone like her should be in St Mungo's. Harry didn't know; he only knew that it meant that Malfoy had been Rabbit all along, and Rabbit had been Malfoy. They weren't two different people; he had always loved them both.

If only he had been less blinded by it.

"Move it," Malfoy said, wand jammed into Harry's back.

"Is that your wand?" Harry began.

"Please." Malfoy snorted. "We're not at Hogwarts."

"That we're not," Harry said, and smiled.

He could smile. Kozić wasn't looking at him.

"Tell me when we get there, why don't you," Harry said.

"No," Malfoy said. The corridor was opening into a much larger room. It was filled with cauldrons, steaming kettles, beakers and phials full of bubbling things.

"Why not?"

"Because," Malfoy said. "We're never going back. Blackbird, now."

Harry never even hesitated. He dropped to the ground, feeling the Imperius Curse tug against him like

sluggish jelly.

“Up!” Kozić screamed. “Up!” She pointed her wand, shouting, “Imperio!”

“The beaker,” Malfoy said. “On your left!”

Rolling, Harry reached his hand up to the table and pulled down the beaker, then threw the bubbly green goop in it at Kozić’s face. Across the room, Harry could hear Malfoy shouting hexes at other wizards, who had come swarming the second they had heard Kozić scream.

The goop landed on Kozić’s face, but parts of it also clattered to the floor. Three parts, in fact.

They were wands.

Harry moved to pick one up, Imperius bearing down harder on him now.

Of course, they were probably the cursed wands, but there were no Muggles in the room, and Harry had no alternatives.

“Cruciatus!” Kozić said, and pain burst between Harry’s temples.

He still couldn’t fight off Cruciatus, and Harry’s stint in the cell had made him weak. He heard himself cry out.

Amidst the sound of his own cries, Harry could hear Malfoy still shouting curses. It gave him comfort, knowing that Malfoy still hadn’t gone down, and eventually, it gave him strength to fight. Then he heard a strange curse in the midst of everything: “Non Dicatus!”

Then Malfoy's voice was in his ear. It was different that Rabbit's, and yet Harry had heard it dozens of times.

You're the only one. The only one, Harry.

Anything. I'll do anything for you.

I love you.

Harry shook his head, and heard instead the words that Malfoy was actually saying, Blackbird, get up. That's a direct order!

Harry got up, and said, "Protego." The wand was different than his usual one, and he was weaker, too. But it was enough to stop the Cruciatus, for the time being.

He sent some objects flying at Kozić to keep her busy, and heard Malfoy's voice again in his ear. Good, he said. Oppugno! "Oppugno!" Harry heard across the room.

It seemed strange, that in all his time with Rabbit, Harry had never been on a mission with him, both of them in the field.

Harry supposed they had a long, long future to look forward to. "Expelliarmus!" he told Kozić, but she had cast a shield.

They threw curses and hexes back and forth, and Harry circled the room until he got within casting distance of Malfoy. "Non Dicatus," he said, and cast, when he had a moment. He didn't like not being on even terms, if there was any opportunity to help Malfoy at all.

Kozić threw another curse his way, and Harry ducked, recasting his shield. “On your left,” he whispered to Malfoy.

“Incendio!” Malfoy said, whirling to his left. Incendio! Thank you, Malfoy said, more quietly in Harry’s ear.

“Now we get each other in stereo,” Harry said.

What’s that?

Harry had to laugh, because Rabbit always had been bad at Muggle things, too. Pointing his wand at a beaker full of more slime, he said, “Reducto!” and ducked as it exploded.

Wow, said Malfoy. I hear you twice.

“I love you,” Harry said suddenly, unable to stop.

“Expelliarmus!” Expelliarmus! the Dictus echoed in Harry's ear. I know. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.

“It’s okay,” Harry said. “Retexticorpus! I can see why you didn’t.” The curse bounced of Kozić’s shield. She had obviously added the spell Malfoy had invented to her repertoire of defences.

Malfoy was saying in Harry’s ear: I was thinking— “Protego!” Protego! —we could be boyfriends.

“Why, Malfoy.” Harry laughed. “Reducto! Oppugno! I barely know you.”

You know me, Malfoy said. “Expecto Patronum!” Expecto Patronum!

Malfoy’s Patronus was not very big, but it was still one of the more beautiful things Harry had ever seen.

A bird was pecking at Kozić’s hair. Harry felt certain that had it not been the silver colour of a Patronus, it would have been bright black.

Think of Augmenti, Malfoy said in his ear, after they both dodged more hexes and several Unforgiveables. Combine it with Petrificus Totalis. But flick up instead of down, and add a ‘g’ shape at the end. Say, Lacus Lapideus.

“I don’t know,” Harry said, lightly teasing. “A friend once told me I should never cast spells someone I don’t know gives me.”

Trust me, Malfoy said, and Harry did.

In front of him, the basement became a lake of stone. Kozić and the wizards attacking Malfoy began to sink, stone crawling up their legs, curling up their waists: soon their hearts would be stone; the world would be stone.

Run, Malfoy said.

They ran.

*

On Harry’s fiftieth job with Malfoy, Rabbit no longer existed.

They had stopped the stone lake of the Lacus Lapideus spell from rising in time, and Kozić, Morchenko,

Claret, and most of her other associates had been arrested. Still, someone could have escaped the compound. Mafloy picked a new guise, just in case.

Harry picked a new one too. He named it Talon.

He could not find any evidence that Kozić had been anyone but Talon. Others in the Department confirmed that Talon had been Kozić all along, but then, they did not speak of these things, and Harry never forgot what Malfoy had said about spies. Talon had been his friend, even if she had been lying all along.

She had changed; that much was obvious. Whether what she had said about her sister was true or not, she had become bitter and spiteful, full of hatred. It still did not change who she had been, or what she could be. Harry had to believe that there had been moments between them that were real—for his own sake, if not for hers.

And then there was Malfoy, who proved himself to be real over, and over, and over again.

“Yes,” Harry said, “but why Kneazle calendar girls?”

“I have an incredible body, Potter,” Malfoy said, stretching in the bed beside him. They were in yet another motel, the fiftieth job over and done with. “I can’t help it if you don’t notice.”

The body was a woman’s body; his guise was a middle aged, grey-haired woman who went by the code name Moose.

Sometimes Malfoy thought he was very funny.

“It’s not funny,” Malfoy said. “It’s hot.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Of course it’s hot,” he said, kissing Moose’s throat. “It’s you.”

Malfoy pouted. “Seriously, Harry. Sometimes I feel like you don’t appreciate the things I wear.”

Harry kissed Moose’s collarbones, his breasts. “I love the things you wear. I love you better.”

Malfoy made a harrumphing sound. “And yet, you don’t like my fashion ads.”

“I like them,” Harry said. “Sometimes I beat off to them.”

Sitting up abruptly, Malfoy scowled. “Why would you—”

Harry laughed. “Are you jealous?”

Malfoy’s guise was beginning to wear off, and Malfoy was letting it. They no longer kept their guises on during jobs when they were alone together—even if it was against regulation. Level Nine had not been able to reprimand them. Firstly, because they didn’t know, and secondly, because Harry and Malfoy had threatened to walk out if they were not assigned together. These days, Harry was Malfoy’s handler.

“No.” Malfoy looked uncomfortable, and not because his breasts were slowly growing inward. “I said I was sorry about all that.”

“You did,” Harry said. “I said I’m sorry too.”

“Still, it was a shitty thing I did.”

Harry sighed. They had already been through this many times. “You didn’t have any other option; you

had to keep it secret. It was your job. Besides. I was a shite, too."

Malfoy tilted his head, gray hair phasing into blond. "You were, rather."

"Ponce," Harry said, and hit him with a pillow.

Malfoy hit him back. The tussled until Malfoy was completely Malfoy, and Harry was straddled over him, looking down at his beloved face. Without any charms, he still looked gorgeous, and very much like Malfoy. Still, Harry could see Rabbit there: the reasons Malfoy had selected Rabbit as his guise. Harry kissed him slowly.

Malfoy moaned, arching into him.

"You know I don't care what you do, right?" Harry said suddenly, pulling away. "With your life, I mean."

"You might care if I joined a convent." Malfoy teased him with little circles of his hips. "What do you think? Do you think I can be a good girl?"

"I'm serious, Malfoy."

"I like it when you say my name." Malfoy wiggled his hips some more.

"Draco," Harry said, and held him down.

"God, that's even better. Can I call you sugar-lips?"

"Malfoy—"

Malfoy's hips twisted in Harry's hands. "Come on, Potter. Your Patronus is a bunny rabbit."

"Malfoy," Harry said, and kissed him. "I wouldn't care if you were just a playboy."

"I'll have you know that the cause of Kneazles is very important!"

Harry kissed his jaw, his throat. "You're not a disappointment."

Malfoy turned his head away. "Okay, can we have sex now?"

"I just wanted you to know," Harry said, and kissed him again.

Malfoy lay there for a moment as Harry's mouth moved over him. Then his hands were in Harry's hair; then they were touching Harry's face. At last, he pulled Harry's head away. "I," he said. "Thank you. Thank you, Harry."

"I'm so proud of you," Harry said, and kissed his brow, his cheek, his nose.

"Seriously." Malfoy looked away. "Can we cut back on all the foreplay, sugar-lips? I really just want you to ream my arse until I'm so full of come I can't even walk without dripping."

"I love the way you sweet talk me," Harry said, still kissing him.

"Come on and fuck me," Malfoy said. "I'll be such a perfect slut for you; you have no idea."

"I've got some idea." Harry got his fingers wet with a lubrication spell. "But I don't know. "You haven't

got tits any more; I don’t know if I’m interested.”

“I knew you only wanted me for my tits,” Malfoy said, idly stroking Harry's hair.

Harry slowly pushed two fingers into Malfoy’s hole. “Merlin,” Malfoy said, breathless. “It still makes me crazy. I get crazy desperate for it; I can't think of anything else.”

“Hush,” Harry told him, and kissed him again, twisting his fingers.

“I would have given you anything.” Malfoy pressed back against Harry's fingers.

“I know,” Harry said, pushing another finger inside, twisting, stretching.

“I didn't care if you gave me anything back. I wanted you so much that I didn’t care.”

“I know,” Harry said. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.” Harry began to work a fourth finger in, because Malfoy liked the feeling of being wet and full. Malfoy said, “I would have done anything. You could have used me just like a whore, and I would have liked it.”

Harry had to look away a moment; it was the look on Malfoy’s face. Rabbit—and now Moose—never held much emotion in their expressions. Malfoy often revealed complete and utter devotion. “I sort of did use you,” Harry said.

“I wanted you to use me.” Malfoy arched, pet his hair. “I knew that you loved Rabbit. I wanted to give you—what he couldn’t.” Harry kissed him again, while Malfoy pulled out Harry’s fingers, tugging on his cock. Harry had been hard since Moose took off his clothes. “Do you ever—” Malfoy began—“it’s okay

Harry. Do you ever still just want him?”

Harry put his hand on Malfoy’s wrist, squeezing until Malfoy let go of his cock. “Who?”

“It’s okay, Harry,” Malfoy said again.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean . . .” Malfoy licked his lips. “I mean, he looked different than me. And his nose could wiggle. Do you ever—”

Lightly, Harry nipped his nose.

“I know how you feel about me,” Malfoy said. “I just meant, you might like to be with me, in that—in that body. Do you want to?”

Harry kissed his nose again. “No.”

“Why not?”

Sighing, Harry slipped his fingers out of Malfoy, and rolled over beside him. “Jesus, Malfoy. Is Rabbit jealous of you, now?”

Malfoy rolled over as well, leaning over Harry. “No. I promise I’m not. I just . . . want to know.”

“Malfoy.” Harry kissed him. He got caught up in kissing him, the thrust of Malfoy’s tongue, the warmth of Malfoy’s mouth, until Malfoy was straddling him and Harry was gasping for air. “I love you,” he said,

pulling Malfoy up a little. “I love you in any incarnation. I love your body, whatever it looks like. I admit, some bodies are more attractive to me than others.” Angling his head, he kissed Malfoy again. “But the sad fact of it is, I’m just going to want you no matter what. And most of all I’m going to want you as you really are.”

Now Malfoy sighed. “You always did like the freckles.”

“Oh, fuck yes,” Harry said, partly because Malfoy was positioning himself, sliding down on his cock, and partly because he really did like freckles. “Yes, Malfoy. Yes.”

Malfoy sank down, angling his hips, then bucking slowly up. His hand found the scar on Harry’s chest, where the Horcrux had been. “I love you, too,” he said.

“There is one thing,” Harry said, as Malfoy sank down slowly, and his cock was encased with tight wet heat.

“Potter, you fill me up.” Malfoy had his head thrown back. He was on his knees, sinking down again on Harry cock, so that Harry could watch the hard red flesh disappear into Malfoy’s body. Malfoy had his hand around own cock, stroking down as he came off, then up as he came back down. “I could ride you all night long.”

“There’s one thing,” Harry said, gasping.

“You always did wreck me.” Malfoy began to ride him hard.

“It’s not that.” Harry gripped Malfoy’s hips tight enough to bruise. It didn’t matter. On tomorrow’s mission, he would be Moose. “Only one thing that's disappointing. It’s that you don’t like tea.”

Malfoy laughed.

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