Dukedom Large Enough by Alysian_Fields

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Chapter 1: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer: I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'You'd Entertain the Universe...' by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

My Dear Draco,

Thank you so much for your last letter. You have no idea how much our correspondences cheer me up these days. I was especially amused by the somewhat acerbic account of your encounters with the goblins who sold you those rune charts for the library. Your sarcasm is truly cutting at times – it makes me feel that I must have done something right when raising you. I actually had to perform a Muffliato Charm upon myself at one point because I did not want to disturb anyone with my laughing! I hope that you won't be angry with me for finding amusement in your various tales of hardship. I can't help but think that you intend me to be entertained.

Honestly, my darling, your letter could not have come at a better time. I confess I have been feeling rather low of late. We were honoured with a visit from your Aunt Clementine last week. Well, she considered it to be an honour, at least. I suppose I should be grateful. She has helped us a lot in the past – we would never have got this little cottage without her, and she was the one who found a doctor for your father who wouldn't be biased by the name of Malfoy. Yes, I should be grateful. I am grateful. I do all I can to suppress the urge to inform Clementine that she can take her condescension and her snide remarks and… but I digress. I know that she hates coming here and only does it out of a sense of duty. I wish she wouldn't. She makes her contempt about the way our house is run perfectly clear, but then with only one elderly house-elf left, what could she expect? Ugh, in-laws!

The visit ended rather badly, I'm afraid. She upset your father by bringing up the war and he got very distressed. I had to sedate him and put him to bed. Oh, it makes me so angry! I really do believe that he is starting to improve, but the slightest thing can cause a setback. I'm afraid the whole affair has left me

rather upset, so I was glad to have a bit of a giggle over your letter. You mustn't resent me for it.

I am so glad that you are in higher spirits about this year. I think that this promotion is a wonderful thing for you – do try to enjoy it as much as possible. If I think that you are happy, I feel more at ease. It hasn't been easy, knowing how your father and I have let you down. You will try to be nice to the other staff members, won't you? And don't tyrannise the children too much (I know it will be hard). Forgive my interference, but I hate to think of you cutting yourself off from humanity completely. You never know, you may find someone whose company you enjoy. Now, I can picture you rolling your eyes as you read this, so I shall stop my lecturing. You know I only do it because I love you; nagging is a mother's prerogative. Work hard, make sure you eat properly and write whenever you can. Don't worry about us, we're holding up.

All my love,

Your Mother.

*

Draco wanted to savour the moment. He ran a hand over the thick mahogany door, enjoying the feeling of its smooth, cold surface under his skin. Then, with a small intake of breath, he pushed. The door creaked painfully and resisted his efforts, but he was not to be put off. He made a large enough gap to get through, and then slipped inside. The door fell shut behind him with an ominous boom. Several oil lamps immediately flickered into life and Draco found himself in a huge, high-ceilinged room filled with shelves upon shelves of books. There were so many books, they even lined the walls from floor to ceiling, leaving gaps only for the odd little winding staircases which led to other floors. A long row of large desks, topped with green leather, ran down the centre of the room.

Draco felt the familiar prickling at the back of his neck, and allowed the soft whispers of magic to wash over him. The sensation never disturbed him; it made him feel somehow that he was being accepted, that he was granted knowledge of a great secret. His eyes roamed over the cavernous room, empty apart from himself and the books, and permitted himself a rare smile. Hogwarts library.

Mine.

Draco had come to work at the library three years ago. For three years he had slaved away under the tyrannical eye of Madam Pince. He had borne her insults without a single retort. He had bitten his tongue and resisted the urge to protest when she had granted him only the most menial, boring tasks which were well below his capability. He had tolerated her abysmal filing system and her antiquated and impractical methods. Draco had taught himself patience over the past three years, making it though each day by repeating the mantra that it would pay off in the end.

And now, finally, it had. At the end of last year, Madam Pince had announced her retirement and Draco had been appointed as the new Hogwarts librarian. No longer would he have to be subservient. No longer would he have to put up with other people's inefficiency. No longer would he have to bite back his rage at having to obey people whom he was sure didn't even care about the books. Never again. Finally, he could put into practice all the plans he had made to revolutionalize the way the library was run. At long last, it would be organised according to his standards, and woe betide anyone who got in his way.

Draco took a couple more steps into the room, tingling with barely contained glee. He had to fight the urge to run the length of the library, whooping with joy.

Draco had always gained a certain amount of satisfaction from studying, but he hadn't developed the passion for books he now possessed until he was eighteen, during that first year in France. Draco had not been able to sit his N.E.W.T.s that summer because of the events which had taken place at Hogwarts, and had had to repeat his final year at Beauxbatons. He had been infinitely grateful for the excuse to get away. The atmosphere in the little cottage the Malfoys now inhabited had become increasingly oppressive and, although he had felt bad about leaving his mother, he had thought that if he did not escape for a bit he might go mad.

He had liked Beauxbatons. The name of Malfoy was not as notorious there as it was in England. Therefore, although nobody made any effort to befriend Draco, he had found that if he kept his head down people generally left him alone. He hadn't minded the solitude; he thought it was probably better that way. You couldn't trust other people.

Having so much time to himself, Draco had become a ferocious reader. Through books he could forget his

solitude. Through books he could escape his unhappiness and enter into a whole other world. He would find a secluded corner of the school, or fly his broom up into the Pyrenees, gazing down upon the grand chateau of Beauxbatons Academy, and find an alm or mountain ledge where he could sit with his book of choice.

He had developed a passion for the literature of the great nineteenth-century French wizards, Gautier and Baudelaire, whose works were also known to Muggles. Somewhat surprisingly, to no one more than himself, Draco had also come to love certain Muggle authors. He devoured novels by Henry James and Virginia Woolf, poetry by Donne and Milton, plays by Ibsen and Wilde. He had wondered whether these beloved works of literature would have been available to him at Hogwarts, but Draco would never have dreamed of looking for them back then. He had quickly become obsessed with the acquirement of knowledge. He had begun to study ancient languages and rune charts; he had read books on art and history. It had given him a sense of self-worth. It was a source of pleasure which did not rely on money, or on the kindness of others. And now he could be with them all day every day, and get paid for the pleasure. It was like being employed to receive massages and eat ice cream.

Ah, those books! Each one a tiny universe, each one under his control. At that moment, Draco felt like the most powerful man in the world. He crossed over to the large oak desk, and ran his hand over it covetously. He stepped behind it and sat cautiously in the high-backed chair reserved for him alone, irrationally afraid that someone would tell him to move. It was a new chair and the cost had been taken out of his pay-packet, but Draco didn't mind. He hadn't enjoyed the thought of perching in the considerable dent in the old chair, made by Pince's arse over the many decades she had sat there. No, the new chair was Draco's way of marking his territory, of signifying that the library was now his.

Draco remembered how he had felt upon returning to England, all those years ago. Back then, he had thought he would be lucky to get a job at all, let alone one he would love. Of course, it hadn't been easy. With his distinctive looks and even more distinctive name, no respectable employer would even consider Draco. The only thing making him persevere through one cold rejection after another, was the knowledge that to return to his parents in exile would be so much worse. Nevertheless, he had started to panic. He had almost used up his meagre savings, and if he didn't get a job soon he would have had no choice but to go back to France.

After several fruitless weeks, Draco had resorted to a little light deception. Using his mother's maiden name as his own, he had finally managed to secure a job, albeit as a bank clerk at Gringotts which hardly set his soul on fire. Still, it was a job and he had needed the money. The work was tedious but it was low profile, which was exactly what Draco had wanted. Consigned to a small office in the backrooms, he rarely had to worry about meeting someone he might recognise from the wizarding world. The goblins

didn't seem to care about his past, which had suited him as well. Resigning himself to the belief that he would never get anything better, he had stayed there for almost four years until, one rainy July afternoon, he had seen the advertisement. He had been flicking idly through the Daily Prophet, not paying much attention to what he was doing, when a small notice at the back had caught his eye.

POSITION OPEN: LIBRARY ASSISTANT

Are you a meticulous individual with a sharp eye for detail? Do you have nerves of steel, excellent organisational skills and the ability to be very, very quiet? Most importantly, do you have a passion for books? If so, this could be just the job for you! Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, renowned as an excellent and indefatigable institute of learning, is looking for someone to help run its prestigious and ever-expanding library. Full board and lodging will be provided for the successful applicant, who must be able to start on September 1st. If interested, please send an owl to the Headmistress of Hogwarts, Professor Minerva McGonagall.

Draco had tried to quash the excitement he had felt upon reading the advertisement. He had had a glorious vision of himself back at Hogwarts, surrounded by all those wonderful books. The school was the closest thing to a home he had now. Yes, he had made mistakes there, but he could return now as a man and erase his former identity. Oh, to be able to work with books! He had closed his eyes and felt what it would be like to walk into the wonderful library once more. He had recalled the rich smell of the books, the way it felt to walk between the stacks, looking at the volumes, some of which were centuries old, and knowing that each one could teach him something completely new. To be with them every day!

But it was stupid. Draco had caused so much trouble at that school. He had tried to kill Albus Dumbledore, for Merlin's sake! And he had almost killed two other students in the process, not to mention all his other transgressions. No, they would take one look at his application and throw it away in disgust. Even so…

Draco had been so distracted for the rest of the day that he had miscounted three moneybags, causing his boss, Vladbak, to threaten him with suspension. He had agonized over the job all evening. He had wanted it so badly, and he couldn't stand the thought of the inevitable rejection. Even so, he would never know if he didn't try. Not giving himself time to back out, he had sent off a letter to McGonagall, using his real name, as any pretence would have been pointless with her. Then he had steeled himself for

the disappointment he would feel if she even bothered to reply.

Draco had been astonished to get a letter from the headmistress just two days later, and even more astonished to find her asking him to an interview the following week. What on earth did McGonagall want? Did she just want to satisfy her curiosity about him? It didn't seem like the kind of thing she would do. No; impossible as it seemed, she must be genuine. Draco had approached the day of the interview in a frenzy of excitement and apprehension. If there was a chance, if there really was a chance…

Draco had been very grateful that it was the summer holidays. At least that way he would only have to see a couple of people at the most. Ease himself in gently. He had underestimated how deeply it would affect him to return to Hogwarts. He was glad that he had Apparated earlier than needed because he had spent a good ten minutes standing outside the gates, trying to slow his pulse and control his breathing. The flood of memories had been almost overwhelming. You're not that person any more, he had told himself. You can do things differently this time. He had walked briskly up the long drive, attempting to defy the voice in his head which told him it was all pointless, that he should turn back and not make a fool of himself.

To his great surprise, Headmistress McGonagall had met him at the front doors of the castle. She had surveyed him coolly as he approached, and Draco had felt his already tentative courage slip a further notch.

"Good morning, Mr Malfoy," she had said. "I saw you waiting by the gate from my office window, and thought I would come and meet you." She had given Draco a small smile, which was sincere nonetheless, and motioned him to follow her inside.

McGonagall had looked almost exactly as Draco remembered, except that now her hair was streaked with grey. Draco suspected that she was the type of woman who would always look pretty much the same throughout life. He had followed meekly behind her, desperately trying to think of some small-talk with which to engage her so that she wouldn't think him too much of an idiot. He had never been brilliant at social niceties, and now he was worse than ever. It had suddenly occurred to Draco that the last time he remembered seeing the professor, she had been leading a troupe of stampeding desks, and had had to bite back a fit of nervous laughter.

He had expected the headmistress to lead him to her office, but instead they had ended up in the library.

He had been infinitely grateful for this. As soon as the heavy doors closed behind him, he had felt himself relax a little. Home. Row upon row of books. Draco had been able to sense their power, had felt them calling to him, almost. He was so close. How wonderful it would be to work there every day! McGonagall had led him into the small office behind the librarian's desk, somewhere Draco had never been before. The office had smelt strongly of mothballs and lavender oil, and Draco had sat down in a wooden chair, politely leaving the comfier one for the headmistress.

He had smiled at her nervously and clasped his hands over his knees. "I wasn't expecting to be interviewed by the headmistress," he had said, then immediately cursed his inanity.

McGonagall, however, had not seemed to think it a stupid thing to say. She had pursed her lips. "Nor would you be, under normal circumstances. The task of finding assistants would normally fall to the acting librarian. However, I have had to take matters into my own hands. We held some interviews earlier this summer, but I'm afraid that Madam Pince's methods of interrogation ended up frightening all the hopefuls away. One was even driven into hysterics and had to be given several Soothing Draughts before he could return home. I decided that it would be easier on the whole if I relieved our esteemed librarian of the responsibility. However, whomever I deem suitable will have to work for the time being alongside Madam Pince – hence the call in the advertisement for applicants with nerves of steel."

Draco had raised an eyebrow. "And you think I have the constitution to cope with it?"

She had viewed him evenly. "I imagine you've survived worse."

Draco had flushed and looked away. He hadn't wanted to talk about any of that, and had been grateful when McGonagall didn't pursue the issue.

The rest of the interview had gone smoothly. They had discussed Draco's education, his literary interests, his work ethic. He had been able to tell that the headmistress was impressed. He had known that he would get good references from Gringotts to testify for his efficiency and ability to put things in order.

"Well," McGonagall had said at last, "I think I've heard enough. You are by far the most qualified candidate I have seen. A little too qualified for the task at hand perhaps, but you seem to really want it."

“I do,” Draco had replied, willing her to feel his sincerity. No, he didn’t just want it, he needed it.

She had given him another small smile. “In that case, the job is yours.”

Draco had been stunned, unable to quite believe his luck. “You… you mean it?” he had stuttered.

She had raised her eyebrows. “Of course I mean it. I meant what I said though; it will be difficult. Our last library assistant had to be retired after suffering a complete nervous collapse. I hope that you are made of sterner stuff.”

Draco had smiled bitterly. “Like you said, I’ve survived worse.”

She had leaned in towards him conspiratorially. “Mr Malfoy, I should tell you that Madam Pince will most likely be retiring in the next couple of years. It would be natural that her assistant should succeed her. I think that you would do the job admirably. Just a little incentive for you to hang on in there.”

Draco had looked up at her with starry eyes. The whole library, his? Oh, that was too good to be true; he would endure anything for that.

He had followed her to the Entrance Hall feeling as if he was walking on air. For the first time in years, Draco had felt the stirrings of hope in his heart. Finally, something had gone right.

McGonagall had been about to bid him farewell when he blurted out, “Why? Why me?”

She had looked surprised, but only for a moment. “Well, the obvious reason of your capability aside, I have to confess that I made up my mind as soon as I saw the look on your face when you walked into the library. You looked at the books as if they were made of solid gold, as if they were treasure. Which, of course, they are. You looked like you belonged. That is the attitude that will see you through.”

“You’re right,” Draco had said softly. “To work with books, to care for them, to guard them… would be wonderful. They have given me so much and I suppose I want to return the favour. If… if I could only have books, I’d be all right, I know it. That wasn’t why I asked, though. What I meant was, um…”

This was awkward. Draco hadn’t wanted to bring up the past, but he needed to know. He had taken a deep breath and forced himself to look the headmistress in the eye. “What I meant was, why would you invite me, of all people, back to the school after all I’ve done? Why associate yourself with the name of Malfoy?”

If McGonagall had felt any surprise, her face hadn’t registered it. She had viewed him silently for a few seconds, Draco making a conscious effort not to look away. Finally, “Everybody deserves a second chance, Mr Malfoy. I think you have been made to suffer enough. Besides,” she had added, “you’re applying for the role of an assistant librarian. Hardly the actions of an evil overlord in the making.”

Draco smiled at the memory. It was nice, he thought, to know that there were some decent people in the world. People who would give you a chance to redeem yourself. McGonagall wasn’t the warmest of individuals, she wasn’t someone whom Draco felt he could confide in, but he felt that she would always give him a fair chance. At any rate, Draco did not want anyone to confide in. The thought of developing a close friendship with another person was frankly laughable to him, and he barely even yearned for intimacy any more. No, as long as he knew there were a couple of people like McGonagall out there, people who would judge him for his ability to do his job, not for the person he had once been, that was all he needed. And now McGonagall had come through for him. She had kept her promise and rewarded Draco for his dedication. Hogwarts library was his.

He was too jittery. There was an excited giggle bubbling inside Draco’s chest and threatening to burst into the open. He had to calm himself – he had learnt over the years that life was far easier if he made a conscious effort not to feel anything too excessively. He took a deep, steadying breath and pulled his mother’s letter out from the pocket of his robes. That was sure to sober him up.

Sure enough, as he re-read Narcissa’s words a small frown puckered Draco’s brow. Guilt gnawed at his insides. He knew his mother wanted him to go and make a life for himself, but the old sense of family duty told him that he should be there with them, helping them out, keeping his mother company. He wasn’t fooled by Narcissa’s bravado; he knew his mother well enough to be able to tell when she was miserable. God, why was he such a coward? Both he and his mother somehow kept up the pretence that

Draco had left because it was the right thing to do, because it was his duty to restore some dignity to the family name. In his correspondences with Narcissa, full of quips, trivialities and banter, both managed to completely ignore the elephant in the room. The pachyderm in question being that the Malfoys' lives were miserable, and Draco had fled because he was cowardly and couldn't bear it. He knew he should go back – his mother clearly needed him – but the thought was too horrific. He knew that Narcissa's love for him meant that she would always put his happiness first, and would never dream of admitting that she secretly wanted him to come back to France. Draco took full advantage of this, and hated himself bitterly for it.

He looked down at the cheap parchment his mother was now forced to use. She had never asked him for a thing. All she ever told him was that she wanted him to make the best life for himself that he could, that she could cope without him. The awful thing was that he knew she was just being brave. He knew that what Narcissa secretly longed for was for him to return to her and keep her company, help her out with Lucius. But she would never say as much, and Draco was never going to push the issue was he – not when it was so much more pleasant for him to just do as she said.

Draco threw the letter onto the desk with a small noise of disgust. He wished at times that he could be like he was as a child: only thinking of his own immediate comforts, and never even considering the needs or feelings of others. The trouble was, he believed, that harsh experience had taught him consideration and empathy, but had not endowed him with the courage or strength to act on his better instincts. He was still the same selfish little brat he had always been.

Draco did not want to remember any more. He had so few memories that were not painful; even the memories of that time before the war, the time when his family was respectable and he was so sure of his own wealth and power, were tainted by the retrospective knowledge of what was to come. And the knowledge that the life he had led back then was to blame for everything that had happened. He did not want to remember. Still, there was some masochistic part of him which would not allow him to forget. It nagged at him, nudging him towards that door in his mind that he always tried to keep closed. He didn't seem to be able to control it. The memories hit him like a beam of light which refused to be blotted out.

Oh, he had been so relieved to get away from his parents. That had been the worst part. If only there was a part of him that felt a desire to return to them, he wouldn't feel quite so guilty. But he was relieved. He could still recall as if it were yesterday that feeling of lightness, of being able to breathe again, when he had come back to England.

Draco closed his eyes and rubbed them with the heel of his palms, hoping in vain to distract himself. He

could remember his mother. He could still see her face, what she was wearing, how she had sounded, that day she had set him free. The day she had put her own needs aside and given Draco the chance to escape. The day he had taken full advantage of her kindness.

Unsurprisingly, Draco had graduated top in his year from Beauxbatons. It should have been a cause for celebration. If he had been anyone else, he would have been able to choose any career he wanted… but who was ever going to hire a Malfoy? He had returned to his parents' cottage with a heavy heart. Was this really it for him? Was he trapped there forever now with no opportunity to do something with his life? He had hated being around his father. Whenever Lucius had had a bad turn, Draco would sit in his room with his head in his hands, listening to his mother trying to calm her husband, knowing that he should go and help her but unable to bear it, and loathing himself for his own cowardice. He had felt as if he was suffocating, drowning, going mad himself. His chest would become tight and he had found it increasingly difficult to sleep. He had wished that he could be strong for his mother. He had wished that he could stay and take care of his father as a dutiful son should. But he couldn't; he couldn't bear to. But how on earth would he get away? How could he look his mother in the eye and tell her that he was leaving her alone when she needed him most?

However, he had reckoned without Narcissa. She, in her infinite understanding, had observed her son's silent struggle and had beaten him to the punch.

They had been eating breakfast together one morning, Topsy the elf rushing about in the background preparing a tray to take to Lucius. Draco had been silent and pensive, brooding once more over his dilemma. The sound of his mother's voice had startled him.

"Darling, I was thinking," she had started. "It's getting a little difficult to have the three of us under one roof, what with money being so tight. And considering you have done so brilliantly in your exams, I think you should do something about getting a job. Maybe back in England."

Draco had stared at her in astonishment.

"Don't gape, dearest, it doesn't become you. Now, hear me out. I know that you took the Dark Mark and were technically a Death Eater, but it isn't as if you really did anything terribly wrong. Nobody died at your hands. And besides, you were so young you could hardly be held accountable for your actions. Draco, if anyone is going to bring some redemption to the family it's you. You could go back to England

and get a respectable job. It's a terrible waste of your education to just loll about at home all your life. You could really be something. You could show the world that the Malfoys won't be beaten so easily. You could be happy."

Draco had felt numb. He had looked into his mother's eyes and knew exactly what she was doing. She was offering him an escape route. She had seen what he had been so afraid to ask, and had put her own need for him aside in order to give him that chance of freedom. He had swallowed. "Mother, I… What about you? I couldn't just leave you on your own," he had protested feebly, feeling his hypocrisy keenly.

She had waved her hand in feigned irritation. "What, you think I can't cope without you? Goodness knows, I've got more than enough to keep me entertained. I have a house to run, I have an elf to organise, I have my crosswords, my sister has started writing to me, and I have your father. He can still be very good company – we had a most interesting conversation about ants the other day. All that to do, and you think I need you moping about the place and getting underfoot? Nonsense!"

"But I couldn't just go back to England!"

"Yes, you can," she had said gently. "Draco, you amaze me. You have so much potential, and I am so proud of you. What kind of mother would I be if I didn't make you go out into the world and use that potential? Your father and I made a lot of mistakes. We should never have lived the sort of life that would lead you into such danger. What has happened to us is our own fault and we deserve it, I know this. However, there is no reason for you to suffer for it. They were our choices, your father's and mine, and you were just led blindly along. Now, don't argue. Draco, I would do anything to protect you and I hate that I made you suffer. Please, help me with my guilt. Go and live your life; try to be happy. It would make me feel so much better if you would."

Draco had felt the tears prickling his eyes. "Mother, I--"

"Now, none of that," she had interrupted. "Hush. Eat your porridge before it gets cold."

Draco had looked at her, willing her to know that he was sorry for his weakness, for wanting to leave her. She had looked back and told him silently that it was all right.

The floodgate was opened. Against his will, Draco was being dragged back though his past, made to re-live all those experiences he had tried to block out. That awful letter from the Ministry, just weeks after the end of the war, telling the Malfoys that all their assets were being seized in order to compensate for their crimes against the wizarding world. Oh, and they had been so relieved when they found that they had escaped Azkaban! Of course, it had been too much to expect that they would get off scot free. They should have seen it coming.

It was like some macabre picture show. Each memory overwhelmed Draco, horrible in its vividness, staying just long enough to cause him a nasty pang before being pushed aside by the next one. The horrible look on his father's face when he had read that they would have to give up the manor, the family seat for centuries past. The way he had shut himself up in his study, refused to talk, refused to eat. The time Narcissa had wept, with bitter sobs that shook her whole body, by the fire in the Green Room, not realising that Draco was there. All those frantic and humiliating letters to former friends appealing for help, begging for charity. The way it had felt when each appeal was rejected or ignored. Looking up at Lucius as the great doors of Malfoy Manor banged shut behind them for the last time, seeing his father's face completely white, spasming with horrible convulsions…

The frightful barrage of recollections forced Draco further back into the past. Another white face, crueller that his fathers, laughing at him as he cowered in fear. A woman suspended above a table, begging for help before she was murdered. A great enchanted fire, coming for him. The smoke burning his eyes, searing into his lungs, before he was rescued. A lonely tower. A frail old man facing him fearlessly, telling him that—STOP!

Draco slammed his palm down on the desk, jolting himself back into the present. He was not going to think about that. He wasn't going to think about any of it. His chest was tight, and he breathed in slowly through his nose, wiping the beads of perspiration from his brow with the sleeves of his robes. Why would he be so stupid? Why would he let himself remember like that, when he knew what it would do to him? He focussed his eyes on the ceiling of the library, trying to think of something to distract himself. An alphabet game, perhaps? He thought. Yes, good idea. Something outside yourself. Now, why not start with something simple like Potions ingredients? An ingredient for every letter of the alphabet. Right: aconite, belladonna, crested newt tail…

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Draco realised that he had been sitting there for a good half-an-hour, staring into space. It was ridiculous – here he was, the new Hogwarts librarian, supposedly renowned for his efficiency, dreaming a perfectly good evening away playing a silly alphabet game. And all because he couldn't control himself and had started thinking about the past. He shook his head and put his mother's letter back in his pocket. He decided to send Narcissa some money as soon as he got his first paycheque. Draco had been given a rise in salary with his promotion, and it wasn't as if he needed to pay rent. He had permission to keep his small rooms at Hogwarts throughout the year, and his needs were not great. Yes, he would send his mother something to help her out. She might be able to buy something nice for Lucius. He wasn't sure that he believed her protests that his father really was getting better, but he wanted to do all he could to help.

That's not true though, is it? said a nasty voice in his head. If you really wanted to help them, you'd go and be with them. But no, you're just going to throw money at the problem and hope it goes away. Draco shook his head again and sighed fretfully. He didn't want to think about that tonight. This was supposed to be a joyous occasion, something he had been working towards for years. Surely he could give the guilt a rest for just one night?

Draco was brought sharply out of his reverie by the unwelcome sound of the library doors being pushed open. A wave of outrage washed over him. Couldn't he just be left alone, have the place to himself for just this short time? It was bad enough that in a week's time the rows of large, leather-topped desks would be occupied by ghastly, whispering children, trying to hide sweets under their robes and hoping he wouldn't notice, wanting to borrow his precious books, taking them back to their dorms where he was sure they wouldn't be cared for properly. Couldn't he have just these few short nights in his precious kingdom, just him and the books?

The unwanted visitor turned out to be Hagrid. Draco took a deep breath and forced his annoyance down. Ever since he had returned to the school, he and the groundskeeper had treated each other with marked politeness. Draco wished to dispel their former animosity and start anew, but at the same time he didn't want to be too friendly. It was best to keep other people at a distance.

Hagrid lumbered over to his desk, labouring under the weight of a huge wooden crate. Draco suddenly had an irrational fear that Hagrid had brought him a Blast-Ended Skrewt, before dismissing the thought. Surely not. He shaped his face into a mask of polite enquiry. Whatever the man wanted, Draco wished to get it out of the way as quickly as possible.

Hagrid nodded at him in greeting. “Evenin’, Malfoy. Hoped I’d find yeh here. Yeh’ve had a delivery. Seems teh be from Italy.”

Draco leapt up from his chair, all his irritation promptly forgotten. “The manuscripts! Wonderful! Here, bring them through to the office.” He ran round to open the door for Hagrid, trying to hide his excitement. He had been in negotiations all summer with a retired Venetian Auror in order to buy the manuscripts. They had been handed down through the elderly gentleman’s family for generations, and comprised of contemporary accounts of the great seventeenth-century wizard, Mario de Francesca, poet, libertine and alchemist. Draco had found out about the heirloom by accident. The elderly Auror was an old friend of McGonagall’s and had paid a visit to the school at the beginning of the summer, making a mistake of casually mentioning the manuscripts in Draco’s presence. He hadn’t even known the full value of what he had. With the headmistress’s help, Draco had managed to persuade him to sell the manuscripts to the school. And now they were actually here!

Hagrid placed the heavy crate on the floor of Draco’s office with a bang. Draco winced, hoping that this rough treatment had not damaged the precious cargo. He pulled out his wand and broke the crate’s magical seals, before kneeling beside it and lifting the lid. There they were! At least twenty thick, calfskin-bound volumes. Draco was unable to hold back a small noise of rapture.

“Anythin’ interestin’?” Hagrid asked from behind him.

Draco had forgotten the groundskeeper was there. “Yes,” he breathed. “Very valuable historical records. They’ll have to be request only, of course. I’ll have to personally assess the student in question, make sure that they’re worthy of the privilege. They’d have to wear gloves. In fact, I’d better supervise the manuscripts while they’re being read. Wouldn’t do to let anything happen to them.”

“Righ’…” Hagrid said awkwardly behind him. “Glad yer pleased.”

Draco thought that Hagrid would leave but, to his surprise, he didn’t. He tore his eyes away from the crate and looked around in enquiry.

Hagrid smiled at him self-consciously. “Wha’ do yer think of the news, then?”

“What news?” Draco replied, before he could help himself. He didn’t care about whatever idle gossip the half-giant might have heard! Why was he encouraging him?

“The new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher,” Hagrid said.

“Oh.” Draco hadn’t heard. Although the position seemed to have lost its one-year expiry date since Voldemort’s death, the job was still considered an unlucky one. The last professor, Jennifer Gray, had managed to last four years before being fired for coming to class blind drunk and accidentally setting fire to her desk. Draco sighed wearily. “What poor schlub have they managed to rope in this time?”

Hagrid grinned broadly. Really, Draco should have realised that anything that made Hagrid look so happy could hardly be good for him. Sure enough, the groundskeeper’s reply made Draco freeze in horror, all his excitement over the manuscripts completely dispelled.

“Harry Potter.”

*

Dear Mother,

Sorry to hear about Aunt Clementine. As soon as I am able, I will take care of you and Dad and you’ll never have to ask the old hag for anything again. And there’s no need to be polite about her for my benefit; I know you dislike her as much as I do. Sorry Father got upset; I hope he’s all right now. I’ll send you some money as soon as I get paid, then maybe the two of you could go out somewhere nice. He might like to see the sea.

I'm still very happy about the new job. Those Italian manuscripts arrived tonight and promise to be fascinating. I'm actually having serious doubts about making them available to the students. However, I think our esteemed headmistress may not approve if I keep them all to myself.

Right, now I've got the preliminaries out of the way, I can tell you the reason I'm replying to you so promptly. Something awful has happened. Seriously, if you thought the thing with the goblins was funny, this will leave you in hysterics. Oh, Mother, the worst thing has happened. The worst possible thing! I suppose it was too much to hope that things would go right for me. Evidently, I am not allowed any peace or satisfaction in life. Oh, hell! Hell and fire and brimstone! It's too awful! I was so sure that this year was going to be good, and now this happens. They've only gone and hired Harry sodding Potter as the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher!

What the hell is his problem? Was it not enough for him to be a celebrated Auror? Was it not enough to have the entire wizarding world fawning over him? Was he just not satisfied with fame, fortune and adoration? This is my turf! I thought I would be happy here, and now Saint Potter's going to come swanking in and ruin it all. I am so angry I could spit. With any luck, he won't stay long. When he's had to go without his adoring fans and all those demands for him to appear at public functions kissing babies and smiling for the crowds, I can't see that he'd find much to motivate him. Arrogant, self-righteous prick. Oh, what shall I do? Everything's been spoilt now.

All my love,

Draco.

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Chapter 2: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'Parisian Dream' by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

My Dearest Draco,

You really are the most insufferable infant sometimes! Fancy getting yourself into such a state over something so small! You seem to be taking Harry Potter's return to Hogwarts as a personal insult, whereas I'm sure that the poor boy intends nothing of the sort. I doubt he even knows you're there. And why shouldn't he want to teach? Perhaps he's bored with being in the public eye and he wants a bit of peace for once. Perhaps, like you, he is just drawn back to Hogwarts. Either way, I'm sure he does not intend to parade around just for the sake of ruining your ambiance, as you seem to think.

I doubt that you will even see him that often. How often do you see the other staff members? You don't go out with them, you never go to the staff room; you spend all your time in the library or in your private chambers. Do you even eat with the others? As far as I can tell, you take all your meals in your room. I doubt you speak more than two words to the other teachers, so why should it be any different with Mr Potter? You will stay out of his way, and I'm sure that he won't persist in trying to converse with an old misery like you. Do try not to be too openly hostile to him. Might I remind you that he saved your life? You would have died in the final battle if it wasn't for him, and what on earth would I have done without you? And you have another reason to think well of him. I never told you this because I didn't want to upset you, but Harry Potter is the reason that your father wasn't sent back to Azkaban. I could never understand why, but I have it on good authority that he insisted that we were allowed to go free. After all Lucius had done to him, he showed mercy on us. So if you cannot bring yourself to be friendly with the young man, at least don't be rude – for my sake if not for your own.

I know that you will love your new job, and I'm glad that the books from Italy have arrived. You will take a bit of time off though, won't you? It can't be good for you to work all the time. I know that a lot has happened in your life to make you world-weary. I know that you had to grow up too fast. However, you are still only twenty-six, and it makes me sad to think of you shutting yourself up in your office all day. Why don't you go out flying? You used to love it so much.

There is nothing to report here. Life in France is as uneventful as ever. Your father seems to have developed an enthusiasm for gardening which I am encouraging. I expect that this letter will make you feel a fair amount of resentment towards me for my lack of sympathy, so please only write to me once you have stopped being angry. Remember that I love you very much.

Your Mother.

*

Draco stepped back and viewed his handiwork with no small amount of pride. He had spent much of the previous night making a giant poster for the library, which was now firmly attached to the notice board. Anyone coming into the library could not fail to see it which, in Draco's opinion, was just as it should be. He ran his eyes over the poster once more, wanting to make sure that he hadn't left anything out.

The 10 Commandments of Hogwarts Library

1) Thou shalt not do any of the following in the library: eat, drink, talk above a whisper, swing on the chairs, play on the ladders, use thy wand, pass notes to thy friends, gaze vacantly into space, doodle, snog, cuddle, make irritating clicking noises with thy tongue.

2) If thou must borrow books from the library, thou shalt not dog-ear pages, underline passages or make notes in the margins. This shalt be considered as vandalism and wilt result in a fine.

3) When borrowing books, thou shalt not get food/drink/bodily fluids on them. Thou wilt have to pay for the damages.

4) Thou shalt not leave books unattended outside the library.

5) Thou shalt not break in the spines of books. Thou wouldst not like it if the librarian broke in thine own spine. Thou hast been warned.

6) Thou shalt not insult the books. Some are sensitive and may cry/insult back/attempt to bite thy nose.

7) Thou shalt not plagiarise from the books. Give credit when thou usest information provided by others. Presenting the ideas of others as thine own means that thou art an idiot, and thou wilt be caught.

8) Thou shalt not attempt to replace books on the shelf thyself if perusing them in the library. Thou wouldst inevitably get it wrong, causing much inconvenience to the librarian. Thou shouldst put it on the re-shelving trolley instead.

9) Thou shalt not make any clever suggestions as to how the library shouldst be run. Thou art still at school and therefore knowest NOTHING about these things.

10) Thou shalt not mock the 10 Commandments or anything which dost pertain to them.

Draco gave a small nod of satisfaction. Everything seemed to be in order. He looked round the library with a small sigh of regret. This was the last time he would see it looking so neat for months. Tomorrow, the first groups of students would be coming in, wanting to take out books for their essays. Cluttering up the place. How nice things would be, Draco thought, if it wasn't for all the people. He walked among the desks restlessly, straightening chairs when there was no need. If only there was something else that needed doing…

Draco had been keeping himself in an almost relentless state of activity over the last few days. If he was busy, he was less likely to think about the imminent arrival of Harry sodding Potter. His irritability had reached a crescendo that night. It was the evening that all the students arrived at Hogwarts, meaning that Potter would actually be in the castle at that very moment. Draco thought he could feel Potter's presence like a weight bearing down on him. He felt like it would suffocate him with impotent rage.

Draco glanced once more around the immaculate library, resigning himself to the fact that there really wasn't anything else that could be done to take his mind off things. He picked up his wand from the desk, realising that if he left the library now he could make it back to his rooms before everyone left the Great Hall. He didn't want to have to run into anybody tonight. He slipped out of the library, performing

various Locking Charms behind him.

It was earlier than Draco had thought. The sounds coming from the hall as he headed towards the main staircase told him that the Sorting Ceremony was still taking place. Draco paused for a moment to listen.

“MacMillan, Sarah,” he heard Professor Vector’s voice call.

There was a tense pause, and then came the unmistakable voice of the Sorting Hat: “Ravenclaw!”

There was some clapping as Sarah MacMillan went to join her housemates.

“Marsden, Lewis.”

Another short pause, then, “Slytherin!”

A wave of nostalgia washed over Draco as he stood outside the hall doors. He suddenly remembered, with vivid clarity, his own Sorting Ceremony, fifteen years ago to the day. He could remember how nervous he had been as he had waited for his turn with the hat. Crabbe and Goyle had already been sorted into Slytherin. What if, after all his brash confidence, the hat decided to put him somewhere else? Fortunately he had managed to hide his discomfort, making himself feel better by sneering at the other terrified-looking first years. How proud he had been when the hat had chosen him for Slytherin after barely touching his head! He had swaggered over to join his housemates, dismissing his irrational nerves as if they had never existed. Of course he was a Slytherin! He had looked forward to writing to his parents, informing them that he hadn’t disappointed. He had smiled to himself, thinking that now he could be just like his father.

How stupid he had been. If only he had known that following in Lucius’s footsteps, continuing his legacy of domination and ruthlessness, perpetuating his view that only those with pure wizarding blood had any worth, would result in ruin and misery. That’s where your pride got you, Lucius. You were wrong. We were all wrong. And now we have to pay the price.

Draco brought himself out of his dark reverie, realising that the Sorting was nearly over. Once the applause had died down as Elinor Watson went to join the Gryffindor table, Draco heard the clear voice of Professor McGonagall addressing the students. The usual notices about not entering the Forbidden Forest or using magic in the corridors were given, as was the information about Quidditch tryouts. Then McGonagall said something which sent a nasty jolt to Draco's stomach.

"I am pleased to announce a new addition to the teaching staff this year."

How the hell had he forgotten about Potter? He'd thought of little else all week!

"Please join me in welcoming our new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Harry Potter."

The applause was riotous. The students clapped, cheered, whistled, stamped their feet until the windows of the castle rattled in their frames. Draco could just imagine Potter's smug face as all this adoration was heaped upon him, and he snarled with rage. He aimed a sharp kick at the hall doors, but it didn't make him feel better. Seething, he stomped up the main staircase, away from the noises of jubilation.

Was everyone in love with Harry Potter? Okay, so he'd got rid of Voldemort, but there wasn't anything that special about him. Perfect Potter with his stupid scar. Draco could imagine how Harry would gloat when he discovered that Draco Malfoy, who had been so proud and so wealthy, was now working as a librarian. The pride he felt in his job was somehow tarnished by the thought of Potter knowing about it. Draco imagined how Potter would shake his head sanctimoniously, saying that that was what happened to people who got themselves involved with scum like the Death Eaters. Great Merlin, even his own mother had joined Harry Potter's never-ending train of supporters!

Draco heaved an irritable sigh as he thought of his mother's letter. Narcissa had been correct in her prediction that her son would be angered by her missive. In fact, Draco had gone so far as to ball the parchment up and throw it across his room in a fit of petulance. He hadn't the heart to throw it away though, and now it lay with his other letters, albeit looking slightly rumpled. He had been so sure that his mother would understand! But no, she had come down on the side of Saint Potter, telling Draco to be polite and kiss Potter's arse, just like everyone else. She had even dared to suggest that Draco was being

childish! She didn't understand.

Draco hated that he owed his life to Harry. Oh, if only someone else had rescued him from the Room of Requirement! Of all the people he had to feel obliged to, why did it have to be him? And now he would look like an ungrateful prat if he wasn't friendly to Potter. And what was all this about Potter keeping Lucius out of Azkaban? He'd never heard anything about that before. Yet another reason for him to feel grateful towards the git, Draco thought resentfully. The more he considered the many reasons he had to view Harry Potter favourably, the deeper his resentment grew. He hated the fact that he was so clearly in the wrong.

If only Potter had just stayed away, everything would have been all right. It was just so unfair! Draco had worked so hard over the years trying to erase his mistakes. He had lived quietly and just got on with things. He had attempted to show that the Malfoys could change. But now, with Harry Potter back at Hogwarts, Draco could feel himself being dragged unwillingly back into his schoolboy role. Once more, he would become Harry Potter's antagonist. Already he could feel himself being shaped into the villain. He knew that Potter hadn't done anything to deserve his resentment. He knew that the other man had not planned his return to the school as a personal attack on Draco. Worst of all, he knew that his mother was right. Harry Potter was the uncontested good guy, meaning that by disliking him, Draco automatically became the bad guy. But… that wasn't who he was any more! It wasn't fair!

Draco stopped for a moment, gulping in great breaths of air in an attempt to calm himself down. He had intended to go back to his rooms, but he was too full of frustration for that. He quickly decided on where he could go instead. His mother didn't understand him, true; however, Draco was certain that he knew someone who would.

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"Good evening, Mr Malfoy. To what do I owe this unexpected pleasure?"

Draco closed the door of the Trophy Room and walked across to the life-size portrait which dominated the far wall – the portrait of his former Potions master, head of house and, for a brief time, headmaster.

“Good evening, Professor Snape.”

Snape was portrayed standing before a large wooden desk which was covered with various potion phials, books and metal instruments. He had been painted in his trademark black robes, and looked as close to how Draco remembered him as possible. It was as if the painting wasn’t a canvas at all, and was in fact simply a doorway with Severus Snape standing on the other side. Draco liked that feeling – it was comforting.

Snape raised an eyebrow as Draco threw himself into a chair before the portrait with an irritable sigh. “Out with it,” he said. I can tell by the moue on your face that you have something to rant about, so you may as well get it over with.”

Draco scowled up at his former professor. “I suppose you’ve heard the news,” he said balefully.

“I hear lots of things. To which piece of news are you referring?”

“You know. Our new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. They’ve only gone and hired Harry fucking Potter.”

“Language, Mr Malfoy!” Snape growled. “Just because I no longer have the ability to put you in detention, it does not mean that you can take liberties!”

“Sorry,” Draco replied sullenly. “You have heard though, haven’t you? About Potter?”

Snape grimaced. “Yes, I have had that displeasure. Ghastly, isn’t it?”

Draco felt better already. He knew he could rely on Snape. “Ghastly,” he reiterated with fervour. “You can just imagine him, strutting about the castle—”

“—Thinking that he owns the place—”

“—All the students falling down to worship at his feet.”

“Oh, they’ll be drinking in every hot-headed, virtuous, misjudged piece of clap-trap he comes out with.”

“Stupid Potter.”

“Wretched boy.”

Draco laughed, feeling some of the tension go out of him. Talking to Snape was like taking an antidote to the vitriolic poison which had been eating into him over the past week. He gave a sigh of relief. “Thank you, Sir; you have no idea how much I needed that. Even my mother seems to have joined Team Potter. I’ve just had a letter from her ordering me to be polite to the git and to remember that he saved my life. And that’s the worst part! I have no justification in resenting his presence here – none whatsoever! In fact, I should be grateful to him, because I wouldn’t be here without him!”

“Yes, well,” Snape muttered, “You’re not the only one.”

“What?”

The older man’s lips twisted into a grimace. “I was rather hoping his wouldn’t come up, but I think I can trust you not to repeat what you are about to hear to anyone.” He looked up at Draco. “Who do you think commissioned this portrait?”

“No!”

“Yes,” Snape said bitterly. “It seems that Potter did not think it enough for me to just have the traditional portrait in the headmaster’s office. He said that I deserved to be acknowledged for the hero I really was, and that future generations should know who they owed the war to. Ugh. Horrible Gryffindor sentiment. Some of us are happy enough to just get on with things without having a huge fuss made of us. But one cannot expect someone like Potter to understand that.”

Draco glanced briefly at the plaque beneath Snape’s portrait which related the real role he had played in the war. If he was honest, Draco had always thought the portrait was a lovely gesture, but there was no way in hell he was admitting to that in front of Snape.

“It is unfortunate, deeply unfortunate,” his old professor continued. “It is a hateful thing to have to admit, but neither of us would be here to have this conversation if it was not for Harry Potter.”

“Not entirely lacking in a sort of poetic irony,” Draco added. “Harry Potter has inadvertently enabled his own derision at our hands.”

Snape smiled. “Some consolation, I admit. But why are you so angry? Potter’s return to the school is admittedly lamentable, but it hardly seems worthy of such deep woe.”

Draco sighed. He briefly contemplated brushing off his unhappiness and saying that it was only a passing irritability, but before he knew it he was pouring out his heart to his old professor. Snape had become Draco’s greatest confidante since his return to Hogwarts, more so than his mother even. With Narcissa, Draco often felt that he had to conceal his own problems, not wanting to add to her own. He spoke to Snape of his frustration, of his feelings of injustice that after working so hard to undo his past actions, he was now to be cast once again as Harry Potter’s enemy. He spoke of the humiliation he felt at having to face the other man after all this time, both of them knowing that Harry had been right and Draco had been wrong.

When he had finished, Snape contemplated him in silence for several moments before replying. “Mr Malfoy, you were one of my most promising students. Which makes it all the more disappointing when you display evidence of utter idiocy. Draco, do you honestly think that Mr Potter’s return to the school will have any real effect on you if you don’t want it to? You are a grown man now; both of you are. You’re perfectly right – you have changed. You are not the boy you once were, and nothing and no one can force you to be him again. You are the only person in charge of your destiny, and if you no longer wish to

play the villain, the solution is very simple: don't. You have a new job which I am sure you will enjoy, and which will inevitably consume a lot of your time. What is it to you what Potter does? Don't seek out his company; just continue as if nothing has changed. Take no notice of Potter. You are your own master now."

It was amazing how, after all this time, Snape still possessed the ability to make Draco feel like a complete idiot. He looked up at the portrait sheepishly. "I… hadn't really thought about it like that."

Snape raised an eyebrow. "That much is evident," he replied sardonically.

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Draco awoke the next morning feeling determined to start anew. It was his first day as the official Hogwarts librarian, he reminded himself with a pleasant thrill of nerves, and he wasn't going to let anything spoil this long-awaited triumph. He dressed himself extra-carefully, and found himself checking his reflection several times to make sure that nothing was amiss with his appearance.

"Going on a date, sunshine?" the mirror growled.

Draco had never been able to work out how he had managed to end up with what must be the butchest mirror ever made. "Um, no," he replied nervously. "New job."

"Well, all the best, mate," the mirror said. "Yer hair looks smashing."

Draco hurried downstairs to the library, deciding not to bother with breakfast. He wouldn't have to open up till nine, but he wanted to be settled before he had to deal with the first onslaught of students.

As he reached the second floor, however, he was forced to screech to a halt and take refuge behind a

handy suit of armour. McGonagall was walking along the corridor up ahead, and she was talking to Harry Potter. After his conversation with Snape the night before, Draco no longer felt any vicious resentment towards Potter. Nevertheless, he wished to delay their inevitable meeting for as long as possible. Even if Potter didn't gloat, Draco would still feel painfully aware of his own fall from grace and of his obligation towards the other man. He didn't need to feel humiliated today.

Draco could only glimpse the other man's back as he passed, but Harry, he noticed, wasn't strutting or looking as if he owned the place. In fact, he seemed slightly awkward and ill at ease, and kept pausing to adjust the collar of his robes.

"Do stop fussing, Potter!" McGonagall exclaimed. "What on earth is the matter?"

Harry grinned at her sheepishly. "Sorry, Minerva. I'm just feeling a bit nervous, that's all. I hope I do okay."

"Of course you will," the headmistress replied briskly. "I haven't forgotten what you did with Dumbledore's Army. Your lesson plans look more than satisfactory, and I can't imagine anyone else more likely to inspire the students. It's about time we had an influential Defence teacher."

"Thanks," Harry replied. "I really appreciate your faith in me. I kept having dreams last night where I turned up to class naked, or I lost my voice. The best one involved me trying to teach a class full of Mountain Trolls.

McGonagall laughed. "Not terribly likely, Harry. Now, come along to breakfast. I will be most put out if we get there and Professor Sinistra has had all the croissants again."

They turned the corner and were gone. Draco came out from his hiding place and took a moment to steady himself. In spite of all his noble intentions, he couldn't help but feel a surge of bitterness towards Harry Potter. What right did he have to be nervous? He was the bloody Saviour of the Wizarding World! Whatever Potter did, people were bound to admire him. The students were going to love him – hadn't his reception at the Welcoming Feast last night proven that to him? Harry was the Golden Boy. Draco was the one who, in spite of keeping a determinedly low profile, was still followed through the corridors by condemning whispers and suspicious looks. He was the one who had to face scorn every day of his

life.

*

Draco proceeded to the library in a much blacker mood than the one he had woken up in. Much to his chagrin, his small delay meant that his new assistant had arrived before him and was waiting for him to open up.

The assistant in question was a young girl of nineteen years named Melanie Dowson. Draco had picked her out of the other hopefuls as the candidate who most closely accorded to his somewhat ambitious demands. He had looked for someone who shared some of his own values, but certainly not all of them. Of course it was important for his assistant to like books – revere them even – but Draco was not looking for a passion to rival his own. The reason being that he wished his assistant to deal with the students, leaving him free to spend his time among the shelves. He was a very different librarian from Madam Pince. All her pleasure in the job had been gained through the sense of power she got from sitting imperiously at her desk, interrogating the students and dealing out punishments. Draco, on the other hand, wished to deal with other people as little as possible. Yes, he wanted to ensure that the students respected the library, and to punish those who broke the rules, but he wanted to do it from a distance. He wanted to be able to actually work with the books, and he needed an assistant who would be happy to man the desk and deal with the loans. Naturally, they should be efficient and organized, but again he did not expect them to live up to his own standards in these areas. They should be good at dealing with people, but not be overly personable or prone to idle chatter. He wanted someone quiet and unobtrusive who would meekly do as he said and not try to be his friend.

Melanie had been the best of a bad bunch. She was a little too young for his liking, but she had spent a year working on the archives in the Department of Magical Creatures at the Ministry, so could be trusted to know what she was doing. Another consideration was her looks. Melanie was not unattractive, but might easily be described as plain. She would certainly not attract milling groups of amorous adolescent boys to the library, Draco had thought with satisfaction.

Melanie smiled at him nervously as he approached. “Good morning, Mr Malfoy,” she said shyly.

Draco favoured her with a curt nod, before performing the various spells required to unlock the doors.

The complex Locking Charms had been Draco's first course of action as librarian. He had always thought that library security had been shamefully lax under Madam Pince's command. No longer would the library be open around the clock. It would open at nine in the morning and close at nine in the evening, and everyone would just have to work around it. His next step would be to charm each and every book so that it screamed if taken from the library without being checked out, but that, of course, would take time.

Draco opened the doors and swept inside, Melanie hurrying along at his heels. He waved his wand, causing the heavy drapes which covered the mullioned windows to part, letting in the watery morning sunlight.

"Right," Draco said, turning to his assistant. "We have exactly half-an-hour before the first hoards of idle miscreants are due to arrive. I want to run over a few things with you first."

Melanie, her round face lit with the kind of enthusiasm which only ever appears on the first day of a new job, followed Draco into the office. "Right you are, Mr Malfoy," she said breathlessly. "I'm really looking forward to working here; I was so excited when I heard I'd got the job I actually choked on a bit of toast. My mum had to do the Heimlich Manoeuvre on me. She thinks I'm mental. She can't work out why I enjoy putting things in order. You should have seen her face when she came home one day and found I'd alphabetised her spice rack. I think she wanted to put me in St Mungo's!" the girl laughed nervously.

Draco didn't say anything. He certainly did not wish to encourage Melanie or make her think that he cared about her personal life. It wouldn't do to let her think that they would become friends. He had hired her for her professional capabilities, and the sooner she was cured of this tendency towards idle conversation the better.

"Now," he said firmly. "First things first. For many years now, this library has been run with extraordinary incompetence. The shelves are a mess, and the method of organizing the books is frankly abysmal. This year, I intend to convert the entire library to the Dewey Decimal System. Naturally, this will take some time. As all my efforts will be bound up in making these improvements, I cannot be expected to deal with trivial things such as controlling the students or checking books in and out. I will need you to deal with those things. I cannot have my work interrupted by some snotty first year asking where the Herbology section is. You will be expected to maintain order and to keep a thorough record of all the books going in and out of the library. Woe betide you if anything goes missing. You will issue Howlers for any overdue books. You will be in charge of library fines. You will keep a comprehensive record of any damages that occur to books, and which students are responsible. I wish to be able to keep check of any

troublemakers. If a teacher wishes to order a book for the library, you will deal with it. I am relying on your absolute efficiency in these matters. Do I make myself clear?"

Melanie, whose face had fallen visibly throughout Draco's speech, nodded dumbly.

"Excellent. Now, that is my filing cabinet," Draco continued, pointing towards the far wall, along which ran row upon row of tiny drawers, each marked with a small white label. "Records for each and every book in the library are kept in there. Under no circumstances will you touch it. Everything is arranged in a very specific order and only I know what it is. If anything is removed or disrupted, I will be most displeased."

Next, Draco picked up a large file, several inches thick, from the table besides them and handed it to Melanie. "This is my cross-referencing folder. Everything is arranged alphabetically and cross-referenced by title, author, date, subject matter and genre. It is also colour coded. Studies have proven that the human brain responds faster to colour than it does to text. I expect you to be familiar with the system by the end of the week. For now, I will be responsible for re-shelving all the books. Once I know that I can trust you, I may pass some of those duties over to you. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Mr Malfoy," Melanie said heavily.

"Wonderful," Draco said briskly. "Now, Miss Dowson, I would ask you to go to the main desk immediately and start work. However, as this is the first day of term, I will go easy on you."

Melanie looked up at him with unspeakable gratitude.

"I want you to spend this morning with this book instead," Draco continued, holding out a weighty tome to his assistant. "It consists of an itinerary of the library, indicating the theme of each and every book, and where it is shelved. When a student enquires where something is, I want you to be able to tell them promptly and accurately. I will be very busy, and do not wish to be bothered with questions. Of course, you will have to learn a new plan once I have implemented the new shelving system, but that will have to do for now. After lunch, I will go over your other duties, teaching you the stamping system and what you must do in order to carry out certain procedures. Finally, I will test you on everything. If I do not feel that you have learnt everything to my satisfaction, you will have to take the book home with you. Are we

clear?”

“Crystal clear, Mr Malfoy,” Melanie said, her shoulders slumping in resignation.

*

Leaving the unfortunate Melanie frantically perusing the shelving guide back in the office, Draco settled himself at the desk. As was to be expected for the first day of term, the library was not busy. Only the most dedicated students – kindred spirits of Hermione Granger – chose to invade Draco’s domain, wanting to get a head start on this year’s classes.

Draco was glad of the peace. It meant that he had time to adjust to his new role, and he spent most of the morning going over his plans for updating the library or, when he felt he could get away with it, surreptitiously reading his well-thumbed copy of Baudelaire’s Les Fleures du Mal under the desk.

After lunch, where Draco ate a sandwich at his desk, deciding as usual not to join everyone else in the Great Hall, he summoned Melanie from the office. His assistant, he noticed, now had a distinctly desperate gleam in her eye. Draco hoped that he had not made a mistake in hiring her; it would be terribly inconvenient if she suffered a meltdown on the very first day.

He had almost finished detailing for Melanie the various procedures she would have to go through while manning the desk, when something singularly unpleasant happened. Harry Potter walked through the doors of the library.

Draco made a strange squeaking noise, and dived under the desk.

“Mr Malfoy?” Melanie said, looking down at him with consternation.

“I’m not here!” Draco hissed at her frantically. “You haven’t seen me! I’ve gone out!”

“Malfoy?” came a voice from behind him.

Fuck.

Draco sat up so violently that he cracked his head on the underside of his desk.

“God, are you all right?”

Draco turned to glare up at Harry Potter, who was looking down at him with concern. “No one but the librarians are allowed behind this desk!” Draco said sharply to cover his humiliation. “Get round the other side!”

“Oh, sorry!” Harry said, promptly disappearing from view. Draco stood up, cursing the fates for making this first reunion even more shameful that necessary, and glared at Potter.

“What were you doing under there?” Harry said, seemingly oblivious to the fact that he was the unrivalled target for all of Draco’s ire at that moment, and would have done far better to have exited the library as quickly as possible.

“I dropped one of my stamps,” Draco replied coldly, thinking on his feet.

“Oh, right.”

Potter, Draco noticed, had grown taller than he had been when they had last met, though not, he was pleased to note, quite as tall as himself. He was not skinny any more either; his robes were loose but Draco could still see the evidence of a well-toned figure beneath them. Hardly surprising for someone who had been working as an Auror for the past five years. Potter’s robes were not elaborate but Draco

could tell by looking at them that they were well-made, and had probably come from a fine tailor. Potter had obviously done very well for himself, Draco thought bitterly, painfully aware of the frayed seam on his own cuff. The other man's hair was still a fright, but Draco saw that he had bought new glasses with fashionable, unobtrusive frames. Potter also had good skin, he noticed, and was tanned. That, at least, would fade quickly now that he was living in Scotland again.

Draco made a conscious effort not to look into Potter's eyes. All the trouble they had had in the past, he felt, had happened after Draco had looked into those bright green, penetrating eyes. Eyes that challenged you and did not hint at any kind of submission. Eyes that awoke fierce passions which…

Draco realised that Harry was staring at him. He was just standing there, not saying anything, looking at Draco completely unselfconsciously.

Draco sighed irritably. "What do you want, Potter?"

Potter shrugged. "Just thought I should come and see you. I was wondering if you wanted to catch up some time."

Draco looked at him coldly. "What could the two of us possibly have to catch up on?"

For the first time, a flicker of uncertainty crossed Potter's face. He shrugged again. "I just wanted to say hello, that's all."

"Well, now you've said it," Draco replied shortly. "And yet you're still here, interrupting my work."

"Actually, there is another reason for my being here," Harry said, attempting to restore some of his equilibrium.

"Oh goodie," Draco muttered.

“I want to order a book. I’m going to be covering Trigger Curses with the sixth years after Christmas, and my friend Nick Mansfield has just published a book on cursed tombs which I think will be really useful.”

“Very well,” Draco sighed. “Melanie, supply Professor Potter with the necessary form.”

As his assistant hurried off to find the right bit of paperwork and a quill for Harry, Draco stared obstinately at a scratch on the desk, not wishing to be drawn into further conversation. He watched Harry filling out the request form from the corner of his eye, wrinkling his nose slightly at the familiar untidy scrawl.

Once Melanie had taken the completed piece of parchment, Harry hesitated and coughed nervously, but when Draco refused to acknowledge him he sighed. “See you around, Malfoy.”

“Whatever.”

Draco could only bring himself to look up again when he knew that Potter was walking away. He watched his old enemy’s retreating form with a mixture of relief, resentment and, strangely enough, regret.

“You know Harry Potter?” Melanie said, looking up at Draco with awe.

Draco groaned in dismay and collapsed back into his chair. He could distinctly feel a tension headache building in his temples.

*

Dear Mother,

Because I love you very much, I will refrain from mentioning your treacherous letter in which you pronounced your support of a certain newly-appointed Defence teacher. Suffice to say that I was deeply aggrieved by your callous treatment of my perfectly justifiable sentiments. But on this subject, the less said the better.

Term had just started and everything seems to be going well so far. I think I am going to enjoy this new job very much. Once I feel that my assistant can cope, I'll leave her to deal with the students, and then I can start work with the books. The assistant seems to be reasonably competent, though not ideal. She keeps trying to talk to me about things outside the professional sphere, which I am trying to discourage.

I was honoured by a visit from the esteemed Harry Potter the other day. To his credit, he didn't gloat or try to lord it over me as I had feared he would. He said that he wanted to catch up with me at some point, but I soon put an end to that little idea. I mean, what could we possibly have to say to one another? It's fairly obvious what we've both been doing since school – he's become even richer and more celebrated, whereas I have lost everything and am considered the scum of the wizarding world. I suppose it might be a nice little ego-booster for him, but I'll be damned if I'm going to give him that pleasure.

I'm glad that you're doing all right. I was surprised to hear about Father's enthusiasm for gardening! I've never taken him for someone with green fingers, but I'm glad he's found something to keep him occupied. It will be good for him. I hope that you're not feeling too lonely. I'm going to send you some money as soon as I get paid. I don't need very much and it makes me feel better if I can help you out a bit. No arguments. I miss you very much.

Lots of love,

Draco.

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Chapter 3: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'The Living Torch' by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

My Dearest Draco,

Wretched boy! Infernal issue of my loins! Bane of my existence! There are times when I am thoroughly ashamed to call you my son. I can only imagine how you must have treated that poor boy. He plucked up the courage to come and talk to you, and you acted like a complete beast, didn't you? Well, I'm sure you're right – Harry Potter certainly won't try to talk to you again after that. Why must you insist on alienating yourself all the time? And why must you be so mistrustful? I'm sure that Harry has no plans to humiliate you or make you feel bad. Perhaps he was simply feeling a little lonely or insecure, and wanted someone to talk to. Perhaps he wishes to forget about your old rivalry. You are the one who is always talking about making a fresh start – is it so impossible that he wants the same thing?

Not everyone in the world is driven by underhand motives. Not everyone is undeserving of a little trust. I hope that some day you can learn that kindness still exists among the human race. I hope you can learn to trust, and form friendships, and allow yourself to love. Because, Draco, I believe you are capable of so much love. Your devotion to your father and myself proves that.

Thank you so much for your offer of money. I can't say that it wouldn't be useful, but do keep enough for yourself, won't you? I hate to think of you going without because of us.

Things are quite pleasant here. All the leaves are changing colour, although it is still quite warm. Your father and I have been out for some nice walks. He has had a very good week (no funny turns) and is very proud of his new vegetable garden. I am surprised by his interest in gardening too! It just goes to show that something good can always be found in times of misfortune – if we had continued our life of luxury in England, Father's horticultural talents would have gone quite undiscovered. He's been asking after you, and is pleased about your promotion.

I'm glad that work is going well. Do try to be kind to your poor assistant! I bet you've been terrorizing the poor girl, haven't you? And what, exactly, is wrong with being on friendly terms with your co-workers? You never know, you might find that the two of you get on quite well. Have you been to visit Severus yet? At least I know that you will talk to him. I don't want you getting too lonely. Give him my best, won't you? I miss you too.

Love from,

Your Devoted Mother.

*

"But I don't want to be Voldemort!" Draco heard the small first year boy whine.

Draco was ensconced in an alcove at the side of one of the castle's courtyards, practically hidden from view, eating an apple. He was taking a brief lunch break and had gone outside to get a little fresh air, which was how he found himself the unobserved witness to two small boys who were evidently playing a game of 'Harry and Voldemort.' Draco was filled with uncanny sensations watching the two children merrily enact events which they were too young to remember. The horrors of the war still stood out in Draco's mind with chilling clarity, and part of him wanted to reprimand the boys for making it into something so trivial. However, another part of him just wanted to let them play. Let them keep their innocence, he thought. Let them stay ignorant of the world's evils. They will learn soon enough. And so he sat and watched, but it made him feel strange. It made him feel very old.

"You always make me be Voldemort!" the first boy continued to protest. "Can't I be Harry this time?" Draco could understand the reasons for his upset – with his golden curls and big blue eyes, the boy could not have made a more inappropriate representation of the terrible dark wizard if he had tried.

"No," his companion replied imperiously. "I wear glasses; therefore I get to be Harry Potter."

“But it’s not fair!” the other whined. “Couldn’t I just borrow your glasses for a bit?”

“Certainly not!” came the reply. “They’re prescription! Besides, my mum says I’m not allowed to let anyone else touch them, because I lent my last pair to my cousin Philius and he charmed them so that they walked about, and they got all scratched.”

“Mummy’s boy,” his friend muttered mulishly.

“I don’t care what you say,” the second boy said obstinately. “You’re still not being Harry Potter.”

“But Voldemort always dies! He’s so lame!” came the response. “I’m sick of being smelly old Voldemort. I’ll only do it this time if I get to win.”

“What? But… that defeats the whole point! Voldemort never wins, you know that!”

“Well, that’s the only way you’re going to get me to play.”

The second boy, seeing that the game was going nowhere at this rate, issued a compromise. “Why don’t we go and find Lucy? She won’t mind being Voldemort and then you could be Ron Weasley.”

The first boy considered this for a moment, then said, “All right. And if Hannah’s with her, she could be Hermione Granger!”

Fuelled with fresh enthusiasm, the two boys ran off to find their friends.

Draco came out of his hiding place and threw his apple core in the corner for the birds to eat. It was time he headed back to the library. He had always been very grateful that, when witnessing children playing

war games, he had never come across anyone taking on the role of himself. Clearly he hadn't been a prolific enough character, for which he was exceedingly grateful. Children weren't told stories of Death Eater Draco.

They soon picked things up though, he mused sadly. As if to demonstrate the point, he passed a group of fifth year girls who all narrowed their eyes at him and whispered furtively to one another. Draco was used to it. He had given up on the dream that he would be able to erase his past. Other people were never going to let him forget. Even if pupils arrived at Hogwarts innocent of the part he had played in the war, they were soon enlightened by the older ones. Draco was aware that McGonagall had received several angry letters from parents who were horrified that she had employed a former Death Eater, after being told the librarian's name by their offspring. Draco had hardened himself to it. It didn't really hurt that much any more; it just reaffirmed his belief that he was better off on his own.

Once back in the sanctuary of the library, Draco returned to the third level where he had been working before lunch. The floor was home to the library's archives, where various records, journals and documents were kept. They were in a dreadful state – some had obviously not been tidied for decades – and Draco was in the process of putting them in order. Thankfully he could now trust Melanie with the everyday running of the library while he worked. He had been pleasantly surprised by how quickly she had picked things up over the past couple of weeks, and was starting to believe that he had been right to hire her after all.

Draco seated himself on the floor beside the crate he was going through. He knew that in an hour's time he would be grimy with the centuries' worth of dust which covered the documents, but his excitement overruled any grievance he might have felt. He had only been going through the archives for a couple of days, and already he had uncovered some real gems. He set his ink, quill and parchment ready to record his findings, looking forward to the time when everything would be properly ordered and accounted for. Yes, Draco thought as he settled to work, under his command Hogwarts library would be a wonder to behold.

*

It was only when Melanie came to tell Draco that it was time to close the library for the night that he realised how late it was. He had been so absorbed in what he was doing that he had unintentionally missed dinner, and only now realised that he was hungry. He locked up quickly with the vague idea of

going down to the kitchens and seeing if the house-elves could supply him with something.

He had almost reached the Entrance Hall when, for the third time that term, the sight of Harry Potter sent Draco running for cover. He wondered if this was how it would be at Hogwarts from now on, continually playing these ridiculous games of hide-and-seek with Harry, always paranoid that he was going to run into the other man. And why was it that Potter always seemed to turn up at the worst possible moments? There Draco was, covered in dust, black smudges of filth all over his face and cobwebs in his hair. Seeing as the last time Potter had seen him Draco had been hiding under a desk, he wasn't especially keen to present himself looking as if he had been living in someone's attic for the last week. He quickly secreted himself behind the door of a storage cupboard, and waited for the Defence teacher to pass.

Draco had not noticed at first, but Harry was engaged in conversation with Nearly-Headless Nick, who was gliding along beside him. They were coming into earshot now, and Draco strained to listen in spite of himself.

"Yeah, it's great to be back again," Harry was saying to his ghostly companion. "Hogwarts is the first real home I ever knew. I never realised how much I'd missed being here until I came back. And this time I can actually relax and enjoy the experience without having to worry about fulfilling prophesies or being killed by psychopaths. That's never fun."

"It's wonderful to have you back, my boy," Nick enthused. "And the students? They are treating you well?"

"Everything's great; I think that teaching really might be my true calling. The kids are fantastic – they all really want to learn. Of course there are some smart-arses who want to try and get the better of me, but nothing I can't handle. I'm a lot less hot-headed than I used to be." Harry laughed easily.

"I knew you would do well!" Nick cried. "I confess, I always hoped you would return to us one day. And what of Miss Granger and Mr Weasley? You are still friends with them, I hope?"

"Of course!" Harry replied. "They've been married for almost five years now; I'm godfather to their little

boy. I'm going down to London this weekend to see them."

"Do send them my regards, won't you? It's always pleasant to hear that ex-Gryffindor students are doing well. And what of the others? Are you still in touch with anyone else?"

The two were slowly moving out of Draco's hearing, but he heard enough to be able to tell that Harry was still in close contact with many of his old cronies. It sent a pang of loneliness to Draco's heart to hear the genuine warmth in Harry's voice when he spoke of his friends. These were people he really liked. He was obviously so secure in his friendships, confident in his friends' affection for him and his ability to turn to them whenever he wanted, just as they could always turn to him. Draco envied the other man's capacity for friendship and affection, his ability to attract decent, loyal people. Draco had never had that ability.

Draco could still remember the feelings of shock and hurt pride, of utter incomprehension, with which he had been afflicted on that very first trip to Hogwarts when Harry had bluntly refused his friendship. Back then, he had scorned the Gryffindor. He had concluded that Harry clearly wasn't special or smart, and that he obviously didn't deserve the friendship of someone like Draco. What an idiot Potter was – he was choosing friends regardless of wealth or influence, regardless even of the purity of their wizarding stock. Where on earth would Lucius be, Draco had thought, if he only associated with people who were nice or fun to be with? Draco doubted if his father even liked any of his friends. Well, Draco was a smart boy. He had learnt from his father that the only way to succeed in life was to stick to the company of people who could actually offer him something, whether it be protection, social advancement or even just collusion with his ideas or plans. Those kinds of things actually meant something, and if Potter didn't understand that… well, more fool him.

Draco had smugly observed Potter's various feuds with his unsavoury companions. His friends never disagreed with him. He had laughed whenever Weasley showed up in shabby robes, or Granger mentioned her Muggle parents. Draco's friends would never show him up in public. Until the age of sixteen, he had never considered the fact that he was lonely. He had not been bred for introspection. He had been constantly surrounded by people who protected and adored him, people who agreed with everything he ever said. How could he possibly be lonely?

In the end, it had only been when Draco was faced with the horrible realisation that perhaps he did not agree with Voldemort's principles after all, that perhaps he wasn't as strong as he had thought, that he started to question the friendships he had formed. And with good reason. As the Malfoys' status had fallen among the ranks, Draco had become aware of conversations that ended abruptly when he entered

the room, of eyes which looked at him with doubt. Even Crabbe and Goyle had started to become mutinous, questioning his authority. And of course, Draco had had no one he could confide in about his fears and unhappiness. The best he had been able to find was some Mudblood ghost in a toilet. It had been pathetic. He had started to wonder whether Potter hadn't been right all along.

Of course he had, Draco thought bitterly as he made his way back to his rooms, his appetite deadened. Draco had been alone all along. He had not realised that the people he had so carefully selected as his friends had chosen him for exactly the same reasons. Draco Malfoy had been rich, influential, the son of a Death Eater who could trace his wizarding ancestry back to the Norman Conquest. He was a valuable friend for any opportunistic young witch or wizard to possess. Draco wondered now whether any of the people who had flocked around him, showering him with praise and laughing at his jokes, had ever even liked him. They had probably been sneering at him on the inside, even as they looked at him with admiration and professed their undying loyalty.

Draco remembered how part of him hadn't even been surprised when Crabbe and Goyle rebelled against him on the night of the final battle. Throughout that terrible last year Draco had become increasingly withdrawn and isolated, unable to speak of the horror he felt, or of his intense desire to escape. He knew that his friends made no effort to seek out his company any more, but had been so preoccupied with fears for himself and his family that he hadn't given it much care. He did remember being shocked by the sadistic pleasure Crabbe and Goyle had felt when exacting punishments on transgressive students. They did it out of pure enjoyment, whereas Draco, endowed with more intelligence and sensitivity than anyone had realised, suddenly shrank from cruelty. And then his sometime comrades had left him in no doubt of his position. They had told him that he was nothing to them, that his words were meaningless and he himself no longer possessed any influence over them. Minutes later, Vincent Crabbe had died.

Draco had never seen Goyle again after that night. He had heard a rumour that the other boy had gone to America with a few other Voldemort sympathisers who had managed to escape imprisonment. Draco had no idea what Goyle might have done over there. Nothing good, he was sure.

He had had similar treatment at the hands of his other associates. He had written to Blaise Zabini just after the Malfoys had lost their fortune, asking him for help. Blaise had not even bothered to reply. Draco knew that he was now a prominent figure on the social circuit, the darling of gossip columnists everywhere for his good looks and his ability to go through women and money at a lightening pace. His face often appeared on the society pages of the Daily Prophet. More often than not, Draco would use these particular pages to line the bottom of his owl's cage.

These experiences had certainly left Draco feeling jaded, and had also practically shattered his once indefatigable self-confidence. The realisation that he had simply never been likeable, that he had been deluded in his confidence in the support of his friends, had shaken him badly. It was for this reason as much as any that he had kept to himself at Beauxbatons. After all this time, he wasn't even sure he knew how to make a real friend.

The final blow, the complete termination of all Draco's hopes for finding true friendship, came on his return to England. He had just started work at Gringotts, and had been passing through the foyer one morning when he had seen Theo Nott at the desk, talking to one of the goblins.

Theo, who had never been personally linked with any Death Eater activity, had done very well for himself after Hogwarts. He had already made his first million from his international Portkey business - promising the fastest method of magical long-distance travel ever - entitled 'Rate of Notts.' Theo had been the one schoolmate of Draco's whom he could say that he had honestly liked. He had been quiet and intelligent, good to just sit with when Draco had grown tired of the sycophants. They had got on very well; Theo was the one person whom Draco had not felt the need to boast to. Upon seeing him again, Draco had felt a little surge of pleasure, of tentative hope that finally his isolation might be assuaged a little bit. Theo had liked him. Theo would surely be happy about going for a coffee at some point and having a chat.

At that moment Theo had looked over at Draco, who had smiled and given a small wave. There could have been no doubt that Theo had seen him, no doubt at all. However, apart from going slightly pink, he had given Draco no acknowledgement. He had abruptly turned his attention back to the attractive blonde witch accompanying him and led her briskly out of the bank. Furiously blinking back tears of hurt, Draco had returned to his desk. That was it: he was through with people. The whole stinking lot of them could go to hell for all he cared. Apart from his parents he couldn't trust anyone, and he wasn't going to try any more.

At least he had Snape, Draco thought to himself as he closed the door to his rooms. Snape wasn't going to sneer at him. Well, no more than Snape sneered at everyone, at least. Snape had been subject to the same mistrust and scorn that Draco now faced.

And he had his books. Draco looked over to his personal shelves, which housed volumes by all his favourite authors. He ran his eyes over the various titles and immediately felt himself comforted. Would Henry James have been able to write such beautiful prose if he had been happy? Would Rachilde have been able to conjure up such dark dreamscapes if she had been surrounded by devoted friends who had understood and cherished her? Would the mighty Baudelaire have been able to conjure such passages of

agonizing beauty, such descriptions of tortured dement which pulsed through the reader's brain long afterwards, if he had been contented? If he had not been scorned, derided, cast out by his wizarding family for consorting with Muggles? Of course not. True genius was bred by isolation and subjugation. No great work of art that Draco could think of was ever the product of a contented soul. Those great writers of the past were his kindred spirits, his brethren; those books were Draco's gateway to companionship and solace. He picked out Gautier's Clarimonde from the selection and curled up in his armchair with it, ignoring the fresh pangs of hunger in his stomach. Then, consciously blotting out the painful memories which his sighting of Harry had elicited, he began to read.

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After his surly treatment of the Defence teacher on the first day of term, Draco was more than a little surprised when, the week after he had overheard the conversation with Sir Nicholas, Harry came to talk to him again.

Draco had almost finished sorting through the archives. The previous day he had, to his great delight, stumbled across the diaries of Helga Hufflepuff herself, stashed at the bottom of a chest which looked as if it had stood undisturbed for centuries. He had also come across scrolls of beautifully decorated manuscripts from the thirteenth century, which contained an account of Eleanor de Normandie's defeat of the dark sorceress, Aethelbred. He had gained McGonagall's permission to order several glass-topped cabinets in which to display these treasures. Draco felt, with a mixture of pride and incredulity, that he must be the first truly efficient librarian to grace Hogwarts since it had been built.

As a result, his mood was far more cheerful than usual as he rounded off his work on the third floor. He was gazing at his minutely-detailed list of the archive contents, unable to decide whether to arrange them all chronologically, thematically or alphabetically, when he heard footsteps behind him. Draco turned and, with a peculiar rush or adrenaline, saw Harry Potter standing behind him. He felt himself grow tense, and he quickly turned his eyes back to his parchment, trying to gather his thoughts for this unexpected meeting.

He swallowed. "Can I help you with anything, Mr Potter?"

"Not in the strictest sense," Harry replied. "I just hadn't seen you for a while. Melanie said you'd be up

here. Nice girl, that."

Draco didn't say anything. He stared determinedly at his list, caught between annoyance at Potter's interruption, embarrassment that he couldn't think of anything to say, and a strange, slightly discomforting desire for Harry to stay.

At length, Harry spoke again. "It's nice up here. Minerva said that you've found some amazing things – I'd love to have a look at them when they're ready. Do you know, I don't think I've ever been up here before?"

"Hardly surprising," Draco muttered, adopting his surly tone more out of a feeling of obligation than any real desire to offend.

"I know," Harry replied in good humour. "I wasn't exactly the most dedicated student, was I?"

Draco was uncomfortable. He didn't like this, this desire for Potter to stay and talk to him. It was straying into dangerous territory. Being friendly with Potter was only asking for trouble. Besides, why did he even want to talk to Potter, of all people? He knew perfectly well that being with the other man only made him feel pathetic and ashamed. Just because Potter was being nice to him, there was no reason to let common sense fly out of the window. After all, Draco had been misled by friendliness before.

"I'm very busy at the moment," he said curtly.

"So I've gathered," Harry replied, seemingly oblivious to Draco's dangerous tone. "You're doing an amazing job here. It'd be nice to see you at mealtimes, though. You should give yourself a bit of a break once in a while."

"I don't need career advice from you, Potter," Draco snapped. "And I take no pleasure from eating with others. I am very fond of my job and I am quite happy not to have breaks, thank you very much."

Harry observed him for a moment. “No offence meant, Malfoy. It’s good that you love your job so much. I’m glad.”

What the hell was wrong with the idiot? Why wasn’t he being deterred by Draco’s cold manner, and going away? Why did Harry want to talk to him so much anyway? Good grief, now he was actually sitting down on the wooden crate beside him!

“It’s very easy,” Harry continued, “to get stuck in the job you think you should be doing, or the job that’s the easiest to get into, rather than thinking about what it is you’d enjoy most. That’s what happened to me. I’d always planned to be an Auror, and that’s what everyone expected me to do after Riddle died. I mean, I didn’t dislike the work, and I was pretty good at it, but… I don’t know. I realised pretty quickly that, while I may have a natural predisposition for fighting evil… it was more like the job had chosen me rather than the other way round. And I got so tired of fighting and being in danger all the time. I was tired of having to go to all those public events, of being who everyone wanted me to be.”

Harry paused, and Draco risked a glance at him. He looked troubled, and he was absent-mindedly running his fingers along the grains of wood on his crate. Draco watched him slowly tracing the whorls, and couldn’t help thinking how nice Harry’s hands were. Mark’s hands had always been a bit rough, and… but he wasn’t going to think about Mark. Especially not now.

“I’d been thinking more and more over the past year about teaching,” Harry said, causing Draco to jump slightly. “I mean, I still wanted a job where I could use my knowledge about the Dark Arts, but I didn’t necessarily want to fight any more. I was sick of it. I kept remembering how much I’d enjoyed running those D.A. meetings at school, and how rewarding it had been to actually teach people and watch them develop new skills, to know that they would be better prepared to defend themselves because of me. It had felt great. I thought it was just a pipe-dream, though. I guess part of me was scared to take the risk, and to let everyone down, disappoint their expectations. But then I saw the ad for this job in the Prophet. I talked it over with Ron and Hermione, said how I was feeling, and they talked me into applying. It was pretty scary. A lot of people were angry with me for quitting as an Auror, and I was so scared that I’d mess up and have everyone say ‘I told you so’. But you can’t just live your life as other people want you to, you know? You have to do what makes you happy. Like the two of us.”

Draco looked up at the other man. He felt very strange, as if a part of his soul he had thought was dead had suddenly been awakened. He had a horrible urge to start talking to Harry, to tell him all about his life and the mistakes he had made and his dreams and desires. He had a wild feeling that Harry would understand. But that was stupid. It was dangerous to start thinking thoughts like that. It would only lead

him to more pain, and Draco didn't think he could cope with that.

"I would like it very much," Harry said slowly, his eyes following his finger which still traced the wood patterns on the crate, "if we could get together some time. You know, go for a drink when you're not quite so busy."

Potter's words caused a feeling akin to panic to rise up in Draco's chest. "I'm always busy," he replied harshly. "And I have no desire to go for a drink. Or talk to you."

Harry looked disappointed and a little hurt, but not surprised. He stood up and, giving Draco a brief, crooked smile, turned to leave.

Draco found himself feeling guilty. He couldn't see how Potter could possibly want to spend time with him of all people, especially as he already had plenty of friends who were nice and respectable. He must have some underhand motive which Draco could not as yet divine. Nevertheless, he felt bad for being so rude. Must be getting soft in my old age, he thought. After all, ten years ago he would have taken great pleasure in being rude to Harry Potter.

Another thought suddenly announced itself to him. He remembered that he had wanted to ask Potter something for weeks, and had been wondering how he might approach the other man with the subject. Now was as good a time as ever, Draco reasoned, and he might as well get it over and done with. Especially as Potter certainly wouldn't be seeking out his company again after this latest venting of spleen. Draco jumped to his feet and hurried downstairs.

He caught sight of his quarry on the second floor, about to descend one of the winding staircases. "Potter!" he hissed, quickening his pace. "Potter!"

Harry turned and waited for Draco to catch up with him. "Malfoy?"

Draco felt himself flush, and was unable to look Harry in the eye, contenting himself with gazing steadfastly at the other man's shoe. "I… I want to ask you something," he said.

“Okay.”

“My… my mother wrote me a letter a few weeks back, just after you had been appointed as the new Defence teacher. She told me something, and I want to know if she was right. She said that you were the reason that my father wasn’t sent back to Azkaban.” Draco said this quickly, wanting to get the experience out of the way. “Is it true?”

Harry paused. Draco saw his foot shift slightly. Then, so quietly that Draco almost missed it, “Yes, it is.”

Unable to help himself, Draco looked up at the other man. “Why?”

It was Harry’s turn to look away. “I did it for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I thought that your family had suffered from the allegiance with Tom Riddle far enough. Secondly, I owed it to your mum.”

Draco gaped at him. “What? What could you possibly owe to my mother?”

Harry looked back again, and Draco found himself astonished by how very green the other man’s eyes were. Harry gave him a small smile. “My life.”

Draco’s mind reeled. Impossible! “What?”

Harry looked away awkwardly. “I think, perhaps, you’d better ask her. It’s her place to say, not mine. But yes, your mum saved my life once, and I never got the chance to thank her. It made me think that perhaps I should break the chain of enmity with your family. So I asked Kingsley to let the three of you escape criminal charges. It’s the only time I have ever used my influence to get something done like that.” Harry sighed. “I’m glad I did it. Especially now.”

He made as if to leave, but then thought better of it and turned back to the dumbstruck Draco. “I’m not

giving up, by the way. I'll keep asking you for a drink until you agree." He smiled roguishly. "You should know of old that opposition only increases my persistence, Malfoy."

Draco felt as if something large was stuck in his throat. He felt himself pinioned by Harry's green eyes, eyes which seemed to strip Draco of all his barriers and penetrate to his raw, trembling soul. He felt himself flush again, and he struggled to draw breath. By the time he had regained his self-control, Harry was gone.

Draco ran a shaky hand through his hair. He briefly contemplated returning to the archives, but decided against it. He was too unnerved for even the pleasure of cross-referencing to calm him. He determined instead that he would go down to the office, have a cup of tea and think about what Harry had told him.

He passed a table of seventh year students on the way, and even his preoccupied state could not block out the loud whisper saying, "It's good, you know, that our new Defence teacher takes his job so seriously. Certain people need to have a close watch on them. I wouldn't be surprised if we get a new librarian before the year is out."

Draco felt a chill pass though him, and swiftly walked away from the table. Could that be what Harry was up to? Was he trying to get close to Draco in order to find out something bad about him and get him sacked? Well, if that was the case, he would be disappointed. Draco hadn't done anything wrong, not for a long time. But… was Harry scheming against him? Surely he had better things to do. It is hardly surprising that by the time he had reached the safety of his office, poor Draco's mind was in tumult, and he wasn't sure which train of thought he should follow first. The revelation about his mother? Harry's desire to spend time with him? The horrible possibility that Harry was trying to deceive him? He pressed his hot forehead against the misted-up window and drew a shaky breath. Draco felt that on this occasion, even a nice cup of tea would not do him much good.

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"So, what do you think it all means?" Draco asked. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the Trophy Room where he had been for the past half hour, pouring out his worries and discombobulations concerning the behaviour of Harry Potter.

Snape affected a start. “Oh, I’m so sorry, Mr Malfoy, had you finished? I’m afraid my mind started to wander during your soliloquy on the fine quality of Potter’s shoes.”

Draco scowled, although he knew the Potions master was only teasing him. “Okay, I get the point. I apologise for rambling. Might I remind you that you are the only person in this wretched establishment I can actually talk to? It’s little wonder that I go on a bit.”

“I’m honoured,” Snape replied, his voice heavy with sarcasm.

Draco sighed fretfully. “Look, as much as I enjoy these little verbal sparring matches, I do actually have a serious problem here. What the hell is Potter up to?”

Snape looked down at him with incredulity. “You expect me to have an insight into the cobweb-infested mind of that self-righteous, glory-seeking fool of a Defence teacher?”

Draco was about to protest that Harry was neither glory-seeking nor a fool, before stopping himself, faintly horrified by the way his mind was working. He pressed his lips together and studied his own knees for a moment before speaking again. “I just thought you might have heard something. The other portraits must talk – maybe they’ve said something about Potter? Maybe they know something? I just… don’t get why Potter’s doing this. Why the hell would he want to spend time with me, when I spent the best part of my school career trying to make him miserable? Why is he being so nice?”

Snape sighed. “I don’t know. I do not care to pay heed to the idle chatter of the other portraits, but I doubt that they would have anything useful to tell. However, I think you are correct in your assumption that Potter would have better things to do than to gain your trust in order to destroy you. Why would an acclaimed Auror give everything up just to investigate a librarian, who poses no threat to anyone? You have been living a quiet, solitary life for years and there are no indications that you still have unsavoury alliances. As a target, you are beneath his concern. And, much as I am loathe to say anything positive about the boy, I do not think Potter capable of descending to underhand tactics just to avenge an old schoolboy grudge.”

Draco rubbed his palm across his forehead in frustration. “Then what the hell is he up to?”

“Perhaps,” Snape said wearily, “he is simply asking you out for a drink. I hear that it’s what normal people like to do in their spare time. They go out, they talk, they swap tedious anecdotes, they laugh, they go home. The world continues to spin on its axis. It is hardly the international crisis you seem to think. Who knows why Potter is being friendly. Who cares? Refuse, if you like. Or accept. Merlin knows, it might do you good to get out once in a while. Then perhaps you would stop plaguing me with ridiculous questions.”

“I hate Potter,” Draco mumbled half-heartedly.

Snape made a loud noise of frustration. “Then keep refusing him! Let him request your company until he is blue in the face! Now please, can we move away from this increasingly tedious topic of conversation?”

Draco sighed. “Yes. Sorry. And you’re sure you haven’t heard anything about what happened with Potter and my mother?”

“No,” Snape said slowly. “This is the first I have ever heard of it. It does seem strange, though. You don’t think it could have happened that night Potter came to the manor?”

Draco considered this, then shook his head. “No, she wouldn’t have had a chance. I’m guessing that it must have happened on the night of the final battle.”

Snape nodded. “I’m afraid I wouldn’t be of much use to you in that case. I did not see Narcissa that night. And I was a little preoccupied. What with my untimely death and all.”

“Right,” Draco replied. “Sorry. I guess I’ll just have to ask her about it. I hadn’t wanted to; I hate bringing up stuff about the war with her. She gets so sad. She’s never mentioned anything about it to me before, so I guess she thought it was something I didn’t need to know about. It seems wrong somehow, making her go through it all just to satisfy my curiosity.”

“Yes,” Snape agreed, “but you will never be able to rest until you know the truth, will you? And it is her place to say. Write to her.”

Draco got up to leave. “Thank you. And I’m sorry for going on for so long about Potter.”

“So you should be,” Snape said dryly. “I am pleased your work is going well at least, and that your assistant seems happy to deal with all the ghastly children for you.”

Draco smiled. “She’ll do. I think the students would much rather deal with her anyway.”

Snape raised an eyebrow. “Still being demonised?”

“I don’t care,” Draco replied in as offhand a voice as he could manage. “I don’t need their good opinion. I’m not doing anything wrong. The rest of the world can hate me and sneer at me and turn me into a monster as much as they like; as long as I know I’m doing the right thing, that’s all that matters.”

“Yes, well,” Snape said darkly, “it’s that kind of thinking that leads to getting killed by a snake.”

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Dear Mother,

Here is the money I promised. Don’t worry about me – my needs are small and I am a lot happier if I know that you and Father are all right. I am glad that he’s doing better at the moment.

Mother, I need to ask you something. I'm sorry if it causes you any pain, but I need to know the truth. I have always trusted you to be honest with me, but I've just been told something so unexpected that I… but I'll start at the beginning. You recall that you recently informed me of the gratitude we owe to Harry Potter for our escape from arrest. It had been preying on my mind and, earlier today, an opportunity presented itself for me to ask him about it. He told me that it was all true, and that the main reason he did it was to show his gratitude to you. Mother, he told me that you saved his life. I pressed him for more information, but he told me that it wasn't his place to say.

What the hell is going on? When did you save Potter's life? I know you've never mentioned it before, but it is true, isn't it? I'm sorry if this letter upsets you; I don't mean it to cause you any pain, but I need to know the truth.

Surprisingly enough, Potter continues to be pleasant towards me. He came to see me of his own volition earlier and practically started telling me his life story while I was finishing off the work on the third floor. He wants me to go out for a drink with him at some point. I realise that I risk receiving another epistolary tirade, but I'm not going to go. I know you'll say that I'm shutting myself off and being miserable, but I can't help it. Life has taught me that people cannot be trusted. Yes, it's lonely, but it's better than getting attached to people and having them hurt me. I can't cope with that any more. It's just not worth the risk.

Mother, you amaze me. How can you remain so positive and write to me about love and goodness, when you have been hurt as much as I have? Didn't all your friends turn their backs on you? Haven't people proven themselves to be essentially self-serving and treacherous? Do you even believe those things you write, or are you just saying them to make me feel better? If so, you had better save your ink. It's too late for me. I have given up on humanity, and I can't see myself ever seeking out the friendship of others again. So there. Potter, I'm afraid, will have to forego the pleasure of my company.

Yes, I have been to see Severus. He is acerbic as ever – I think we are very well suited. Melanie, my assistant, seems to be a good enough sort of girl. She hasn't made too many mistakes so far, and I believe I am curing her of her verbal diarrhoea. Give my love to Father – I'll be sure to buy him a trowel and some secateurs for Christmas.

All my love,

Your Devoted Son.

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Chapter 4: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'Danse Macabre' by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

My Dear Draco,

I am sorry for not replying to your letter straight away – I know that you must have been impatient for an answer. I'm afraid I have had a bit of trouble finding the words; your letter gave me quite a shock. I received it while I was at breakfast with your father, and I had to make an excuse and leave the room. You know how upset he can get if he thinks I'm distressed.

Now, I don't want you to feel bad about it. I was very glad that you told me what you had discovered, and you have every right to want answers. Yes, everything Mr Potter said is true in a fashion. On the night of the final battle I was in the forest with Lord Voldemort, your father and several other Death Eaters. I knew that you would be up at the castle; I knew that a battle was raging as we sat there; I knew that you were in terrible danger. I was desperately worried about you. I had no idea if you were alive or dead, and I wanted more than anything to go and find you, but I didn't dare. Voldemort would never have permitted it, and any sign of subordination would have put our family in even greater danger. We sat there, waiting for Harry Potter. At length he came to us, and Voldemort hit him with the Killing Curse. He fell. I was asked to check that he really was dead, and to my great surprise, I found that he was still breathing.

Draco, you know what that year had been like. You know what our family had gone through. You know how your father bitterly regretted his association with Voldemort. If I had dared, if I had thought I would be successful, I would have torn the bastard apart with my bare hands. I wanted him finished for what he

had done to us. When I knew Potter was still alive, I knew that there was still hope. He had survived the Killing Curse twice – if anyone could defeat Voldemort it was him.

Bending down as if to check that he was still breathing, I asked him if he had seen you and if you were alive. I barely heard his reply it was so quiet, but it gave me all the strength I needed to finally defy Voldemort. I heard him breathe the word, 'Yes.' I turned back to the others, full of the type of courage only a mother's love can inspire. I masked all my loathing and fear and misery with a triumphant smile, and told the son-of-a-bitch who had destroyed our family's happiness that Potter was dead. The supposed corpse was taken up to the castle and… you know what followed.

This is an honest account of what happened that night, when I saved Harry Potter's life. I am sorry I didn't tell you about it before; I wanted to forget. I never wanted to think about those horrible two years, all those deaths, all that fear, ever again. I think I had almost forgotten about it. I believe that your father and I had scarcely noticed that there was a fearsome battle going on around us that night, as we desperately searched the castle. All we cared about was finding you and keeping you safe.

I wanted Voldemort gone. I don't think I ever really thought about it as saving Harry's life – at least, not in the way he talks of it. Not as something noble. I never expected any thanks from him, any acknowledgement even. If anything, I thought of it as a small way of compensating for all our family had done to him – and it was so unexpected that he took it as he did, and looked out for us afterwards. It makes me want to cry. I hope that you are not angry with me.

I am sorry that you cannot take up Potter's offer of reconciliation. I do believe that you could trust him, but I understand your wariness. I know how badly you have been hurt, and I can't help but blame myself. If we had not raised you to be so proud, to choose your friends so snobbishly, things may have been better. I don't think that any of us were really happy in our days of prosperity, do you? I think we fooled ourselves that we were because we were rich and because people wanted to associate themselves with us… but none of it was real. I think that's why I used to throw so many benefits and went shopping so often, went to some many boring lunches. I always had to be doing something to distract myself from that little niggle that there was something missing. Of course I loved you and your father, but so much of my life back then seemed trivial and insincere. Including the people I was friends with.

In answer to your second question, yes, I do believe what I said about friendship and the goodness in people. True, I was promptly dropped by all my old friends when we were in difficulties, but I don't think – as much as their rejection stung me at the time – that I really cared for their company anyway. My life now is so different. I have so much time – time for soul-searching, for discovering who I really am, for

regret at a life misspent. But in spite of all that, I think my life is better now. It is true. And there are good people in the world – I told you that my sister and I have been in touch recently. She has chosen to forgive all that I did to her in my pride, and wants to start anew. I believe that Harry Potter might be like that too.

I know you have suffered. I know that what you have experienced has taught you the cruelty of the world. And perhaps good, honest people whom you can lean on are few and far between, but they are out there! It makes me sad to see you giving up on this world and resigning yourself to loneliness when you, unlike me, still have your whole life ahead of you to turn things around! But it is up to you. I know my words cannot heal your broken heart. All I can do is repent for the part I had to play in causing it.

My love, as always,

Your Mother.

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The castle doors creaked loudly as they closed, in spite of Draco's best attempts to keep as quiet as possible. He hesitated for a moment, waiting for the echo to die away. It seemed sacrilegious somehow, making noise on a morning like this. Everything was so still and beautiful. The world was still asleep. Draco was unsure of the exact time, but he knew it must be very early; the sun had not yet risen and a few stars still spangled the brightening sky. The castle grounds were enveloped in a blanket of mist. Draco leaned back against the door and took a deep breath full of the cold, early November air. It was chill but very fresh, and Draco could tell that it was going to be a beautiful day. The coldness awakened him, refreshed him, soothed his fuggy head and tired, prickly eyes.

Draco had not slept that night. He had read Narcissa's letter over and over, the emotions which it caused making all thoughts of rest impossible. He had had no idea of the part his mother had played in the war. He had never thought to ask what she and Lucius had done that night before they found him; after the battle they had all reached an unspoken agreement never to discuss it. Draco was astonished at his mother's courage, at this solid proof of her love for him. Of course, he had always know that she was a much braver person than he was. He was so proud of her. And he felt guilty for making her re-live it, for

opening up old wounds.

Draco set out across the lawns, his feet leaving prints in the frosty grass. Exhausted as he was, he wanted to walk. He wanted to walk, either until the horrible knot inside him undid itself or until he actually collapsed from fatigue. He allowed his feet to take him wherever they would, and let his mind wander once more over the subject that had kept him awake all night, pacing his small room.

He almost wished that he hadn't found out. He wished his mother hadn't told him about Potter's kindness to them, he wished he hadn't asked Potter why he had done it, he wished he hadn't asked his mother how she had saved Potter's life. It made everything so complicated. And it made him think about the war, which was the one thing Draco never wanted to do. He wouldn't let himself. He always avoided areas of the castle which associated themselves in his mind with what had happened after Voldemort had come back, like the corridor of the Room of Requirement. If he found himself on a spot where he knew someone had been attacked or killed, it was as if a wall descended in his brain. He would cut the train of thought off before it had even begun, almost unconsciously. It hurt too much to think about. And now he had dragged up all the old pain, all those terrible memories – for his mother as well as himself – just because he couldn't adhere to the old school motto and let sleeping dragons lie. He hated himself for causing Narcissa distress, for making her cry. This had all started with Potter coming back to the school. That night Hagrid had announced the news, when Draco had been plagued by memories he had made such an effort to repress, had been an omen of what was to come. Potter had made Draco relive the old nightmares, stopped him from moving on. This was all Potter's fault.

Draco found himself on the Quidditch pitch. He hadn't been there since his return to Hogwarts, and he was surprised to see that it was exactly as he remembered it when he had played there as a boy. It felt like lifetimes ago. There were memories and sufferings enough for a thousand years between now and then. Draco felt that in the circumstances, he probably shouldn't linger in a place which had witnessed so many fierce battles between himself and Potter; so much fuel for the hatred he bore the Gryffindor, all over a game which was meant for fun. Still, Draco was tired. He wanted to sit down for a while, and the benches in the stands proved too tempting to resist. He settled himself, wrapping his cloak around him and blowing on his frozen fingers to bring some life back to them.

Yes, he thought, his mother really was braver than him. To still have faith in human goodness, to approach his Aunt Andromeda after so many years of estrangement, would take a braver heart than his. He wished that he could be brave, if only for her sake. He hated to think that he was causing his mother unhappiness by avoiding the company of others as he did. He wished for her sake that he had the courage to put the past fully behind him, to be bright, optimistic and friendly, to believe that people wouldn't just hurt him. He wished dearly that he could write her cheerful letters of how he had spent

the weekend with his friends, of how he had been to parties and dinners, of how he had met someone and was planning on settling down. But it was never to be. Every time he thought about trying to form friendships, he felt the panic start to rise in his chest and he would hurry back to the safety of his books, who would never hurt him.

The sun was appearing over the treetops now, and Draco had to squint in order to see. Everything was bright, glittering, pure. This is how it would be, Draco mused, if he was the only person in the world. It was a nice thought.

The sun was taking the edge off the cold morning air. Draco liked the feel of it on his skin. He yawned. He really was terribly tired. He would have to go back up to the castle in a couple of hours. It was Saturday, meaning that the library opened an hour later, but Draco still had things to do. He should just stay awake till then, then take an Invigorating Draught to alleviate his fatigue. But… he was so comfortable. The thought of moving was highly unpleasant. Draco could feel himself nodding. Well, a couple of minutes wouldn't hurt…

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When Draco awoke, the sun was much higher in the sky and he had a crick in his neck. He experienced a moment of confused panic before he remembered where he was, and then he cursed silently. Why the hell had he let himself fall asleep? He hoped that he was not late for the library. He had honoured Melanie with the counter-spells to unlock the doors, so she could open up if he was late. Even so, Draco hated inefficiency, and was even less forgiving of the flaw in himself than in others. In addition, his muscles were cramped, he felt horribly groggy and he had a dry mouth. He hoped he hadn't been snoring. He wondered what it was that had woken him.

He soon found out. Someone was moving around in the changing rooms to his left. He feared at first that one of the house teams had come to practice, but it didn't sound like it. Draco could only hear one set of footsteps, and there was none of the hearty chatter indicative of school Quidditch team meetings. Draco had just resolved to get up and leave the stands before whoever it was came out and discovered him, when he heard the changing room door bang shut and, the next moment, Harry Potter walked onto the pitch, wearing Quidditch gear and carrying a broom and the box which contained the school's Quidditch balls.

Draco's stomach plummeted. Of all the people he could meet on that particular morning! Did Potter have a radar or something? Draco couldn't deal with talking to anyone right now, but least of all him. He had an irrational hope that if he kept completely still Potter wouldn't see him, but he had no such luck. Harry bent to open the box. He released the tiny Snitch first, then unbuckled the Bludgers which whistled off across the pitch. He turned to pick up his broom, noticed Draco, and blanched. Draco cringed.

"Malfoy?" Potter's voice was full of incredulity. "I certainly didn't expect to see you here!" He took in Draco's unkempt appearance. "Merlin, you haven't been out here all night, have you?"

Draco gave his best attempt at a sneer. He dearly wished he could have brushed his teeth. "Of course not. I had hoped to get a little peace by coming out here but, as is your habit, you have interrupted it."

Harry shrugged. "I always come down here on Saturday mornings. I like to have a fly before the Ravenclaw team arrive for practice. Why don't you join me sometime?"

Draco snorted contemptuously. He knew that Potter didn't realise how these words stung him, but he wanted to punish the other man nonetheless. "I don't think so," he snapped.

Harry shrugged again. "Suit yourself. Just thought it might be nice. I could certainly do with some—" he ducked to avoid a Bludger, "some competition. You were always a fantastic flyer."

Draco grew cold; Harry was mocking him. "Don't insult me, Potter. You know I was never as good as you, and there's no need to pretend otherwise."

Harry looked taken aback. "I wasn't insulting you. I don't think I necessarily was better. It was luck most of the time. The only reason Gryffindor won the cup in third year was because I had the Firebolt. You saw the Snitch first."

Draco was surprised by how candidly Harry had admitted to that. "You confess that I should have won,

then?”

“Perhaps.” Harry grinned at Draco cheekily. “I don’t regret beating you, though.”

Draco was ready with an acidic response, but was interrupted by Harry leaping backwards to avoid another Bludger attack. Draco rolled his eyes. “Why the hell have you released those infernal cannonballs?”

“Makes the game more interesting,” Harry replied lightly.

“Show off,” Draco muttered.

“Whatever. Are you sure you won’t join me for old times’ sake? You do still fly, don’t you?”

“I wasn’t aware that the two of us had any times we would care to revisit,” Draco replied coldly. “And no, I haven’t flown for some years now.”

Potter looked at him searchingly, causing Draco to drop his own gaze. “Shame,” he said at last. “You really were good.”

“I don’t need you to comment on the way I live my life,” Draco snapped.

A small flicker of irritability crossed Harry’s face. “Whatever; I was just trying to be nice. If you resent my presence so much, perhaps you should go back to the castle.”

It was the first time Potter had been abrupt with him since his return to Hogwarts and, as much as Draco knew he had deserved it, it stung him into petulance. “No,” he said, “I was here first – you leave!” He knew he was being childish, but he didn’t care. He was miserable and guilty and tired, and he wanted to

punish Potter for it.

Infuriatingly, Harry laughed. “I’m not the one who’s got my knickers in a twist! I told you – I always come here on Saturday mornings. If my company is so distasteful to you, you should leave.”

“I was here first! Therefore, if anyone leaves, it’s you.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “And why should I do what you tell me?”

Draco, much to his shame, descended to playground tactics. “I’m older than you.”

Harry snorted. “By, like, a month. It’s hardly a prodigious amount!”

“Ooh, that’s a big word, Potter. Sure you know what it means?”

“Yes, I—” Harry checked himself. “Look, this is stupid. I’m not getting into this with you. I’m going for a fly now; you can stay or go as you please, it’s nothing to me.”

Draco had got up from his seat and now joined the other man on the pitch. “Don’t just walk away from me like I’m nothing!” he snarled, slave to his irrational anger. “Why the hell did you have to come back here anyway?”

Harry turned around, his face drawn with confusion.

“Things were going so well,” Draco ranted, “and now you’ve come along and spoilt it all!” All of Draco’s resentment and frustration had reached a peak, and he could see no way of stopping it now. He didn’t care. He wanted Potter to know what he had done. “You couldn’t just let me get on with my life, could you? You couldn’t just let me forget. Things were finally starting to get better, then you came along,

dragging up the past, making me doubt what I'd achieved, making me—"

"Draco, look out!" Harry cried suddenly. "You're…"

But Draco heard no more. At that moment a Bludger hit the back of his head and he was plummeted into unconsciousness.

*

Draco was being jostled. There was a dull pain at the back of his head, he had a ringing noise in his ears, and he was being jostled. He moaned.

"Hey," a pleasant, gentle voice came from somewhere above him. "Are you waking up? Can you hear me, Draco?"

Draco moaned again. He could feel a supportive arm around his neck and shoulders, another hooked around the back of his knees. He was being carried! Well, that explained the jostling. Draco found that he didn't mind. It was rather comforting, this steady rocking, this being held. Draco couldn't remember the last time someone had held him. He made a small contented noise, and nestled his head on his carrier's broad shoulder.

"Nearly there," the pleasant voice told him. "You'll be all right once Pomfrey's seen you."

Draco would have liked to go back to sleep, but there was something nagging at him. That voice…

His head gave a particularly nasty twinge, and all that morning's events came screaming back to him. The Quidditch stands. The Bludger. Potter.

He cracked his eyes open. His vision was blurred, but he could still make out the face of Harry Potter, inches from his own. Potter was carrying him. He groaned again. “Potter,” he said, his tongue feeling very heavy in his mouth, “what the hell are you doing?”

“What, no more snuggling?” came the innocent reply.

“What the hell is going on?” Draco could see that they were travelling through the castle now. Oh God, what if someone had seen them?

“You got hit on the head by a Bludger,” Harry said. “We were on the Quidditch pitch and—”

“I know all that,” Draco interrupted testily. “What I want to know is why the hell you are carrying me in your arms like some damsel in distress!”

Harry grinned. “Would you prefer me to throw you over my shoulder, cave-man style?”

“No. What I would have preferred you to do is conjured up a stretcher and transported me to the castle in a dignified manner.”

“Oh,” Harry replied, looking a little abashed. “Um… to be honest, that never occurred to me.”

“Doesn’t surprise me,” Draco said sardonically. “How you ended up masterminding the defeat of Voldemort is nothing short of a miracle.”

Harry sighed. “I can tell you’re feeling better. It’s a shame – you’re really cute when you’re asleep.”

Draco thought it safest not to reply.

Once in the Hospital Wing, Draco quickly found himself being fussed over by Madam Pomfrey, as if for all the world he was still an eleven-year-old boy, and not twenty-six and a somewhat formidable librarian.

“Dear me,” she said as she fussed about Draco, shining lights into his eyes and casting Healing Charms on the back of head. “Dear me, the amount of Quidditch-related injuries I have to treat! It’s a very dangerous sport! Why so many young people insist on playing it is beyond me. Fancy getting yourself hit by a Bludger, you silly billy! I thought you were more sensible than that now.”

“It was my fault, Poppy,” said Harry, who was loitering around at the foot of Draco’s bed. “I was the one who had the Quidditch balls out. Malfoy and I were talking and I should have been paying more attention.”

Madam Pomfrey gave him a reproachful look, then turned back to Draco. “Well, Mr Malfoy, I think you’re going to be fine. You were lucky this time.”

“Does this mean I can go?” Draco asked, keen to get away and leave the whole embarrassing incident behind him.

Madam Pomfrey pursed her lips. “I’m afraid not; concussion can be unpredictable. I wouldn’t be doing my duty if I didn’t insist that you stay here at least for a few hours, just to make sure.”

“But I feel fine!” Draco protested. “I have to get to the library!”

“It’s okay,” Harry said. “I can run down and let Melanie know you’re indisposed. I’m sure she can take care of things by herself for today.”

“Well, that’s settled then,” Madam Pomfrey said in a tone that brooked no opposition. “I’ll leave you to

get some rest."

Draco closed his eyes tightly and lay back on the pillow, the ache in his head only adding to his irritability. He knew that Potter was still there, lingering at his bedside, but Draco didn't want to acknowledge him. This was all his fault.

"I really am sorry about the Bludger," Harry said quietly.

Draco didn't respond.

"Look… about what you were saying before you got hit…" Harry paused, and Draco finally opened his eyes and looked at him. Harry's face was troubled, his eyes downcast. "I don't know if you remember," he continued, "but you said that me coming back to Hogwarts had ruined everything for you. Draco, I… I never meant anything bad by it. If I've hurt you, I'm sorry."

Draco hated this. He didn't want Harry to apologise when he hadn't really done anything wrong. The whole situation made Draco loathe himself. Why was it that whatever Harry did, he inevitably made Draco feel worse? He wanted him to go. He wanted to be left alone in his wretchedness.

"Look, just don't bother, Potter," Draco snapped, projecting all his self-hatred onto the other man. "I don't need your apologies. I don't need anything from you. I meant what I said – you have made things worse for me. You just can't do anything without messing things up for the people around you, can you? Just… leave me alone. Stop bothering me with your pathetic attempts at friendship. It doesn't wash with me. I don't need you or anyone else."

Harry looked horribly hurt. He looked like a little boy, Draco thought, a child who had been told that no one wanted him. Then his face hardened. The corners of his mouth tightened, his eyes grew steely, and Draco recognised the revered and powerful wizard who had defeated the moat dangerous dark sorcerer of all time. "Fine," Potter said, his voice cold and abrupt. "You've made yourself perfectly clear. I'm sorry for bothering you; it won't happen again." He turned to leave the ward.

Draco was disgusted with himself. Why the hell did he have to be such a mean git? Potter was only trying

to be nice. Even if he was only being kind to Draco out of charity, he still did not deserve that kind of treatment. Draco was hateful; he felt like crying. Potter would never talk to him again. Draco suddenly realised how much that would hurt him, to have Harry hate and avoid him, like he had done when they were boys.

"Potter," he called, sick with fear that Harry would ignore him and walk out.

Harry turned around, his expression guarded.

Draco took a deep breath and closed his eyes, steeling himself or what he was about to do. "I'm sorry." There, he had said it. "I'm sorry." The words came easier the second time, and Draco was able to open his eyes and look hesitantly up at the other man. Harry still looked wary, but he wasn't sneering or walking away. Perhaps Draco hadn't blown it after all.

He sighed. "Look… I've had a bad night. I got a letter from my mother telling me what happened that night of the final battle. It just, you know, dragged up a lot of stuff about the past. I try not to think about any of that, it's too painful. I don't like to think about who I was back then. I took it out on you, and it was wrong of me. I didn't really mean what I said. You… haven't done anything wrong. I just get a bit set in my ways, and… I suppose I was sort of kidding myself that I could erase what happened and, I don't know, make a new identity for myself. And then you came back, and it made me remember all this stuff. It wasn't your fault; it's me. I'm sorry I was rude. I'm… not very good with people." He was slightly breathless.

Harry came over to the bed and looked down at Draco gently. "I can see you," he said softly. "I see that you've changed. Why do you think I've been pestering you so much? Draco… it's because I want to forget the past too. I want to make a fresh start, just like you do. I don't want to remember all that fear and suffering, and I'm sorry if I caused you pain. But neither of us are who we were back then. We've changed, we've grown up, and… I see no reason why we shouldn't be friends."

Draco nodded, staring steadfastly at his knees. He didn't trust himself to answer.

"So," Harry said, a hint of a smile in his voice, "how about that drink, then?"

Draco swallowed, forcing his emotions back under control. He looked up at Harry and gave him a small, sad smile. “I don’t think it would be a good idea. I’m just… not cut out for being with people any more. Perhaps it would be best if we just, you know, left things as they are.”

Harry sighed. “Ah, well. You can’t blame a bloke for trying.” He looked up, and once again Draco found himself frozen to the spot, pinioned by those beautiful green eyes. Harry smiled. “I’ll just have to ask you again another time. I can wait. I’ve become a very patient man.” He glanced away, and the spell was broken. “Right,” he said, “I’ll go and let Melanie know you won’t be in today. Try to get some rest, okay? I’ll see you soon.” He left.

Draco realised that he had forgotten to breathe. He felt very strange. Shaken. Still, he was glad that he had patched things up with Harry. He… he was glad Harry wanted to ask him out for a drink again. He lay back, feeling pleasantly sleepy. He supposed that the library could cope without him for one day. Draco closed his eyes and, two minutes later, was asleep once more.

*

A week later, his head fully recovered, Draco could be found working arduously in the library. He was now faced with the daunting task of rearranging and reordering the library’s thousands upon thousands of books, and a less committed man than Draco would have given it up as a lost cause. However, this was what Draco lived for. This was what he had looked forward to for over three years, ever since he had returned to Hogwarts.

It was going to be difficult though. The books were already in an order of sorts – there was the Potions Section, the History Section, the Literary Fiction Section etc. as well as the infamous Restricted Section – but that was as far as it went. The books were arranged any old way; some were even stacked against the walls or pushed to the back of the shelves behind others, making it very difficult for anyone to find what they needed. Draco had often mentioned to Madam Pince that the system could do with updating, but she had always snapped at him to mind his own business, saying that the library had been run in the same way since before her time, and that there was no sense in changing it now.

Well, now Draco was in charge. By the end of the year, each and every book would be neatly arranged on the shelves according to the Dewey Decimal System, and woe betide anyone who messed it up. Some of the books needed cleaning or repairing as well, and Draco felt, with a pleasing sense of self-importance, that it was just as well that his organisational skills were so good because it would take military precision and minute planning if he was going to get everything done.

The feeling of being a general in charge of sub-par troops was stronger than ever today. Draco was standing in front of the most disorganised book shelf in the library. Here, a book about the treatment of magical maladies could be found next to an encyclopaedia of dragons, while the complete works of Shakespeare sat on the other side. The books covered such diverse themes that it was often difficult for newcomers to the library to understand what they had been put together. The reason, however, would soon become clear. Each and every book on that particular shelf had the ability to talk. Draco supposed that it must have been someone's idea of an amusing attribution to the library at some time in the past. Another little surprise, an addition to the charm and mystery of Hogwarts, to have books which could think for themselves. As if switching staircases and singing coats of armour were not enough, Draco thought contemptuously.

He was not a fan of the talking books shelf. He saw their ability to converse as no good reason for such divergent texts to be housed together – it was an acute irritant to his sense of order and discipline, to the point where every time he passed that particular shelf he would grit his teeth and develop a nervous twitch in his left eye. Well, now he was in a position to do something about it. Draco stood triumphantly before the books, a vindictive smile on his lips. No more pandering to quaint ideas of novelty or sentiment. It was time to bring an end to the chaos and assign each book its proper place amongst the others.

Unfortunately, Draco had not taken it into consideration that the books might object to his plans. Some were happy enough to be moved. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare expressed profound relief at not having to share shelf space with Magical Maladies and Their Treatment, who kept moaning and coughing, interrupting his soliloquies. The Complete Works went as far as to promise the librarian a sonnet in his honour, which pleased Draco greatly. In fact, most of the books didn't mind being moved at all, having grown tired of their neighbours and believing, with the arrogance possessed by all books, that theirs was the only subject worth studying.

However, Draco struck against real opposition when he attempted to remove a copy of Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights. The reason for the opposition was that Wuthering Heights had fallen passionately in love with its neighbour, Addison Abbot's Numerological Thinking, and was loathe to be separated.

“Oh, how could you?” howled Wuthering Heights, as Draco tried to put it on the trolley marked ‘Muggle Literature’. “Have you never known love? Have you never felt the flames of passion scourge your soul? Oh, unfeeling man! To come between two spirits, two beings who are as one! Oh, my soul! My love! How can I bear it?”

“Now, darling,” Numerological Thinking said, “we must bear this as best we can. We must let our time apart enrich our love, and exist in the hope that we will one day be reunited.”

“How can you say that? How can you bear the agony so calmly? I think you don’t love me at all!”

“Dearest!” Numerological Thinking began to object, but Draco interrupted.

“Look,” he said, willing himself to stay calm, “I’m very sorry you find this so distressing. However, it is impossible for you to remain where you are. You are a Muggle novel. Loverbook over there belongs in the Arithmancy section. It would be an insult to the integral order which I am attempting to impose on this institution if I shelved you together. Surely you can see that?”

“You wouldn’t say that if you had felt the stab of true love in your heart!” sobbed Wuthering Heights. “Oh, cruel! Cavalier! Unfeeling! I don’t suppose you have considered my feelings and needs for an instant! So selfish! Always the same! You don’t care about anyone but yourself, do you?”

A group of first years at a nearby table glanced over at Draco, desperately trying to muffle their laughter.

Draco screwed his eyes shut in frustration. “Look,” he hissed furiously at the hysterical book. “Look, we will continue this discussion later. I won’t make a scene in front of the children!” He shoved Wuthering Heights unceremoniously onto the trolley, and strode off to his office to calm down. This is what happens when you endow inanimate objects with feelings, he thought contemptuously. Two books falling in love – whoever heard of anything so ridiculous? Well, things will have to carry on according to plan regardless. Ugh, I never was a fan of Emily Bronte. Far too melodramatic.

Draco was about to step into his office with the thought of making himself some soothing camomile tea, when he heard someone clear their throat behind him.

"What?" he snapped, turning around angrily.

Professor McGonagall, who was responsible for interrupting him, looked at Draco haughtily over the top of her glasses. "I'm sorry if I'm disturbing you, Mr Malfoy."

Draco cringed. "I'm sorry, Headmistress. I… I didn't realise it was you. Please, come through to the office."

"No need for that," McGonagall replied. "I just thought that I would come and see how you are getting on with your plans to improve the library. The archives are certainly looking wonderful."

Draco made a conscious effort to gather his thoughts. "Um, yes. Things are going very well. At least, they will be as soon as I can really get stuck in. I'm sorry, I'm not really with it at the moment – I've just been trying to re-shelve the talking books, and some of them kicked up a bit of a fuss."

She raised an eyebrow. "How so?"

"Two of the books claim to have fallen in love, and they object quite strongly to being separated."

To Draco's astonishment, the headmistress's face melted in sympathy. "Ahh… are you sure that you can't keep them together?"

Draco looked at her aghast. He had certainly expected better from the likes of Minerva McGonagall. "I'm afraid it's completely out of the question," he replied. "They belong to different sections; it would go against all my principles to store them together."

McGonagall sighed a little forlornly. “Well, I’m sure you know best.” She gave him a swift, searching look. “Mr Malfoy, I don’t suppose we’ll be seeing you in the Staff Room at all this year? Or at mealtimes? It might be nice.”

Draco pressed his lips together. “I… I don’t know. My duties keep me very busy.”

“Mr Malfoy, when I gave you the job, I certainly did not mean for you to spend all your waking hours in the library. I am simply voicing my concern for your welfare. I’m sure that people would like to see you around.”

Draco gave her a sceptical look.

“I understand that you have been spending some time with Professor Potter,” McGonagall continued in an overly-casual tone.

“It’s nothing,” Draco said quickly. “He came to speak to me a few times, that’s all. I… I’m really all right. I’m quite happy with the way things are; I don’t really need much company.”

McGonagall looked as if she was about to say something more, but then thought better of it. She sighed and gave Draco a brief, perfunctory smile. “Well, I suppose it’s up to you. Good luck with the re-shelving, Mr Malfoy.”

She left the library, and Draco went into his office, his mind retreating from thoughts of spending time in the Staff Room and talking to Harry Potter, back into the safe territory of books.

*

Typical, Draco thought. Just bloody typical. Just like back in sixth year, only worse. Once again, he was

eating his lunch in the alcove in the East Quad, listening in on a conversation between two students. This time, however, the students were a couple of girls of about sixteen or seventeen, who were enthusiastically discussing how dreamy their new Defence teacher was.

“Oh God, that intense look in his eyes when he was showing us those Counter Curses!” one girl with bobbed blonde hair said rapturously.

“I know!” her friend replied. “I thought I’d die! Oh, and he totally has a six pack. Denise followed him to the Quidditch changing rooms and she caught a glimpse of him with his shirt off.”

“Omigod, I am soooooooo jealous! We should totally go next weekend. We might catch him in the shower!”

The pair giggled hysterically, and Draco rolled his eyes.

“And he’s so nice as well,” the second girl sighed. “You wouldn’t think he’d done all those amazing things as an Auror, that he’d defeated Voldemort when he was only seventeen…” she trailed off, gazing dreamily into space.

“I know,” her friend enthused. “He’s so sweet and friendly – he totally told us that we could come to him with any problems we had with the work and he’d help us out. Even so, I still get the impression that he wouldn’t take any crap. He gets that look in his eyes. I bet he’d be quite authoritative when he needs to be.”

“Especially in the bedroom!”

“Veronica!”

Another fit of hysterical giggling.

“In any case,” the first girl said, having sobered up, “I’m definitely going to dye my hair red. Denise and I are going to get the stuff next Hogsmeade weekend. She’s doing her hair too.”

“Why?” asked the girl named Veronica.

“Haven’t you heard? When Harry Potter was at school here, he went out with Ron Weasley’s sister. She was his first love. Now, everyone knows that all the Weasleys are red-heads, so that must be his type. Apparently, he’s never got over her.”

“I wonder why they broke up,” mused Veronica.

“Who cares? It’s her loss. All that matters is that he’s single again. Hey, you should do your hair too!”

The bell rang at this point, and the two girls hurried off to class. Draco emerged from his hiding place, a mixed expression of distaste and incredulity on his face. So, Harry had fangirls. Not that much of a surprise really, but nauseating nonetheless. Good grief, did they have no shame? Spying on Harry in the changing rooms, trailing round the castle in his wake, dying their hair red… Draco wondered how long it would be before Hogwarts was overrun with masses of Ginny Weasley replicas. Stupid girls. Did they seriously think that would impress Harry, or make him want to be their boyfriend?

Draco made his way back to the library, trying to turn his mind to the serious matter of indexing, but unable to quite drag himself away from the inane conversation he had just overheard. Why had Harry and Ginny broken up? It had seemed so perfect – the Gryffindor hero and his best friend’s little sister. Harry had already practically been adopted by the Weasley family. Ginny was attractive, feisty, good at Quidditch; it had seemed as if the two of them were destined to be together. Everyone had expected them to get married after they had left school. But they hadn’t. The couple had gone their separate ways not long after Draco had returned to England. He could still remember the speculation in the papers, how both parties had refused to comment, how they had been trailed for weeks afterwards, the gossip columnists eager to uncover any new romances, any hints that either Harry or Ginny had been unfaithful. Draco could remember being surprised. Of course, he had always thought Ginny was a rather predictable choice for Harry. Safe. He smiled, remembering how Pansy had referred to the couple as a Freudian nightmare.

Pansy. When had he last heard from her? What would his life be like now if..? But there was no sense in thinking about that; it had all worked out for the best. Pansy was married now, living somewhere in Austria with her husband and two boys. Draco hoped that she was happy. It would have been nice, he thought, if they had stayed in touch. He had tried to. Pansy, at least, had not ignored him after his fall from grace, even though their relationship had been over for some time. They had exchanged a few letters, but her correspondence had grown more and more infrequent, until finally she stopped replying altogether. Draco couldn't really blame her. She had a family now, a life; why would she want to spend her time keeping in touch with an ex-boyfriend?

They had always known that they were engaged, even before they had started school. At first, it was something they had teased each other with, but as they had grown older, they had come to realise what it meant. They were going to get married. It had never really bothered Draco; he hadn't tended to emotionally invest in anything back then. Pansy was nice enough, and he was fond of her. She was from a good family, she shared many of his views, and would make a good wife. She even made him laugh.

Their physical relationship had been short-lived. Having grown tired of regular adolescent fumblings, they had lost their virginities together at the end of fifth year, just before Lucius had been arrested. It had been… nice. Nothing special, but nice. It had been like they were practising for the future, rehearsing for their lives together as a married couple.

The next year, once Draco had realised that Voldemort's special mission was far more than he could handle, things with Pansy had gradually come to a halt. Draco had become withdrawn and sullen. He had not felt like having sex. Pansy had tried to get through to him and find out what was wrong, but had gradually given up. She would not have understood. Pansy only ever saw things in black and white; with her, there was no room for uncertainties or doubts. She would have seen Draco's fear and shifting convictions as weaknesses, and she would not have sympathised.

By the end of the year, their relationship was all but finished. Draco knew that Pansy's parents, once so desperate for the union with the Malfoys, were trying to back out of the marriage arrangements. They had not wanted their only child to marry someone whose father was in Azkaban. The loss of the Malfoy fortune a year later had given them the excuse they needed. The contract was annulled, Pansy was quickly betrothed to a rich Austrian pureblood, and at eighteen, Draco had found himself single for the first time in his life.

What happened next had been completely unexpected. He had been studying at Beauxbatons for about two months when he had noticed that one of the boys in his Astronomy class, a dark, blue-eyed student named Luca, was looking at him a lot. Draco hadn't been able to help looking back. Luca was very attractive, and Draco had always had that feeling, that slight inkling that maybe he just might like boys as well as girls. It had never been an issue until then. He had been quite happy with Pansy and would never have been unfaithful to her; it hadn't made any sense to worry about those strange dreams, those bizarre fantasies. At Beauxbatons, however, he had had no fiancé as a safety net, and Luca's attentions had made him extremely nervous.

Sooner or later, the inevitable had happened. Luca had caught up with Draco in a secluded classroom where the latter had been reading a book, and had kissed him. Initially, Draco had been too startled to respond. He had contemplated pushing the other boy away in outrage, but it had seemed like a pointless, empty gesture. After all, why shouldn't Draco experiment? There was nothing holding him back now. And so he had kissed Luca back. Luca's hands had found their way into Draco's trousers, and Draco had allowed himself to be touched, only vaguely aware that he was entering a transition in his life, that what was happening might change things forever. He had clumsily reciprocated.

He had felt strange afterwards, oddly detached. He had known that what he had just done meant something, meant an adjustment to his identity, but it hadn't really mattered. It had felt good. That was the only time anything had happened with Luca. Draco supposed that the other boy must have done that kind of thing a lot – picked out likely looking students to seduce and disregard – but he hadn't felt rejected. It had been an initiation, nothing more.

He wasn't sure that he wanted to think about the next person in his sorry excuse for a relationship history. Not that there were any feelings left – they had faded a long time ago – but the hurt still remained. The humiliation and regret, the feelings of worthlessness, still remained. It had scarred Draco for life.

About a year after he had got his job at Gringotts, Draco had decided to grab some dinner at the Leaky Cauldron after work. He rarely did this, usually preferring to avoid people, and he often wondered what had led him to break with routine on that particular day. He had settled himself in a corner with his meal and a copy of Edith Wharton's The Age of Innocence, blocking out the other clientele from his consciousness.

He had been there for some time when he had heard a voice above him ask, "Mind if I sit at your table? This place is getting pretty full." Draco had looked up and seen that the speaker was a man a few years

Draco's senior with light brown hair and hazel eyes. He was attractive, and Draco had felt his stomach do a small flip. He coloured slightly and nodded, and the stranger had slid into the seat opposite him with his beer. A cursory look around the pub had told Draco that it wasn't that busy; the man could have sat in plenty of other places, and he had wondered why on earth he would choose Draco's table.

Draco had tried to continue reading, but the stranger's presence blocked his concentration, and he had found himself staring blankly at the page, feeling slightly idiotic.

"That's a good book," the stranger had commented.

Draco had looked up at him. "Yes, it is. The ending always frustrates me, though. And he made the wrong decision."

The man had shrugged. "I dunno; I don't know that he had much choice. You have to take social pressures into account."

It had been a fateful conversation for them to have, Draco considered, now that he knew what was to come for the two of them.

"I'm Mark," the man had said. "Mark Elund."

Draco had taken the offered hand. "Draco Black."

They had stayed there, talking, for over an hour. Mark was an ambassador for the Ministry, and spent his time between London and Rome. He had left Hogwarts two years before Draco had arrived, and had no inkling of who Draco really was – a cause for much relief. Mark liked to read. He was interested in architecture and psychology. Titian was his favourite painter, his favourite colour was purple, and he had a dog called Aristotle. By the time they left, they had agreed to meet again the following day for a proper dinner in town.

Draco had gone home, bubbling with elation. He had liked Mark. Mark was intelligent and eloquent, he had nice eyes. He was a good, principled person, not like the friends Draco had made at school. Most of all, Mark seemed to like him. It had been Mark's suggestion that they meet again, and he had squeezed Draco's arm when they left and looked at him in a way that hinted at more than a platonic interest. Draco had never been on a proper date before. A real, successful grown-up wanted to go out with him! True, Mark might have felt differently if he knew who Draco really was, but there would be time for that. If things got serious, he would tell Mark about his past. He was sure to understand. "Mark Elund," he had said slowly, turning the name over as if it were a magic charm. "Mark Elund."

The first three months of their relationship had been wonderful. Draco could remember visits to art galleries, walks in the country, lazy Sunday mornings eating breakfast in bed and reading the papers together. He had spent almost all of his time at Mark's house in Greenwich. He had made friends with Mark's dog. They had cooked meals together; Draco could remember the two of them laughing in the kitchen. There had been times when Mark had been short with him, but then Draco was that much younger, and inexperienced. He couldn't blame Mark for getting frustrated with him.

And then it had all fallen apart. They had gone to Draco's tiny apartment one afternoon so that he could pick up some clothes. He had gone into his bedroom to pack his overnight bag, and had come back to find Mark standing by his desk, a letter in his hands. He had turned to Draco with a strange look on his face, and Draco's stomach had dropped. Mark was holding the latest letter from Narcissa, the envelope of which bore his true name: Draco Malfoy.

"Draco… what is this?" Mark had said, his voice quiet and controlled.

Draco had swallowed. "I can explain," he had whispered. "I- I was going to tell you, I really was, but I was so scared of messing things up between us. I didn't know if you'd take it very well, and—"

"Of course I'm not going to take it well!" Mark had burst out. "After all this time, I find that my boyfriend is part of that family! Shit, Draco, I'm a fucking ambassador! Do you have any idea of what this could do to my reputation? Are you seriously saying that you're Draco Malfoy, Lucius Malfoy's son? Did you take the Dark Mark?"

Draco had gone cold. Something seemed to be wrong with his voice. "I… I was young," he had managed. "It was a stupid mistake. I've changed so much since then, you have to believe me! You know I've

changed, don't you? That's not who I am any more!" he had pleaded.

Mark looked at him stonily. "Why didn't you say who you were when we first met?"

"I've been using my mother's family name since I came back to England. No one would hire me as a Malfoy. I am so, so sorry I didn't say anything sooner."

"I just wish that I'd known before we got into this," Mark had said quietly.

"Would it have made a difference?"

Mark hadn't replied, and Draco had felt sick to his stomach. He couldn't lose Mark over this. There had been a long, horrible silence, where Draco had watched his boyfriend think.

Finally, Mark had sighed and replaced the letter on the table. "Come on, we'll be late for dinner if we don't get going. I get why you didn't tell me about your past, but… oh, never mind. We'll try and forget about it, okay?" he had given Draco a small smile which did not reach his eyes, and led the way out.

Draco had followed, feeling miserable and desperate. His mind had been whirring, trying to think of how he could make it up to Mark, show that he had changed. He was going to be so good from now on. He was going to be the perfect boyfriend. Just please, don't let Mark leave him. Don't let him be alone again.

Mark hadn't mentioned the letter again, and he hadn't asked Draco to elaborate on his history. Draco supposed that he didn't want to know. Still, the distance between them became even greater than it had been before. Mark had become impatient with him more and more often, and Draco had become increasingly desperate to hold onto him. Their sex life had suffered: Mark had stopped being affectionate, and didn't even look at Draco when they made love any more. Afterwards, he would turn over without a word, or get up to have a shower, leaving Draco feeling helpless and ashamed. They would have blazing rows about nothing; or rather, Mark would yell at Draco, who would just stand there apologising. Sometimes, he had almost been afraid that Mark would become violent.

Finally, the inevitable day came. Mark had asked Draco to meet him in the café across from Gringotts for lunch one day. As soon as Draco had walked in and seen his boyfriend's face, he had known what was going to happen. Even so, he had clung to the desperate hope that he would somehow be able to salvage the situation. He would tell Mark how much better he could be. He wouldn't make any more stupid mistakes. He would be the perfect boyfriend. They had ordered coffee.

"Draco, this isn't working."

"Look, I know things have been awful, but I really can make it up to you if you'd just—"

"This isn't about you," Mark had interrupted. "Not really. I know that you want to make up for your past, but… look, I have my job to think about, okay? And it's not just that. These are things I feel very strongly about. My cousin was killed in a Death Eater attack, and I just… I can't stand the thought that my boyfriend was one of them."

"But I never—"

"It doesn't matter. You were part of it. Your family was part of it. Even though I know you must have changed, I can't stand it. It makes me almost hate you. I… Draco, I don't like who I've become. This isn't me, okay? I'm a nice guy, and I know the way I've been acting isn't great. I don't like who I am around you; I don't like what you've made me. It's not really your fault, but I just can't do this any more. It's killing me. I'm sorry, Draco. I tried."

Mark had thrown some change down for his coffee and walked out. Everything had seemed so surreal. There was one part of Draco's brain that had been working on overdrive, trying to think of how he could go after Mark and persuade him to change his mind. The other part was almost detached from the whole situation. This was the part that acknowledged, 'I am never going to see him again.' It was the part that noticed a damp stain on the ceiling. It was the part that watched a stooped old man walking past outside, fumbling with the collar of his long overcoat. And just like that, on a mundane Thursday afternoon, everything had come to an end over a cup of coffee.

Thinking about it now, Draco wondered if he had ever really been in love with Mark. He had loved being in a relationship, loved the feeling that he was desired, but had he really loved the other man? He had never felt equal to him, that was for sure. He had never quite been able to feel comfortable with Mark. He had grieved the relationship; he might even go as far as to say that his heart had been broken. However, there was a small part of Draco that had almost been relieved that it was over. He didn't have to hide anything anymore, didn't have to prove anything. He hated now to think of how desperate he had been in that relationship, of how he had crawled. It was so humiliating that he had allowed himself to get to that stage, and he swore that it would never happen again.

After Mark had come a few anonymous sexual encounters with young men and women Draco had met in bars. Draco found that he was not terribly good at casual sex. It left him feeling frustrated and cheap almost, yet he knew that he could never tell anyone who he really was and try for another relationship. He couldn't allow himself to get emotionally attached again, not after what had happened last time. It was too hard, too painful when it fell apart, which it would of course. In the end, he had given up on one night stands too. He had not had sex with anyone since before his return to Hogwarts, and now, at the tender age of twenty-six, he seriously doubted whether he would ever have sex again. Of course he missed it, but it was all just too complicated. The risk was too high.

Draco settled down to work again, dismissing all thoughts of his own pathetic relationship history along with speculation about Harry Potter's love life. None of that mattered, after all. What did matter was that he finish reordering the Astronomy section within the next two days, and to this far more pressing matter, Draco turned his concentration.

*

Dearest Mother,

I am so sorry for distressing you by asking all those questions. I promise you that it is the last time it will ever happen. I have resolved to bury the past once and for all – I think that would be the best thing for all of us. Needless to say, I am amazed at your courage. I am so proud to be able to call you my mother, and I can only hope that in time, I can be more like you. I will never mention it again.

You will be pleased to hear that things have pretty much resolved themselves between Harry Potter and

myself. We had a bit of a row last week (which ended with me getting knocked out by a Bludger – don't ask), but eventually managed to have a civilised chat and work out our differences. He's not bad, really. I still don't think it would be a good idea to form an actual friendship with him – too much water under the bridge – but I do feel much better now that I know we're not enemies.

Work is going very well. I have finished Astronomy and I've made a good start on Arithmancy. Oh, and I watched Melanie ban a hideous fourth year from the library for a month because she'd got ketchup on the book she had borrowed. I was quite proud of my young assistant – I might trust her with shelving duties soon!

I am in reasonably good spirits so there is no need for you to worry about me. I've just brought a new novella by Gautier called 'The Jinx', which I am looking forward to reading. I'm sending you some more money with this letter. Don't worry, I'm not going without. I just bought myself a pair of new pyjamas and some socks, so I'm all set. God, that sounds pathetic, doesn't it? Oh, the thrilling life I lead!

I hope that you are all right and that Father is holding up. I would very much like to sample some home-grown vegetables next time I visit!

Your Affectionate Son,

Draco.

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Chapter 5: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'To a Woman Passing By', by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

My Darling Draco,

Now really, you mustn't feel bad about asking me what you did. I was glad to tell you about it, really I was. It was something you should know about, and it was wrong of me to keep it from you. Draco, I've been thinking; I think that we were wrong to try to forget what happened. I know that it's painful, but I think that the only way we are ever going to heal, the only way we are going to grow as people, is if we face up to what happened and to what we did. Burying the past will not help; I believe that it will only make things worse. Please, try to accept what happened. I know a lot has changed since then, but you have to at least acknowledge those awful events. I am sure it will help you move on. I know that it's helping me.

I am glad that work is going well, and I am very pleased to hear that you have resolved things with Harry Potter. It would be awful if the two of you were still enemies after all this time. He seems very persistent – he must really want to be friends with you! I wish you could just push yourself that little bit further and agree to spend some time with him. I think you could do with the company – you spend too much time on your own and you get wrapped up in your own thoughts. It's so easy to form a twisted view of the world and paint things blacker than they really are, when you don't really take part in it.

Your father had a bad spell last week. Don't worry, he's much better now, but it was quite difficult for a while. I must say, it's rather heartbreaking when the man you've been married to for over twenty-seven years suddenly doesn't recognise you. He thought that I was his mother, I think. He doesn't remember any of it now, for which I am very grateful. Knowing your father, he would be very distressed and embarrassed if he knew what he was like when he gets ill. I would never think less of him, but he still has such a sense of honour and dignity.

It was all a bit of a blow. We'd been doing well for so long, and I was really starting to think he might be on the mend. Of course, he can still get a bit vague, and there are blank patches in his memory. He still can't think about the war without getting upset. Even so, he'd been perfectly lucid for months. He knew who I was, he'd been asking after you, he was perfectly sensible. And then all of a sudden, he has another attack. I know that they're not as frequent as they used to be, but one had rather hoped that they had stopped altogether. Every day that he was well gave me a bit more hope that he would be well forever, and it just makes it all the more hurtful when he does get sick.

Anyway, enough of my whining. We've been eating your father's courgettes and potatoes which have all turned out wonderfully. I really am so proud to have such an accomplished husband! And it does save quite a bit from the grocery bill as well. Speaking of which, thank you so much for the money you sent. It will certainly help out with our Christmas preparations. Not that I buy many presents these days, but it's always nice to get some good food in and make the house look pretty, isn't it? I have some rather exciting news relating to Christmas – your Aunt Andromeda has said she will come and stay with us, along with her little grandson! Isn't that wonderful? I haven't seen her in so many years, and I admit I'm slightly nervous. But just think how lovely it will be to have the whole family together at last! It will be a bit of a squeeze fitting everyone in, but I'm sure we'll manage. You won't mind sharing a room with Teddy, will you? You are still coming home for Christmas? I hope you are – I miss you very much, and I know everyone will love to see you. Do let me know.

Lots and lots of love,

Your Mother.

*

I wonder if I disappeared, if I actually vanished from the face of the earth, anyone would notice?

It was the first weekend of December. Snow had fallen at Hogwarts, and the icy wind which blew around the castle made the windows rattle, and caused the students to hurry, shivering, through the draughty corridors. Draco was standing by a window on the third floor, gazing down into the grounds. He could hear the distant hum of activity coming from the school, but the corridor he was in was still and quiet. He could hear the sound of his own gentle breathing, and watched it mist up the glass in front of him, before gradually diffusing.

Down in the grounds, Draco could see Hagrid standing in front of his cabin, leaning on his spade and talking to Harry Potter. They were too far away for Draco to see their faces, but he could tell they were

laughing about something. As Draco watched, the two of them set off towards the castle, Harry having to walk fast to keep up with Hagrid's long strides. Draco could see them more clearly now. Harry was speaking enthusiastically about something, and would frequently turn to smile up at his companion. Draco thought that there was nothing more isolating that watching a conversation you could not hear and would never be party to. It was like a barrier cutting him off from humanity. Was he real? Did he even exist at all? At times like this, his loneliness had a palpable quality, and it made him feel vaguely panicked. What if he was cut off to such an extent that he actually disappeared? Nobody ever looked at him or spoke to him; he never made the effort to talk to anyone himself. He was a being apart from everyone else, a solid ghost haunting the castle, completely extricated from everyone. He was in his own little bubble of silence, he thought, as he watched the two friends disappear from sight below him.

And then, completely unbidden, Draco remembered Harry's words to him back in the Hospital Wing: I can see you.

*

Things were going brilliantly in the library. Now that Draco had made a start, he found the process of rearranging the books was getting quicker and easier by the day. Over half the books were now properly coded and endowed with Anti-Theft Spells. He was coming to the end of the Magical Law section now, and he had a sneaking suspicion that he would be finished not long after Christmas.

That wasn't to say that Draco's job was without its complications. Last week, Melanie had made a mistake while re-shelving books, putting them away according to the old system instead of the new one, and causing Draco to give her such a telling off that she was brought close to tears. He had felt bad about it, but he could not allow her to get sloppy. And then he kept having to make detours to the Muggle literature section. He was still having a lot of trouble with bloody Wuthering Heights, and if things continued like this, he would have to think about removing it from the library altogether.

Thinking it was about time for another check, Draco walked around the shelves to the Muggle literature section and, sure enough, there was the accursed book lying on the floor. Draco strode over and snatched it up. "What the hell is your bloody problem?" he hissed.

“Leave me!” the book cried. “Let me be! If I want to kill myself, that’s my business!”

Draco counted to ten. “Look, you leather-bound monstrosity, you can’t kill yourself! You’re not alive to begin with! Throwing yourself off the shelves won’t do anything except cause an excessive amount of inconvenience to me!”

“I’m more alive than you are, unfeeling wretch!” the book retorted. “Besides, I know that my beloved Numerological Thinking has been put on the floor below. I would sooner be closer to my love, even if it is further from heaven!”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Look, I’m very sorry you’re still upset, but do try to remember what you are. You are a book! You have a sacred duty to impart knowledge and wisdom, to give your readers new insight! How can you possibly do that when you’re carrying on the way you are?”

“I don’t care,” Wuthering Heights sobbed. “How can I conduct my duty as I should when my soul has been torn in two?”

“You don’t have—” Draco drew a deep breath. “Look, I’m very sorry, but there’s nothing that can be done. Just… just do me a favour and stop with the fruitless suicide attempts. It’s becoming bothersome.” He shoved the book back into its proper place on the shelf and went downstairs. It was nearly eleven o’clock, and he decided that he could do with a cup of tea.

When he came within sight of the desk, his insides gave a jolt. Harry Potter was standing there, talking to Melanie. Draco took a moment to steady himself, then walked over to them. As soon as she saw her boss, Melanie gave him a terrified look and scuttled off to the office where she had been filling out new loan slips. Evidently, she was still nervous after last week’s telling off.

Harry looked over at Draco and smiled. “Hey, I was just about to come and find you. I hear you’ve nearly finished with your renovations.”

Draco slipped behind his desk. For some reason that he did not wish to go into, he felt slightly safer if there was something solid between his body and Harry’s. “Yes,” he replied smoothly, attempting to cover

the nerves he felt at talking to Harry again. “Everything is going very well. As long as I can get that blasted talking copy of Wuthering Heights to behave, I should be finished before long.”

Harry frowned slightly. “What’s wrong with Wuthering Heights?”

“The bloody thing thinks that it’s in love with an Arithmancy book, and has been kicking up an awful fuss since I separated them. I mean, the whole thing is preposterous!”

Harry’s face softened. “Awwww, that’s really sad. Couldn’t you have kept them together?”

Draco gave him a look of pure incredulity. “First McGonagall and now you! No, I couldn’t keep them together. They belong to completely different sections, and it would have messed up my entire system.” He bent down to lift a box of new stock which had just arrived that morning onto the desk, pushing aside a small pile of inventories as he did so. He must have pushed it too far because the papers fell to the floor, taking Draco’s copy of Baudelaire’s poems, which had been hidden underneath, with them.

Harry bent to pick everything up. He put the papers back on the desk, but held onto the book, turning it over in his hands. “This yours?”

“Thank you. And yes, it is. I take it with me everywhere. Baudelaire’s my favourite.”

Harry smiled and handed him the book. “I’ve heard of him. He was one of the great wizard poets of the nineteenth-century, right? I’ll have to read his stuff some time.”

“You should,” Draco replied. “He’s amazing. He was the first great artist of the Decadent movement. I must have read that book at least sixty times.”

Harry laughed. “I’ll definitely have to look him up in that case! I might need to get a copy in translation, though,” he added. “My French is well below par.”

Draco smiled and turned his attention back to the box. He opened it and lifted out several brand new tomes, which comprised of an illustrated encyclopaedia of magical plants he had ordered a couple of weeks ago. He smiled with satisfaction as he lined them up on his desk. There was truly nothing more pleasing than a brand new book. Completely perfect and unblemished, full of unrealised potential. He looked down upon them happily for a couple of moments, before realising that Harry was still there. “Did you want anything, Mr Potter?”

The other man grinned. “Harry, please. And yes, as a matter of fact, I did. I realised this morning that it’s about time that I asked you to go for a drink with me again. I mean, it has to be about a week since I last tried, hasn’t it?”

Draco smiled, remembering the owl Harry had sent to him a few days ago, carrying a letter which simply had a drawing of a glass of beer and a large red question mark on it. “Isn’t it about time you gave up?” he said.

Harry leaned across the desk towards him. “I don’t give up. It’s kind of my thing. Now, how about this Saturday? You close the library at seven-thirty on the weekends, right?”

Draco sighed. “Harry… what’s the point? I mean, what could we possibly have to say to each other? We’re on good terms now, we’ve resolved our differences – can’t we just leave it at that?”

“No,” came the reply. “See, I think you secretly want to go for a few drinks with me, Draco. I think you’re just bluffing because you’ve got so used to being on your own, and you’re scared of making any kind of friendship because you think you’ll just be disappointed again. You never go to the Staff Room, do you? You take all your meals alone, you keep your distance from the other teachers, you hardly ever leave the grounds of the castle. I’ll bet it gets very lonely. Now, I think it’s a shame. You’re obviously intelligent, you have interests and opinions, and yet you have no one to share them with. I’d like to spend some time getting to know the new Draco Malfoy, because I think he would be well worth the effort. And I think that, despite all your protestations, you’d like to get to know me as well. And that, Draco, is why I refuse to give up. That is why I will keep on asking you out for a drink and a chat, until you come down off that bloody high horse, get over your neuroses, and decide to take a chance. So, how about it?”

Draco just stared. He was deeply unsettled by Harry’s ability to read him so accurately. Finally, he sighed

and looked away. “Look… I really appreciate the thought, but I don’t think it would be a good idea. Maybe you’re right, okay? Maybe… maybe there’s a part of me that would like to go with you this weekend, or that would like to join everyone else in the Staff Room, or that would like to make friends. However, the sensible part of me knows that it’s not a good idea. I told you, I’m not good with people. It would only end in another let down for both of us. I’m sorry.”

Harry grimaced. “Damn it, I’ve been working on that speech all morning! Well, fine. If you won’t listen to reason then you give me no other choice than to resort to blackmail.”

Draco gave a nervous laugh. “What?”

Harry didn’t answer. Instead, he picked up one of the books from Draco’s desk and looked down at it contemplatively. “This is new, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Draco replied, wishing that he knew what Harry was up to.

“A brand new hardback. How nice. God, don’t you just hate it when people pick up a brand new hardback like this, and they break in the spine?” He let the book fall open in the middle.

Draco finally caught on. “Don’t you dare! I haven’t even had a chance to look at them yet!”

Harry grinned evilly and pulled the book open another inch.

“Stop it at once! Haven’t you read the library commandments? I could have you banned for this!”

Harry opened the book even further, and it gave an ominous creaking sound. “You know what you have to do, Draco. Say you’ll go out with me this weekend, and I’ll stop.”

“Why you… how could… Stop it! Potter, you malevolent bastard! Put it down!”

“Only if you give me what I want.” The pages were completely flat now, and Draco could see the book’s spine buckling. Harry pushed the centre of the book upwards a little, and the book let out another cracking noise.

“All right!” Draco hissed in desperation. “All right! I’ll go for a drink with you this weekend! Just… Just put. The book. Down!”

Harry snapped the book shut and replaced in on the desk with the others, a very smug look on his face.

Draco scowled. “You’re a bit evil, you know.”

Harry smirked at him. “Well, I didn’t spend all that time watching you at school for nothing, did I?”

Draco felt himself flush. “You… you used to watch me?”

Harry shrugged. “Of course! That’s what we did, isn’t it? I watched you, you watched me. It’s funny; I don’t think either of us paid as much attention to anyone else, despite how much we claimed to hate each other. Well, see you on Saturday, Draco. I’ll meet you outside the main doors at eight.” Harry grinned at him and strode out of the library, leaving Draco feeling mightily confused and more than a little outraged.

How had this happened? How could he have let Potter get the best of him like that? Draco had not been this annoyed with himself for a long time. Potter had seen right through him, had known exactly what Draco’s weaknesses were, and now… now Draco had no choice but to go and meet the bastard on Saturday as promised.

Melanie came out of the office at this point, holding a bunch of fresh loan slips. “You!” Draco said, deciding to vent some of his anger at his unfortunate assistant. “What are these papers still doing on the

desk? They should have been filed first thing, not left around, cluttering up the place! Get it done at once!"

"Yes, Mr Malfoy," the terrified girl replied, grabbing the inventories and hurrying back into the office with them.

Draco sighed wearily, thinking once more how easy his life would be if it wasn't for Harry sodding Potter.

*

"Can you believe it?" Draco ranted later that night. "Can you believe his sneaky, underhand tactics? And now I have to go for a drink with him. I am bound by honour. Who knows what he would do to my poor, defenceless books if I'd backed out? Can you believe Potter would do something like that?"

"I'm astounded," Snape replied heavily. "Draco, do you realise that ever since our new Defence teacher arrived at Hogwarts, you have done nothing but talk about him? I used to enjoy our conversations, but now I know that all I will get are increasingly hysterical ramblings about Harry Potter."

Draco bit his lip. He hadn't realised that he talked about Harry that much. He was reminded of how his father used to chastise him while he was at school. "Draco, all we have heard from you this summer are tales of Harry Potter, and how much you hate him. Potter's celebrity, Potter's broom, Potter's smug attitude. We are getting rather tired of it, and would appreciate a change of tune. It will do you no good, you know, to obsess about Potter like this. You would be wise not to let it affect you so much…"

He looked up at Snape's portrait, his cheeks tinged faintly with pink. "I'm sorry, Sir. I hadn't realised that I talked about Potter so much. I assure you there's no reason for it."

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure about that?"

“Of course!” Draco said quickly. “I- I only talk about him because he keeps bothering me. If he’d only leave me alone, I wouldn’t think about him at all.”

Snape gave him an unpleasant smile. “Well, you believe that if you like.”

“I will!” Draco replied defensively. “I only talk about it to you because I thought that you understood about Potter. I thought that you understood how I felt, and you sympathised. I’ll stop it though, if it’s so bothersome,” he finished a little sulkily.

“I think I do understand how you feel,” Snape said, giving Draco an appraising look. “The real question is whether you understand.”

“Of course I do!” Draco said hotly. “I mean, he’s not as bad as I initially thought, I suppose. All I was saying was that it was bloody annoying of him to blackmail me into going out with him. And now I’m really nervous about it. I mean, what the hell am I going to wear? I don’t own decent clothes any more. And… and what if we get there and the conversation just dries up after about ten minutes, and it turns out that we don’t have anything in common after all?”

Snape groaned. “Yes, I can see now that you have a very firm grasp on your feelings. You know exactly what you’re about. Draco, you really do astound me sometimes. Look, stop dithering about like an idiot. Clearly, you are at least partially glad about this, er, social meeting with Potter, otherwise you wouldn’t be worrying so much about it going well. Now, I doubt that Potter will know or care what you are wearing, as he’s hardly a sartorial connoisseur himself. As for the conversation, I am sure that you will find enough to talk about. And if not, you make your excuses and leave. It’s really quite simple.”

“Yes, Sir,” Draco replied sullenly.

“Good. Now that that’s out of the way, why don’t we discuss something else? How have you been sleeping?”

“A little better, thank you. I’ve been using that draught you told me about and I haven’t been waking up in the night.”

“Good. You added the Mandrake leaves correctly?”

“I believe so. I… I was actually wondering if you knew of a potion for dreamless sleep. The one that Madam Pomfrey uses is too heavy for my needs.”

“Have you looked at Cicolini’s Medicinal Mixtures?”

“Yes, but there wasn’t really anything suitable.”

Snape thought for a minute. “Well, I think I can remember something along those lines in Harriet Harper’s compendium. I suggest that you look there first. If not, use the regular potion, but halve the number of spleenwort seeds and stir anti-clockwise. Why, have you been having nightmares again?”

“Not… not exactly.” Draco reasoned that, given their altercation moments before, now would not be a good time to inform Snape that for the past week, he had dreamt every night of Harry Potter.

*

It was Friday. Holy Merlin on a stick, it was Friday, and Draco had to go out with Harry Potter the very next day. The thought was too terrifying. He was torn between wanting to run away from the whole thing, and secretly looking forward to spending time alone with Harry. Draco was plagued by day-dreams of what might happen on Saturday, ranging from self-indulgent fantasies in which he had never been so charming and eloquent, and he and Harry talked for hours, to horrific visions of awkward silences and clumsy faux pas, of Harry realising that he had made a horrible mistake in thinking that they could be friends.

He had deliberately avoided the other man since they had arranged to go out. He couldn't account for it, because now his initial annoyance had died down, he realised that Snape was right: in spite of his considerable nerves, Draco really did want to spend time with Harry, and had no intention of standing the other man up. All he could think was that he was scared Harry might try to back out of the arrangement if Draco gave him a chance. And so he was back to playing the avoidance game, ducking into empty classrooms whenever he heard Harry's voice.

That didn't mean that he'd ruled out a little casual spying, though. Draco had left Melanie in charge of the library, telling her that he had to go and speak to the headmistress about something, and was now secreted behind a statue of a winged horse across from the classroom where Harry taught. Any minute now the last bell of the day would sound, and the class would be dismissed. Any minute now…

When the bell finally did ring, Draco was so wound up with expectancy that he jumped out of his skin. He frowned at his own idiocy, suddenly very much aware of how foolish he was being – a grown man hiding behind a statue just so he could catch a glimpse of the person who'd simply asked him out for a couple of drinks. He cringed at the thought of anyone finding out about it; this was bordering on stalker behaviour, surely.

He had just resolved to stop all this nonsense at once and return to the library, when the classroom doors opened and students came spilling out, all talking enthusiastically about what they had just been doing, and Draco had no choice but to dodge back behind the statue. Last to emerge was Harry himself, surrounded by a group of very flirtatious girls, two of whom Draco recognised as the couple he had overheard in the quad the other week. He couldn't help but smile to see that the girls all sported various shades of red hair.

"That was such an interesting lesson, Professor Potter," one of the girls simpered, batting her eyelashes at Harry promisingly. "You're an amazing teacher."

"Er, thanks, Michelle," Harry said, grinning a little nervously. "I'm glad you're enjoying the classes."

"We'd love to hear about some more of your own adventures, though," said another girl, whose hair was a shocking shade of carrot. "I mean, you're so brave! You've done so many amazing things!"

“Well,” Harry replied awkwardly, “if I feel that I can draw on personal experience to help you all learn, then that’s what I’ll do. However, the focus of my classes is on teaching all aspects of Defence, rather that telling anecdotes about my past.”

“It’s such a shame, though!” cried the girl whom Draco recognised as Veronica. “You know, we should totally form a Harry Potter fan club! Then we could hold meetings to discuss all the amazing things you’ve done. You could give lectures!”

“And there could be merchandise!” the carrot-haired girl enthused. “We could have Harry Potter t-shirts, and Harry Potter action figures, and—”

“No!” Harry cut in. “I mean… I mean, I’m very grateful that you enjoy my classes, but there’s really no need… that is, with all my teaching commitments I really couldn’t spare the time. And I’m sure that your time would be much better spent on your schoolwork. Um, I have some marking to do now. I’ll… see you all on Tuesday.”

The girls all looked a little put out, but they still smiled coquettishly up at Harry as they bid him goodbye, whispering together as they walked away from the classroom. When they were gone, Draco saw Harry breathe a sigh of relief, run his fingers through his messy hair, and go back into his classroom, locking the door behind him.

Draco couldn’t help smiling indulgently. Harry never had been much use at handling all his adoring female fans. He could still remember the furore when Eloise Midgeon had tried to slip him a Love Potion.

In just over twenty-four hours’ time, they would be meeting. The thought gave Draco a little thrill. He would be going for drinks with Harry Potter. Harry had actually wanted to spend time with Draco, get to know him. Draco returned to the library with a little dreamy smile playing on his lips. He would have Harry all to himself. It was scary, yes, but also exciting. Harry had chosen him. Draco just hoped that he wouldn’t let the other man down…

*

Draco spent Saturday in a constant state of nervous agitation. He couldn't eat anything, the slightest thing made him jump, and he was so snappy with Melanie that she took to making a swift exit whenever he appeared. He kept telling himself that he was being stupid. Yes, it had been a long time since he had done any socialising, but it was only Potter, for Merlin's sake! Surely it didn't matter what Potter thought of him? It wasn't like Draco had ever coveted the other man's friendship.

Well, that wasn't strictly true, but best not to think about that.

The half hour between closing the library at seven-thirty and meeting Harry at eight was the worst. Draco went up to his room, cleaned his teeth, faffed around with his hair and wondered if he should get changed, before deciding that he didn't want to look like he'd made an effort. Besides, it wasn't like he had anything smarter he could put on. It was stupid anyway; why the hell was he in such a state about this? It wasn't like he and Harry were going on a date. Oh God, was Draco thinking of this as a date? If so, he had better stop at once, because Harry certainly wasn't. Harry was straight. Besides, Draco wouldn't want to go on a date with Harry. He wondered idly what Harry would be like on a date. He would be chivalrous, of course. He was a Gryffindor, after all. He was the type to bring flowers, to pay for dinner…

Draco realised with a shock that it was five minutes to eight, and that he was running late. He grabbed his winter cloak and rushed out of his rooms, banging the door shut behind him. By the time he reached the Entrance Hall, he was breathless and a little red about the face, and had to take a moment to calm down. He wanted to be cool and collected for this… whatever it was.

When Draco emerged from the castle, he found that Harry was already waiting. He turned to Draco and grinned. "Hey, I was beginning to think you weren't going to show."

"Sorry I'm late; I forgot the time," Draco said, only half lying.

Harry suggested going to the Three Broomsticks, and Draco readily agreed. The pub was bound to be the busiest in Hogsmeade, and Draco felt that more people being around would alleviate some of the pressure on him.

Thinking about it afterwards, he found that he could not remember what he and Harry had discussed as they walked into the village. He could remember the way the snow crunched underfoot, and the way the stars had shone so brightly in that cold December sky. He could remember Harry laughing easily at something he had said. However, the actual conversation escaped him. He supposed that he had been too nervous, too highly strung at that point to take anything in.

Draco had been right – the pub was busy when they arrived. The Three Broomsticks was decorated in preparation for Christmas, and the warmth and busy chatter provided a strong contrast to the cold night outside. Harry rubbed his hands together and turned to grin at Draco. “I told them to reserve a table at the back for us,” he shouted over the babble, before leading the way through the crowds.

Draco followed apprehensively. Harry had reserved a table… That was the kind of thing you did for a date, not a catch-up chat between two old enemies. But he was probably reading too much into it. After all, Harry had been trying to cajole him into this for a long time, and he probably just wanted to ensure that everything went as smoothly as possible. Following Harry through the pub, Draco prepared himself for the hostile glances that were always thrown his way whenever he went out in public. He was surprised when none came. Everybody’s eyes went straight to Harry. People greeted Harry, smiled at him, stared at him as if he was some sort of miracle. Which, in a way, he was. Nobody saw Draco, so dazzled were they by the presence of Harry Potter in their midst. He could slip by unnoticed.

Just as Harry had said, there was a little table at the back, out of sight of the bar and relatively secluded, which was set for two people. Draco removed his cloak and sat down opposite Harry, desperately searching for something terribly witty or profound to say which would tell the other man that he hadn’t been completely insane to invite a weird reclusive librarian out.

Harry, on the other hand, seemed perfectly at ease. “What do you want to drink?” he asked. “I’ll get the first round.”

Draco could have done with a pint of beer. However, he knew that if he drank all that, he would have to go to the bathroom at the pub, and that was not something he wanted to do. The truth was that Draco had a fear of public bathrooms. In fact, he had a fear of any bathroom not owned and policed by himself. One could never be sure of the hygiene standards. And even if it was hygienic, there was always the danger that he might break the rules of whoever’s bathroom he was using. He knew that he would be mightily pissed off if anyone broke his bathroom rules. No, he would need a drink that was fairly strong

but not very big, if he was going to last the evening. “A vodka tonic,” he replied.

Harry grinned. “Okay, I’ll try not to be too long.”

Draco waited nervously, drumming his fingers on the tabletop. After obsessing about it for so long, he was actually here, out for drinks with Harry Potter. It was almost surreal.

True to his word, Harry was back in a couple of minutes, carrying Draco’s vodka and a Firewhiskey for himself. Draco took a couple of gulps of his drink, hoping that the alcohol would ease his inhibitions a little and enable him to provide halfway decent conversation.

“I’m really glad you decided to agree to this,” Harry said.

Draco looked up at him. “You didn’t exactly give me much choice,” he replied.

Harry rolled his eyes. “You shouldn’t have played hard to get. Now, I don’t know about you, but I’m starving; I haven’t had any dinner yet. Want to get some food?”

“Sure.” Draco took another sip of his vodka tonic. He rarely drank these days, and already he could feel the alcohol start to take effect on him. A pleasant, warm sensation was making its way up his legs, and he felt comfortable and buoyant. He sighed and relaxed into his chair. This was really very enjoyable, being in this cosy pub at Christmas time, sitting opposite Harry. Draco smiled to himself. He watched Harry perusing the Three Broomsticks’ dinner menu. He looked at Harry’s hands, his long, expressive fingers, which were slightly calloused. The light stubble growing through on his top lip. He had never realised how long Harry’s eyelashes were before. Harry pressed his lips together, moistened them with the tip of his tongue. Draco’s smile broadened. Harry was sexy.

“See anything you fancy?”

Draco blanched. “What?”

Harry gestured towards the other menu which was lying in front of Draco. “Is there anything you fancy to eat?”

“Oh! Um… I don’t know. I should probably have something.” Draco picked up the menu and held it in front of his face, trying to hide the fact that he was blushing. Yes, he certainly should have something to eat. Drinking vodka on an empty stomach had been an extremely foolish plan. It was giving him… very weird ideas.

Harry put his menu down. “You know what? I’m going to be bad. I’m going to get a big plate of chips. How about it – want to share?”

“Sure,” Draco replied, grateful to have the decision made for him. He had hardly eaten anything all day, and chips sounded perfect. Harry went to the bar to place their order, and Draco made a conscious effort not to grin goofily any more – he really didn’t want Harry to know he was tipsy.

“How come you haven’t eaten already?” he asked when Harry returned to their table, trying as hard as possible to appear sensible.

Harry looked awkward. “Well, I was going to, but there were some students hanging around outside the hall, and… I didn’t really want to see them at that point. There wouldn’t have been enough time for me to order something from the kitchens to be sent to my room before I had to come and meet you, so I went without.”

Draco smiled. “Ah, the Harry Potter Fan Club, I presume?”

Harry looked at him in horror. “How the hell did you know about that?”

“Well, they’re not exactly discreet, are they? I see that they’ve all decided on a change of hair colour

now."

Harry groaned. "It's awful! I don't know what they're thinking! I mean, if I was crazy enough to want to risk going out with a student, I'm not exactly going to go for a miniature copy of my ex, am I? I'm kind of hoping that it'll all die down soon."

"What exactly did happen with you and Ginny?" Draco blurted out. It must have been the alcohol. Nothing else would have possessed him to say something so hugely inappropriate. He was sorely tempted to bang his head down onto the table in complete self-despair. See, this was why nobody ever took him out. It was because he did things like this.

However, apart from a brief, questioning look, Harry did not seem bothered by Draco's question. He took another sip of his whiskey. "The truth is that we just grew apart. It was fine at first, but… I suppose people change so much at that age. Really, it went on for longer than it should have done. After I'd killed Riddle I just wanted, you know, a bit of stability. I wanted to settle down. Ginny, on the other hand, wanted to go out and have fun. It wasn't so bad when we were all repeating final year, but after we left the cracks started to show. I wanted us to get engaged. I was completely committed to our relationship – we seemed so right for each other, and I could see no reason why it shouldn't work out if we tried really hard. I guess I wanted it to work out so badly that I missed all the glaring signs that we were wrong for each other."

"Wait," Draco said, Harry's frankness abating his own embarrassment, "you wanted to settle down after you killed Voldemort? You were eighteen years old!"

Harry laughed. "I know, I know. I'd just never had any kind of stability, I guess. Everything up until then had been so chaotic and unpredictable, and I just wanted to be, you know, safe. You're right though – I was way too young. I can see that now. Ginny and I dragged things on for as long as we could, then she broke it off. I was pretty upset, but she was right to do it. We'd grown apart a long time ago, and sometimes life just doesn't work out like you planned. We're pretty good friends now actually, which is nice."

"That is nice," Draco sighed. "I don't really talk to any of my exes." It was funny how after all the wild speculation in the press, the reasons behind Harry's very public break-up had been so mundane. "It must have been hard for you, dealing with all the gossip."

Harry grimaced. “You’re not wrong. Trying to get over a broken heart when there are headlines every day dissecting your relationship isn’t exactly a picnic. I’ve made a real effort since then to try and keep my personal life hidden.”

“Very sensible. It must be difficult to do, though.”

Harry shrugged “Not really. To be honest, I’ve only been out with two people since.”

Draco’s eyes grew very wide. Harry Potter had to be one of the most desirable bachelors in the country. He could have gone out with a different girl every night if he’d wanted to! “How is that even possible?” he asked incredulously.

The chips had arrived, and the two men began eating them with gusto. “I’m just not really the playing around type,” Harry answered between mouthfuls. “I never was. Besides, I have a weakness in that I tend to fall for people pretty easily, so going on loads of dates might be a problem.”

“So who were the other two?” Draco asked, his courage strengthened by Harry’s openness. He couldn’t deny that he was curious, and he felt privileged, being allowed access into Harry’s private world.

“We-el,” Harry said slowly, giving Draco a brief, searching look. “The first after Gin would have to be Danni. I spent six months working in America after I’d finished my Auror training. I wanted to get out of the country for a bit, and the American Ministry offered me a temporary placement. And about two weeks later, I met Danni.”

“Was she an Auror too?” Draco asked.

“He,” Harry said, giving Draco a brief glance.

“What?” Draco was sure he must have misunderstood. Surely Harry wasn’t telling him that he’d been in a relationship with a man?

“Danny, as in short for Daniel. And yes, he was an Auror.”

“So then you’re…”

Harry grinned at him. “What, you didn’t think you were the only one, did you?”

Draco coloured. “I- I don’t know what you mean.”

“Oh, come on!” Harry laughed. “I clocked you checking out Sam Smith’s arse the other week.”

Sam Smith was the Hogwarts Games master, who insisted on wearing very tight Quidditch shorts every single day. Against his better judgement, Draco had often found his eyes irresistibly drawn to Sam’s toned, tight arse. “I did no such thing!” he sputtered, redder than ever.

Harry laughed. “Oh, come on, I was looking too! It’s bloody hard not to look! Shame he’s such an idiot.”

“Yeah,” Draco agreed, seeing that it would be pointless to deny his sexual leanings any further. “Okay, so you got me. Now, what happened with you and this Danny?”

“Well,” Harry said, downing the rest of his drink, “we started out as friends. I’d… never really fully examined the fact that I was attracted to both sexes. It had never really been an issue until then. I mean, it didn’t really bother me, but it was just a bit… disconcerting. You know?”

Draco nodded. He had felt exactly the same way.

“So anyway, we took it pretty slowly to begin with. He was great with me; he was always very patient. I fell for him. It all seemed so exciting, so… I don’t know. We kept it a secret. We were working together, and there were rules about that kind of thing. We were going to go open with our relationship when I returned to England. The thing is… he hadn’t realised quite how well known I was. It was different in America – people knew who I was, of course, but Riddle hadn’t been such a threat over there. Nobody took that much notice of what I did. But then we went back to London for the weekend – I wanted Danny to meet my friends before we told everyone about us. He was pretty overwhelmed. Everyone was so interested in me, everyone wanted to know what I was doing, who I was with. He couldn’t cope with it. He was a very private person, and the thought of all that interference into his personal life was horrific to him. When we got back to America, he basically told me that he loved me, but not enough to put up with all of that. I went back to England two weeks later on my own.”

“Wow,” Draco said quietly. “That sucks. I’m sorry.”

“Thanks,” Harry replied. “I do have a rather unfortunate habit of falling for people who like me, but not quite enough. And then I come over all needy, and… it doesn’t exactly do wonders for the self-esteem.” He laughed. “The third one was even worse.”

“What happened?”

“Girl called Laura. She worked in a shop in Diagon Alley, and we met through George Weasley, whose wife was friendly with her. We hit it off straight away. She was smart and funny, and she seemed to really care about me. She told me that she was ready to settle down and have a serious relationship and, like an idiot, I believed her. My friends all warned me. Hermione especially kept telling me that Laura was a little too good to be true. She said she was using me because I was famous, that she only cared about being Harry Potter’s girlfriend. I just thought she was being paranoid, but of course, as always, Hermione turned out to be right. About three months in, I found out that Laura was cheating on me. I confronted her, and she admitted to everything – she’d only ever wanted to go out with me for the status. I ended things pretty quickly.”

“Ouch.”

“Yeah. So, there you have it. My pathetic relationship history in all its glory. Now it’s your turn.”

“What?” Draco looked up apprehensively.

“Oh, come on! You were the one who wanted to talk about relationships, and you’re not getting off that easily. I’ve just bared my soul, and now it’s your turn. I doubt your track record could be any worse than mine.”

“Wanna bet?” Draco replied. “Harry, I think it’s fair to say that I could give you a run for your money.”

“Well, in that case I should get another round in – sounds like we’re going to need it! Same again?”

He didn’t know if it was the alcohol or that fact that Harry gave the impression of being completely trustworthy and non-judgemental, but Draco ended up telling him everything. Every humiliating, depressing detail of his past relationships. Harry had listened sympathetically, expressing outrage at all the appropriate moments, leaving Draco wondering why on earth he had been so reticent about accepting the invitation to go out. Harry made him feel likeable.

They ended up talking until last orders. Conversing with Harry, Draco felt interesting, witty even. He gradually lost the fear that Harry was bored with his company. They walked back to the castle together, laughing tipsily, stumbling a little in the snow. Harry said goodnight at the top of the stairs, patting Draco on the arm and telling him that he had to go to a conference in Paris the next day, but that he’d come into the library and say hello on Monday. Draco watched him walk away, feeling younger than he had felt in a very long time. Just before he turned the corner that led to his rooms, Harry looked back at Draco and smiled.

*

This is ridiculous, Draco thought to himself as he lay in bed that night. This is utterly ridiculous. It’s not happening. I am categorically not going to wank myself off to thoughts of Harry Potter. Except he so was.

He knew that he was fighting a losing battle with his libido; reason was completely ineffectual when he was this worked up. Sighing resignedly, he let his hand drift south. It's nothing personal, he consoled himself. It's nothing to do with him. It's just because you haven't had sex in… oh God, has it really been over four years? Anyway, it's been a very long time and Potter is… quite sexy. But that's it. It means absolutely nothing. He sighed again as his hand came into contact with his long-neglected erection.

He was just releasing tension, that was all. He could spend this one night fantasising about Harry, then everything would go back to normal. Oh God, Harry was bisexual! That meant that… maybe he had been thinking of tonight as a sort of date after all! But then, that didn't make any sense. He hadn't given Draco any real suggestion that that was the case. Besides, Harry could have anyone he wanted, so he would hardly be interested in pursuing him. No, Harry was just being friendly. And it wasn't like Draco was seriously interested anyway. Harry was just a bit sexy, that's all. And he had that way of looking at you…

Draco closed his eyes. He imagined those beautiful green eyes gazing into his own. He imagined Harry kissing him possessively, his hands tearing at Draco's clothes. He… he remembered the time when he had thought about Harry in this way before.

It had been so long ago. It had been driven completely from Draco's mind; why the hell did he have to remember it now? He wanted to stop what he was doing, but he was too far gone. Yes, Harry had been the first… Oh Merlin, this was embarrassing. Harry had been bound up with the discovery that he… Oh, how could he have forgotten?

It had all started with Luca, the first boy Draco had ever experimented with. They had been lying together on the empty classroom floor, silent and contemplative, after their solitary encounter. Luca had turned to Draco and smiled, a lock of brown hair falling across his face. "So, how long have you known?"

Draco had shrugged. "I don't know. A while, I guess. It was never really an issue before."

"So you've never…"

"No."

Luca had sat up a bit, leaning on his elbow. “Hey, have you ever tried fingering yourself?”

Draco had looked up at him, shocked. “What?”

“You really are an innocent, aren’t you?” Luca had laughed.

Draco had felt slightly annoyed. He had never enjoyed the feeling that he was at a disadvantage, that he was being laughed at. “I wouldn’t say that innocent was the right word,” he had said at length.

“Well, let’s say novice, then. I take it from your reaction that you never have tried it, and if you’re going to continue… having assignations such as this in the future, it’s something worth knowing about.” He had leaned in conspiratorially. “There’s this place inside your anus, a couple if inches up. When you touch it… well, it’s pretty mind-blowing.”

Draco had looked at him dubiously. Surely the other boy was having him on? Testing how gullible his inexperience made him? “That can’t be right.”

“I can show you now, if you want,” Luca has said.

“No!”

“Suit yourself. I recommend you try it sometime, though. Just make sure that your finger’s well lubricated. Oh and choose sometime when you’re completely alone – like I said, it’s pretty mind-blowing.”

Draco could still remember the feelings of disbelief, merging into curiosity, merging into temptation. He remembered debating for days whether he should trust Luca’s advice, wondering just how incredible this new technique could actually be. Finally, he had resolved to try it for himself. He could remember it all so

clearly now…

Irresistibly aroused by the recollection, Draco groped blindly in his bedside drawer for the bottle of lubricant he kept there.

He remembered taking his broom up to the mountains, where he had discovered a secluded little cave. He often liked to go there to read, and it would provide the requisite amount of privacy for what he wanted to do now. He had laid himself down on his cloak and removed his trousers, carefully placing the body lotion he had brought with him close to hand. He had started to stroke himself, feeling nervous and more than a little foolish. He still hadn't been sure that Luca wasn't joking; after all, this didn't exactly feel normal.

And then… and then he had thought of Harry Potter. He had remembered watching Harry kill Voldemort, witnessing the great power of that boy, no older than himself. He had remembered the look in Harry's eyes. Such intensity. He had wondered whether Harry looked like that when he made love. He wondered what it must be like for Ginny Weasley, to be able to go to bed with Harry. He had imagined what it must feel like to have Harry inside him, looking at him like that, validating him, taking everything that was rotten and corrupt in Draco and making it all better with his touch. Without really thinking, he had reached round and pushed one of his fingers inside himself. He had lain completely still for a moment, accustoming himself to this new violation. It certainly didn't feel bad. He had moved his finger further inside, remembering what Luca had said about the magic place being a couple of inches up. He slowly masturbated himself with his other hand; in his mind's eye, it was Harry touching him. And then he had found it. He had gasped and jerked as little darts of fiery pleasure had shot through his body. The sensations had been so intense they had almost frightened him. He took a moment to recover, then he had done it again. And again, and again… Harry…

Years down the line, Draco's far more expert fingers quickly found his prostate and pressed on it. He arched his hips against the sensation, no longer alarmed by it, only questing for more. Yet it was still Harry Potter's name pounding through his body as he brought himself to ecstasy, still Harry's face which burnt into his feverish brain. Unable to prolong it any longer, Draco submitted to his orgasm, pressing his lips together tightly and breathing heavily through his nose. At length the convulsions abated, and he lay still, feeling hot and a little ashamed. Still, he told himself, it means nothing.

*

“So, it looks like you’ve nearly finished in here.”

Draco jumped. Why did Harry always have to sneak up on him like that? “Yes,” he replied, trying to regulate his heartbeat. “I doubt I’ll get everything done this week, but I’m hoping that it will all be finished not long after the holidays.” He risked a glance at Harry, who was looking round the library appreciatively.

“I’ve never seen it looking so good,” he said. “You’ve really done wonders.”

“Thank you.” I do not want to have sex with you. It was just a fantasy; it didn’t mean anything. At any rate, you don’t want to have sex with me, do you? So it’s silly to even think about it. It’s not even an issue. We’ll just talk about something trivial. Just as friends. “So, how was the conference thing you had to go to?”

Harry huffed a laugh. “Boring as ever. Couldn’t get out of it though, and at least I got to see a bit of Paris. Oh, that reminds me.” He reached into his cloak pocket and pulled out a small rectangular parcel. “This is for you – happy Christmas.”

Draco was astonished. He took the present with a look of incomprehension at Harry. “Oh… you really got me something? You didn’t have to, I… I never expected anything. Oh, and I don’t have anything to give to you!” he finished with dismay.

Harry waved his hand. “Don’t be stupid, I don’t expect anything. The only reason I got that was because I saw it in a shop yesterday and I knew that you just had to have it. It… it wasn’t like I went out of my way or anything.”

Trying to quash the horrible urge to burst into tears of gratitude, Draco undid the brown paper and pulled out a small, slightly tatty looking book. He carefully opened the front cover and saw that it was a copy of Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du Mal, published in 1857. It was a first edition. Okay, he really was going to cry now if he wasn’t careful. He breathed in slowly through his nose, trying to get a grip on his emotions. He was grateful that they were in a library and could only whisper, because he knew that the

tremor in his voice would betray him. “Where the hell did you find this?” he asked. “They’re really rare; only a few copies were printed before the book was condemned.”

“I was looking through this little second-hand bookshop in Montmartre, and there it was.”

“It must have been really expensive.”

“Doesn’t matter. As I said, I knew you had to have it.”

“Harry, I… this is just wonderful, I—”

“Oh, don’t thank me,” Harry said hurriedly. “I get all embarrassed and have to run away. I’m glad you like it; I was hoping you would. Anyway, happy Christmas. I’m sure I’ll see you again before we have to leave.” Harry turned and left, rather pink about the cheeks, leaving Draco holding onto the precious book and feeling as if his whole world was being turned upside-down.

*

Dearest Mother,

Of course I will be home for Christmas. I am really looking forward to seeing you – it feels like much too long. And I am so happy that your sister is coming; it will be lovely to meet her at last. And no, I don’t mind sharing a room with Teddy. Did you know that he’s Harry’s godson? It will be nice to meet him.

I’m very sorry about Father. Still, you must bear in mind how much he has improved. I know we all hope he’s going to get completely better, but these things do take time. Don’t lose hope; I’m sure that he’ll get there in the end. Has he still been gardening, or is it too cold?

Thank you for everything you said in your last letter. I think you're right about moving on by not running away from the past. Also, I think you were right about me spending too much time on my own. Perhaps it does make me a little warped and overly cynical. You will be delighted to know that I finally allowed Harry Potter to talk me into going for drinks with him. It was actually very nice. I think you're right; I think Harry might be one of the few good people in this world. Why on earth he wants to be friends with me is a mystery, but there it is. I think that maybe, in time, I might be able to form a real friendship with him. But I don't want to get my hopes up – he may come to his senses yet!

Anyway, I will be home in just a few days, bearing gifts and Christmas cheer. Well, Christmas ambivalence, at any rate. I'm really looking forward to seeing you all.

All my love,

Draco.

P.S. Could you have Topsy put my Falmouth Falcons duvet on my bed? Thanks xxx

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Chapter 6: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'Voyaging', by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

My Darling Boy,

Thank you for letting me know that you got back to Hogwarts safely. I hope that you're not too cold over there. When is Harry getting back? I expect you're looking forward to seeing him.

It was so wonderful to see you this Christmas, and I was delighted that you were so much more cheerful. Even Father noticed, didn't he? I hope that you'll be able to keep it up. I was glad that you got along so well with Andromeda and Teddy – he's a lovely little boy, isn't he? He certainly liked you a lot.

Things have gone back to normal here. It's quite sad to have a quiet house again; I miss having you all around. Still, your father and I have been getting on very well. You must have noticed how improved he is. Apart from that rather embarrassing habit he had of calling Andromeda 'Bellatrix' (and you can't really blame him – as different as they are in person, they do look very similar), he was perfectly coherent. When I know he's having a good day, I might mention to him that you're friends with Harry now; that is, if you don't mind. I think he would be pleased to know that the Malfoys are making amends for their past actions.

Anyway, stay well and happy, my love, and let me know what you get up to. Good luck with the library this term, and good luck with Harry!

All my love,

Your Mother.

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Draco awoke with a start and sat bolt upright, panting for breath. His whole body was clammy with a cold sweat, and he felt vaguely nauseous. It had been a long time since he had had a nightmare like that. He was shaking. He pressed his palms to his face, trying to calm himself. There was already a thin, ghostly light filtering through his curtains, and Draco decided that there was no point trying to get back to sleep. He was too unsettled by his nightmare anyway. He got out of bed and padded into his small

bathroom, hoping that a hot shower would dispel some of his lingering anxiety.

He almost wished that he was back in France with his family, which never happened. At least their tiny cottage in Brittany held no associations with the past. It had been a really nice Christmas as well; he hadn't felt suffocated like he usually did when he stayed with his parents. It was true that Lucius had been much better, and it had also helped to have his aunt and cousin there, but Draco secretly suspected that the real reason for his contentment was that he actually had something good in his life now. He had a new job that he loved and… he had a friend.

He had spent much of the holiday trying to subtly glean information about Harry from his little cousin. Not that he had needed to try very hard – Teddy was only too happy to talk about his godfather. He had chattered away for hours about how Harry would take him to Quidditch matches or to go and see the Weasleys. Harry was clearly his hero. Draco had liked his cousin a lot – weird, because Draco rarely liked children. Teddy was friendly but not loud, and he was capable of thinking deeply about things, making him seem far more mature than his nine years, and contradicting the somewhat punkish appearance his kaleidoscopic hair gave him. Draco had liked his Aunt Andromeda as well. She was a grave, quiet woman, who doted on her little grandson. Draco could appreciate that – poor Andromeda had lost her husband and only daughter in the space of months, and Teddy was all she had left.

He had been happy to see his mother so contented as well. Narcissa had always been sociable and, as much as she protested that solitude was good for her, he knew that she missed company. The reconciliation meant a lot to Narcissa, and Draco had been pleased to see her able to talk to someone openly and form a real friendship which would not be dictated by social mores. She had been very eager to hear all about Harry and, while Draco was more than willing to discuss his new friend, he didn't like the look his mother would give him sometimes. It was a knowing, crafty look, and Draco found it incredibly annoying. Especially as he knew exactly what she was thinking.

He had confided in her that he was bisexual shortly after he had started dating Mark, and she had taken the news surprisingly well. She had said that it wasn't as if there was any pressing need to continue the family name now that 'Malfoy' had become synonymous with corruption and ruin, and that it therefore hardly mattered if he ended up with a man, as long as he was happy. It was because of things like this that Draco was so devoted to his mother. Still, it was a bit much that he couldn't form a perfectly innocent friendship with another man without her getting ideas. Okay, so he had had a couple of sexual fantasies about Harry, but that hardly meant anything. And yes, he may have brought the subject of Harry into conversations a little more frequently than was absolutely necessary, but as this was the first time Draco had felt that he had a real friend in years, it was understandable that he was a little excited

about it. Narcissa was just being silly, that was all.

Draco stepped out of the shower and towelled himself dry, feeling much better than when he had woken up. It was the first day of the spring term tomorrow, meaning that Harry would be arriving that very night. He smiled, thinking how different his feelings were compared to when he had awaited Harry's arrival last term. He would have to get something for the other man, something to acknowledge Harry's generosity to him. The only trouble was that Draco didn't have any money – he could only really afford to spend up to ten Sickles. Also, there was no way he could ever best that copy of Baudelaire that Harry had got for him.

He looked at his clock: it was nearly seven. In a couple of hours he could walk into Hogsmeade and have a look around. He wished he knew a bit more about Harry and what he liked. Harry liked teaching, Quidditch, spending time with his friends, fighting evil. Not terribly helpful as far as gifts were concerned. Draco supposed he could get some Quidditch merchandise, but it hardly seemed personal enough. He wanted to convey to Harry how much he appreciated his kindness.

"Ugh, this is impossible," he muttered as he checked his appearance in the mirror. "I'm never going to come up with anything."

"Got a problem, luv?" the mirror grunted.

"I do wish you'd stop calling me 'luv'," Draco replied. "But yes, as it happens, I do. I need to get a friend of mine a gift. It has to be meaningful but not too expensive, and I haven't the foggiest idea what he might want."

The mirror was silent for a bit, then said, "How about flowers? Nothing's more meaningful than a bunch of roses."

"Um, I'm not sure that would be appropriate," Draco said uncomfortably. "My friend's a man, you see, and I'm not sure that he wouldn't think it was a bit weird."

“I thought you were…”

“Well, yes, I am. But we’re not… that is to say, he doesn’t… and nor do I for that matter. I mean, there may have been a couple of… but it doesn’t mean anything. We’re just friends. I’m pretty sure he wouldn’t want anything more.”

“Can’t see why not,” the mirror growled. “Cracking bloke like you should have been snapped up a long time ago.”

“Er, thanks for the sentiment,” Draco replied, feeling more uncomfortable than ever.

“Still, seems a bit sad that one feller can’t send another feller some flowers if he wants,” the mirror continued. “Perfectly normal thing to do, in my opinion. Nice way to say thank you. Think it over, anyway; I reckon your friend would think it was just smashin’.”

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Draco wasn’t entirely sure how it came about that two hours later, he was walking nervously into Hogsmeade’s only flower shop. Was he so desperate that he was actually taking the advice of a mirror? Well, yes he was. The young girl behind the counter gave Draco a brief smile before returning to her arrangement of a vase of large lilies which emitted ethereal music.

There were flowers of every description in the shop, from tiny violets to huge blooms as big as dinner plates with rainbow-coloured petals. What on earth should he choose? Harry wouldn’t want anything too ostentatious, he was sure of that. The mirror had suggested roses. But surely roses were too indicative of romance? Draco only really wanted to say thank you. Perhaps if he chose roses which weren’t red…

“Excuse me,” he said to the shop assistant, “could you show me what roses you have?”

“Certainly, Sir. What colour roses were you thinking of?”

Draco thought for a moment. “White, please.”

The girl disappeared for a moment, then returned with a bucket full of the delicate blooms. Draco looked at them; they each resembled the moon, he thought. They were so round and luminous, so pure, so full of promise. Draco felt that there would be no better indication of making a fresh start. He could send them over to Harry’s rooms, and they would be there for when the other man arrived that evening.

“How much for twenty?”

“Seven Sickles.”

“Perfect. I’ll take them.”

“Wonderful. I’ll put an Anti-Wilt Charm on them for you. Would you like me to send them to someone in particular?” the girl asked.

“No, I’ll take them myself.” Draco did not like the idea of giving Harry’s name to the shop assistant. He could imagine the kind of look he would get. He handed over the money and left. He decided that he would go straight back to his rooms, write out a card, and send his owl over to Harry’s rooms with the flowers at once, before their enchantment and promise wore off. He knew that if he lingered too long he would decide that the whole thing was idiotic, and not send them at all. It was high time he stopped being so reticent and started making a positive effort to maintain his friendship with Harry, and he wouldn’t let his paranoia defeat him this time.

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It was fortuitous that Draco had resolved to send them to Harry so speedily, because by the next morning he was convinced that the roses had been the most stupid idea he had ever had. What would Harry think? Draco had sent him flowers, for Merlin's sake! Oh, this was all that stupid mirror's fault. Flowers were something you sent when you were in a relationship, and now Harry would think that Draco was… Oh, it was too humiliating to contemplate. How could he have been so idiotic? He performed his work automatically, barely noticing what he was doing, so preoccupied was he with a terrible sense of foreboding. He could feel a hot flush burning his cheeks every time he thought about those fateful roses. He dreaded seeing Harry again, anticipating how the other man would thank him awkwardly, not able to meet Draco's eyes. Harry would keep his distance after that; Draco had been too forward, too clumsy. He had ruined everything.

Just when Draco had got to the point where he was seriously considering just running away from the school in order to escape his humiliation, Harry came into the library. Draco thought he might pass out. He had thought that the Defence teacher might have tried to avoid him for a few days, yet here he was, deliberately entering Draco's territory. He watched, frozen to the spot, as Harry walked over to him with a huge grin on his face.

"Draco! I've wanted to come and see you all day," he said quietly once he had reached the speechless librarian. "Thank you so much for the flowers, they were beautiful. I'd had a pig of a journey last night, and it was such a nice surprise. They really cheered me up."

"It was nothing," Draco managed. "I mean, it didn't… I just wanted to get you something to say thank you for the book, that was all."

"Well, I love them. It was a lovely thought. Nobody's ever bought me flowers before," Harry added, almost shyly.

"You really liked them?" Draco said, feeling the crawling shame he had been experiencing all morning abate a little.

Harry gave him an odd look. "Of course I did. Why wouldn't I?"

“I don’t know,” Draco replied. “I was just worried that you might think… I don’t know. It doesn’t matter. Did you have a good Christmas?”

“I did, as it happens,” Harry said, leaning casually against the bookcase Draco was rearranging. “I went to stay with the Weasleys as usual; Molly always puts on a fantastic spread. I might have to up my exercise routine now, come to think of it. I had far too many mince pies, and I no longer have Auror duties to keep me fit. Then again, I could completely let myself go. I could get portly and grow a beard. That would certainly put a stop to those horrific Harry Potter Fan Club ideas. How about you? How was your holiday?”

“Really good,” Draco said, completely at ease once more. “We had your godson over to stay.”

“I heard! You were certainly very popular with Teddy; he talked a lot about you when I visited last week. He told me to say hello from him.”

“That’s nice,” Draco said softly, feeling warmth spread through his insides. It was so pleasant to hear that someone had liked him; he had got used to the idea over the years that he was completely unlovable. “He was a great kid. And that’s really saying something because I generally find children repellent in the extreme.”

Harry laughed. “Why does that not surprise me? Hey, I was wondering if you wanted to—”

Harry stopped talking abruptly as three fifth year students walked past. They all gave Draco distinctly cold looks, and he moved away to where he had been sorting the books, painfully brought back to the fact that he was in no position to consider himself Harry’s equal.

“Hello, Professor Potter,” one boy said. “I hope you had a good Christmas.”

“Yes, thank you, Adams,” Harry replied. “I hope you’ve all managed to finish that essay to hand in to me

tomorrow. Latecomers will be fed to the Boggart I keep in my briefcase."

"Of course," the boy replied, showing no sign that he knew that Harry was joking. Draco found himself reminded of Percy Weasley before he had removed the rod up his arse. "Listen," the boy continued, leaning in conspiratorially, "I feel it my duty to warn you about the company you are keeping." Here he shot a nasty look in Draco's direction. "I don't know if you're aware, but it's a well known fact that our librarian used to be a Death Eater. Personally, I think it's a disgrace that such people are permitted to go free, let alone be allowed to work here of all places. Anyway, I think you'll agree that he is hardly an appropriate associate for someone such as yourself."

"I am well aware of Mr Malfoy's past, thank you, Adams," Harry said coldly. "I am not entirely sure what would make you think that I wouldn't be. And I am quite capable of choosing who I spend my time with by myself. I happen to be of the opinion that people can change, and I do not hold with demonising individuals for mistakes they made when they were very young. I will overlook it this time, but if I ever hear any of you referring to Mr Malfoy with anything less than the respect he is due, I will put you in detention for a week. Is that clear?"

The teenagers mumbled their assent and skulked off, clearly intimidated by Harry's evident anger. After all, they all knew what he was capable of.

"You shouldn't have done that," Draco said angrily once they had gone. "I am perfectly used to that kind of treatment from the students, and I can deal with it on my own. I don't need you to fight my battles for me, you know!"

Harry looked taken aback. "I'm sorry if I interfered, but I'm not going to just stand by and let them insult you. Besides, how exactly are you fighting your battles?"

"By keeping a dignified silence," Draco retorted. "I know you're a Gryffindor, but sometimes there just isn't any need to make a big fuss about things like that. Besides, it's not like I don't deserve it."

Harry looked at him sadly for a moment. "Do you really hate yourself that much?"

Draco turned away. “I simply accept that I did things in the past which were very wrong, and now I have to be punished.”

Harry sighed. “You don’t think you’ve been punished enough?”

“Look,” Draco said, starting to feel a little testy, “sometimes you just have to accept your lot in life. People dislike me because in the past I wasn’t a good person, and I associated with people who were even worse. It’s perfectly understandable. By having a go at those kids like that, you’re just going to make things worse! They will hate me even more now because they will think that I’m, I don’t know, poisoning your mind or something. By not retorting, I show that I have changed, that I accept that I’ve done wrong. If they don’t get a reaction, they don’t get as much satisfaction from goading me. Now you’ve just undone all my work.”

Harry took his glasses off and cleaned the lenses on the sleeve of his robes. “I’m sorry you feel that way,” he said quietly. “I’m sorry if I have made things worse, but I’m not the kind of person who can stand by and allow someone to insult someone I care about. It’s just not in my nature.” He put his glasses back on. “I’ll see you soon, Draco. Thank you again for the flowers.”

Draco watched Harry walking away. He felt bad that things had ended on that note, but he knew that he had been right. Noble as Harry’s intentions undoubtedly were, Draco was sure that they would only make his own situation worse. Still, Harry had said in so many words that Draco was someone he cared about. And… he couldn’t deny that a part of him had been made immeasurably happy by Harry defending him like that. He just hoped that the students’ reaction would not be too bad.

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Draco could not have had a greater sense of achievement if he had just completed a climb of Everest. He felt light and elated, completely at peace with the world, as he stood by his desk in the library at half-past nine on Wednesday evening, and surveyed the fruits of his labours. He had finally finished. For the first time since he had known the place, the library was arranged exactly to his liking.

“Oh, Mr Malfoy,” breathed Melanie, coming to stand beside him. “It’s beautiful.”

As testament to his good mood, Draco actually turned to his assistant and smiled. “Thank you. I’ve been anticipating this day for so long that now it’s actually arrived, I don’t know what to do with myself. I must say that it feels wonderful to finally have everything up to my standards… although it does rather pose the question of what the hell I’m going to do now.”

“Oh, you’ll think of something,” Melanie said encouragingly. “I’m sure of it. And there will be a lot of work maintaining everything you’ve done already.”

“This is true,” Draco replied. “You can’t expect the heathens in this school to respect the beauty of a well-ordered shelf.”

“Oh, they’re not all bad. Or, um… whatever…” Melanie trailed off as she noticed Draco’s icy look. “At any rate, I’m sure that between us we’ll be able to keep things running smoothly.”

“Yes,” Draco replied quietly. “I’m sure we will.”

Melanie smiled up at him and went into the office, leaving Draco alone in the library. She really wasn’t a bad girl; Draco thought that they would probably have a very happy working relationship. As long as she didn’t start to get any funny ideas about allowing the students too many liberties, things would be just fine. And he would definitely need to find something else to do in the library now that the mammoth task of reordering the books was out of the way. There was a danger that he might find himself with too much free time on his hands, meaning he would have lots of time to think about… things that wouldn’t do him any good in the long run. If he could just keep himself occupied, he would be more at ease.

Draco was deeply unsettled by the strange feelings he had been having lately. It wasn’t just the erotic fantasies about Harry – after all, they could be put down to sexual frustration and the fact that Harry was the only person of either gender who had paid Draco any attention for years. No, the most bothersome thing was the feeling Draco had been having lately that he was coming alive. It all seemed so ridiculous when he actually thought about it, because of course he was alive. Still, there was this sensation he had that he was blossoming, awakening, feeling things again. It disturbed him. He had built those barriers for a reason: if you allowed yourself to feel, you got hurt. So why was he sabotaging himself? Why did he

have this increasing urge to go into his office and ask Melanie how her week had been? Why did he suddenly want to go out flying again? Why had he been so distracted last night that he couldn't even read one of his beloved books? What the hell was happening to him?

He hoped that things were all right with Harry. He hadn't seen the other man since their minor altercation on Monday, and he was starting to worry that Harry was actually upset with him. True, Harry had received a lot worse at Draco's hands since his return to the school and had continued to show astonishing tenacity in his pursuit of friendship, so it was highly unlikely that he would be put off now. Still, Draco found that he cared a lot more about what Harry thought these days and, consequentially, was a lot more worried about the ways in which he might have upset his new friend.

Draco resolved that he would go and find Harry the next day. After all, it was hardly fair that the other man should have to do all the leg work. Draco would go to him and let him know that there were no hard feelings about the other day. He had overreacted, that was all; Harry was just being a good friend. Yes, he would go and apologise and perhaps he would even suggest that they go out together again soon. Draco felt a little shiver of excitement run up his spine at the mere thought.

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Draco had never really had the chance to watch Harry teach before. He often wished that he had been smart enough to figure out the truth about Voldemort in time to have attended some of Harry's legendary Dumbledore's Army tutorials, instead of plotting to sabotage them. He was aware that the information Harry had provided to his fellow students must have saved many lives. He knew that Harry had been a brilliant, if somewhat volatile tutor, happy to take however much time was needed to ensure that his pupils picked up the skills they needed, yet easy to provoke, especially if he thought he was being doubted.

Draco could well believe that. He could remember how Harry had been at school. It had been so deliciously easy to wind the Gryffindor up, to get under his skin… and Draco had taken every opportunity to do so. Merlin, he had been a little shit back then. Poor Harry. At the time, Draco had never given a thought to the feelings of his friends, let alone his sworn enemies, and couldn't have cared less about why Harry was always so moody, apart from the fact that it was fun to antagonise him. He could understand it now, though. He couldn't imagine having to deal with all the horrible things Harry had had to face, practically since he had first arrived at the school. And then Harry had been used as a

pawn by the Ministry, slandered and then manipulated in order to cover up their own incompetency. Harry had had so much more than the usual adolescent problems of bad skin and losing his virginity to trouble him – he had known that Voldemort wanted him dead and that he was the only person who could save the wizarding world. No wonder he had been edgy.

There was hardly any evidence of Harry's former temper now. Apart from the odd little instance – the other day in the library, or that time in the Hospital Wing – Harry was the easiest-going person Draco had ever met. What had happened? Harry no longer had to worry about Voldemort and the Death Eaters, but his life wasn't exactly the charmed existence Draco had thought. He was still under a tremendous amount of pressure to go to all these official meetings and be shown off by the Ministry, which Draco knew he hated. The press were still hounding him as well – Harry had gone to great lengths to ban the paparazzi from Hogsmeade, not wanting his fame to disrupt the lives of the locals too much. And, from what he had told Draco, Harry's celebrity meant that his personal life had more than its share of complications. And yet Harry never complained. Draco couldn't understand it, and he felt slightly bad about griping about his own life so much. Perhaps he could learn a lesson from the other man; perhaps he should be brave and not allow his setbacks to stop him from enjoying life.

Harry was out in the grounds with a class of third year students. He'd got Hagrid with him as well, and Draco could only presume that they were conducting a lesson on dangerous magical creatures. Well, Hagrid would certainly know about that. Draco stood beside the doors to the castle, watching the small group. The kids all looked like they were really enjoying themselves; Harry's classes must be really good fun.

The final bell rang, and Draco slipped back through the doors of the castle. He would wait until the students had gone past, then he would try and talk to Harry. A general hubbub filled the school as students came pouring out of classrooms. Draco felt slightly foolish, waiting around in the Entrance Hall for Harry like this. He was beginning to think that he should just go back to the library, when Harry's students burst through the doors, talking excitedly about their class. It appeared that Harry had enlisted Hagrid's help to introduce the kids to several of the minor dark creatures they might encounter. They had even been taken to the lake, where Harry had persuaded the mermaids to show off their pet Grindylow.

Harry was the last through the doors. He was talking to a couple of boys about Red Caps, but when he noticed Draco he made his excuses and walked over, smiling warmly. A couple of students gave Draco weird looks, but, much to his relief, no one said anything. He didn't want Harry to feel like he had to defend him again.

“Afternoon,” Harry said. “What brings you out here?”

“I was waiting for you,” Draco said, feeling rather idiotic. Merlin, he sounded like a groupie or something!

Harry laughed. “Believe it or not, I was just on my way to the library to come and see you! Clearly our minds are becoming attuned. What’s up?”

Draco smiled awkwardly. “Oh, you know, I just wanted to apologise if I was a bit harsh the other day. I know you were just trying to be nice.”

“Forget about it; I’ve had far worse tongue lashings from you than that! Besides, I get why you were mad. I have this stupid thing where I always want to muscle in and defend what’s right, but that isn’t always the best thing to do. You’d think I’d have learnt that by now. Anyway, I’m sorry if I caused you any trouble.”

“You didn’t!” Draco said quickly. “I was probably just overreacting. It was nice of you to stick up for me like that.”

Harry shrugged. “No worries. Hey, do you want to get together again at some point? We haven’t really had a chance to catch up since we got back.”

“That would be great,” Draco replied, feeling relieved that Harry had been the one to suggest it.

“I’ll be a bit swamped with marking for the next couple of days, I’m afraid,” Harry said. “Serves me right for being a sadistic bastard and setting everyone essays to do over the holidays. I should be all done by Sunday though – fancy getting breakfast together?”

“In the hall?” Draco said doubtfully. He wasn’t keen on trying to have a conversation with Harry while hundreds of malevolent children were glaring at him.

“No, we’ll never be able to hear each other in there. Why don’t you come to my rooms? I could arrange for some of the elves to get something ready for us. What do you think?”

“Okay,” Draco said with a nonchalance he certainly did not feel.

“Great! You know the way? Good. I’ll see you there at, say, nine-thirty? I’m afraid I like a bit of a lie-in on Sundays. I’ve got to go and pick some stuff up from my classroom now, but I’ll see you then.”

“See you,” Draco replied. “Bye.”

He made his way back to the library in a daze. Harry had actually invited him to his private rooms! Harry was going to arrange breakfast for them! Okay, he really was acting like a groupie now; this had to stop. Still, he had to stop himself from grinning when he thought of Harry. He had anticipated that this year would bring changes for the better, but he had never dreamed that things would change so much.

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Draco woke up at seven on Sunday. He lay there for several minutes, telling himself that he wasn’t going to get up now, because he would inevitably spend the next two hours getting ready for meeting Harry, and when you were only visiting a friend for breakfast, that was a bit tragic. And Draco clearly needed to get it through his head that that was all Harry was: a friend. He couldn’t allow the fact that Harry was nice and attractive to blind him to the fact that they were completely unsuited.

Draco did really well. He managed to lie in bed for a whole fifteen minutes before he felt that he simply had to get up.

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By the time he reached Harry's rooms, Draco had worked himself up into such a state of nerves that he was actually trembling a bit. This was ridiculous! He was simply having breakfast with a colleague; it really wasn't that big a deal. He took a couple of deep breaths, and knocked on Harry's door. It was only breakfast. Nothing to get excited about.

Seconds later, Harry flung the door open. "Morning! Come on in; everything's just been delivered. You're looking nice today. Are you going somewhere after this?"

"Er, no," Draco said, feeling very foolish. "I wasn't aware that I looked any different today." Liar, he told himself. You spent half-an-hour on your hair alone. See, Harry looks like he's just got out of bed – he isn't making a big deal about this. The two of you are nothing more than friends.

Harry's apartment was considerably bigger than Draco's, which wasn't surprising. It was also considerably messier; again, not surprising. Draco was led into an attractive sitting room. There were two doors on either side, presumably leading to Harry's bedroom and bathroom. Ahead of him there was a large window overlooking the lake which had a small, beautifully laid out table in front of it. Harry had arranged for them to have a continental breakfast, complete with fresh coffee and orange juice. It was the kind of breakfast Draco had had when he was a boy, living at the manor. The roses he had given Harry were placed on the windowsill, and a single bloom had been put in a small vase, and took pride of place in the centre of the breakfast table. The sight of it made Draco's stomach do a small somersault.

"Wow," he said. "You certainly make an effort with breakfast."

"Only when I have company," Harry replied. "Usually it's a slice of toast in the hall for me. This is a pleasant change; perhaps we should make a habit of it. Here, come and sit down." He pulled out a chair for Draco.

Draco sat. What exactly was going on? On the one hand, Harry had clearly made no effort with his appearance for this meeting and thought it strange that Draco had, indicating that he just saw Draco as a friend. But then he had put on this amazing breakfast with a freaking rose in the middle of the table, and was being all chivalrous with a chair, which suggested that he wanted more. But was Draco just reading

too much into it? God, why was he so rubbish at this kind of thing? Really, he told himself, it would be much easier for everyone if Harry only wanted to be friends. He had just about reconciled himself to the fact that he might just fancy Harry a little bit, but anything more would be unthinkable. He was a completely unsuitable partner for someone like Harry. Besides, he had made the decision a long time ago that he was not going to get into another relationship. No sense in breaking his resolution now.

“What are you thinking?” Harry asked, breaking Draco out of his reverie.

“Nothing, really,” he demurred. “Just that it’s nice that we’re friends now. It makes me feel that I’m a little closer to being able to atone for everything I did when I was younger.”

“I’m glad we’re friends now too,” Harry replied. “Though I do wish you wouldn’t talk about having to atone for what you did. You were a kid back then; we were all kids. You’d just been brought up to believe certain things. Yes, you made mistakes, but do you honestly think that I didn’t? I know that you’ve had a rough time of it, but if you’re still seeing yourself as being guilty and a bad person, that’s how other people are going to see you too.”

“I don’t really care about how other people see me,” Draco said quietly.

“Bull. If you didn’t care, you wouldn’t be feeling so bad all the time. I just think it’s sad that you don’t feel that you deserve to be happy.”

“It’s not that,” Draco sighed. “I have tried to be happy, but… it’s other people who don’t seem to want to let me.”

“Well, that’s even more of a shame,” Harry said quietly. “I just wish they could see how admirable you are.”

Draco snorted.

“I’m serious! It must have taken a lot of courage to turn your life around like you have. I really admire you, Draco. Now, eat your croissant.”

The food was delicious. Draco didn’t know whether it was because he hadn’t eaten this well in such a long time or because the company was so good, but he genuinely believed that this was the best breakfast he had ever had. Somewhat surprisingly, the conversation came round to the subject of the war. Draco never spoke about the war if he could possibly help it, but he had often wondered about what exactly Harry had got up to in that final year. He had only gleaned bits and pieces of information, and he had never been entirely sure of how much had been fabricated. Even more surprisingly, Draco found that he actually wanted to talk about the war. It was like letting go of a weight he had been carrying round with him. Harry was quite happy to tell Draco his version of events, and they discussed that terrible final year almost until eleven o’clock, when Draco had to go and open the library. Sunday was Melanie’s day off, so he really couldn’t afford to be late. Harry said that he would come along, so the two of them set off together, still deep in conversation.

“I still can’t believe you escaped from Gringotts on a dragon,” Draco said as they descended the staircase. “I’d heard rumours when I was working there, but you can never tell with goblins when they’re having you on.”

“Don’t I know it,” Harry replied.

“There is one thing I’m a bit curious about, actually. It’s… a bit of a weird question.”

“Shoot.”

“Well, you know how all those people came to escort you from the Muggles’ house at the beginning of the year, and they all Polyjuiced into you?”

“Yeah?”

Draco laughed awkwardly. “Well, I don’t really know how to put this, but it’s been troubling me ever since you mentioned it. Polyjuice Potions turn people into the exact replica of whoever they’re

impersonating, right? So… does that mean that when Fleur and Hermione took it, they, you know, grew man parts?"

Harry looked at him aghast. "Oh my God! I'd never even thought of that! Oh, that is so disturbing! Well, I can't exactly ask them about it now, can I? Oh great, now it's going to haunt me forever!"

They had arrived at the library, and Draco pulled out his wand to unlock the door, very much amused by Harry's discomfort. The door swung open, Draco walked into the library, and felt his world shatter around him.

At first he couldn't work out what had happened. He thought that there must have been some mistake; had he somehow come to the wrong room? This couldn't be his library. It was like some kind of horrible nightmare. There were books scattered everywhere, their pages torn out and their covers bent. Bookshelves had been overturned, their contents spilling out onto the floor. Someone had scored deep scratches into the students' desks. The glass window in the door of the office had been smashed. And there, in red paint, scrawled over Draco's desk, were the words, 'DEATH EATER SCUM. GET OUT OF THIS SCHOOL'.

There was a strange ringing noise in Draco's ears. He heard Harry swear loudly as he followed him into the library, but it seemed like it was very far away. Then Draco started to laugh. He had no idea why he was laughing – the horror he felt at that moment was so acute that he wanted to die – yet he couldn't seem to stop. He could hear Harry calling his name, calling him over and over, but he wasn't able to respond. Draco's knees gave way, and he would have fallen to the floor if Harry hadn't caught him.

"Draco, stop that! Draco!" Harry took hold of his shoulders and shook him.

Draco gasped and grabbed hold of Harry's arm. He stopped laughing. Harry was holding his steady, which was just as well because he didn't think he'd be able to stand on his own. The other man's face was deathly pale.

"It's all right," Harry said shakily. "I've got you. It's all right."

“My books,” Draco whispered. “My books.”

“I know. I know. Oh, fuck! This is… Draco, do you have any idea who might have done this? Who knows how to get into the library when it’s locked?”

“No one,” Draco replied, still desperately hoping that this was all some horrible nightmare. “No one except me and Melanie. Oh God, you don’t think that she—”

“No,” Harry said. “I’ve learnt to read people pretty well, and she’s just not the type. Besides, she has way too much respect for the library to do something so horrible. No, there must be another way.”

Draco shook his head. He felt completely numb.

Harry was silent for a moment. “Oh, fuck!” he suddenly exclaimed. “I think I might know. The secret passage.”

“What secret passage?” Draco couldn’t make sense of Harry’s words.

“You don’t know about it? There’s a secret passageway that leads from the Charms corridor and opens up through a trap door behind one of the bookcases. Here, I’ll show you.”

He led Draco across the room, carefully stepping around the desecrated books. Looking at them, Draco felt a physical pain, as if he had been torn and trampled on himself.

“Here,” Harry said, pointing towards a large bookcase which stood against the far wall. “You see those marks on the floor where it’s swung open? Someone must have found out about it.”

“It must have been one of the students,” Draco said numbly. “God knows, they hate me enough. Oh, what am I going to do?” He felt his chest grow tight with panic. Looking around his once beautiful library,

he couldn't see how he would ever repair the damage. Oh, his poor books! He absent-mindedly bit down on his knuckles in his anguish.

Harry came up to him and put a steadying hand on his arm. "Don't do that, you'll hurt yourself. Draco… Draco, look at me. Look at me. Now, here's what we're going to do. We're going to get out of here, lock up, and leave a notice on the door saying that the library will be closed for the day in order to carry out construction work. Then we're going to go back to my rooms, have a cup of tea and calm down. Then we're going to come back and spend as much time as is needed to get this place looking like it was before."

"No," Draco muttered, "I have to stay here. I have to help my books. I have to stay."

"You're in no condition to do anything at the moment. We'll sort this mess out together later, but you're in shock right now and you need to take some time to get yourself together. Come on." Harry grabbed hold of Draco's elbow and steered him out of the room. He used several of his own charms to lock the doors behind them, then conjured up a small notice informing students that the library was closed. They then walked back to Harry's rooms in stunned silence, barely noticing the few students they passed on the way.

Being back in Harry's sitting room was so weird; so much had changed since they had left less than half-an-hour ago. Draco sat down heavily on the sofa, gazing blindly at the leftovers from their breakfast. Harry went over to his small kitchenette and put the kettle on. They didn't speak. Five minutes later, Harry came to sit beside him, handing him a mug of strong black tea. "Here you go. I put a shot of brandy in it; it should make you feel a bit better." He paused. "Draco, I'm so sorry. This is all my fault."

"What?" Draco glanced over at the other man. Harry looked terrible.

"I should have just left things well alone. You were right; I should never have said anything to those kids the other day. It's my fault that this has happened."

"No," Draco said firmly. "Harry, this isn't your fault; you were just being a good friend the other day. I've known that something like this was brewing for a while. It was stupid of me to think that I could come

back here, I see that now. People will never let me forget."

"Don't say that. You can't let this beat you. You are going to pick up the pieces and you are going to go on as if nothing has happened. You have to show these people that you're better than that."

"How can I?" Draco whispered. "It would have been one thing if they had attacked me personally; I could have dealt with that. But why did they have to take it out on the books? Those books are all I have. It… it was so cruel. The books haven't done anything wrong, they haven't hurt anyone. How could someone do something so horrible? And I brought it upon them. Oh, my poor books…" Draco could feel himself getting choked up, and desperately tried to master his emotions. He wasn't going to cry in front of Harry. He couldn't cope with that on top of everything else.

"I know," Harry said quietly. "I do understand. I… I like reading too."

Draco snorted in spite of himself. "'I like reading'? Oh yes, I see that you have a very clear grasp on what I'm feeling right now."

Harry grimaced. "That was badly put. I mean, I know that I don't exactly share your passion, but… I know what it's like to feel that books are your only real friend." He sighed. "When I was little, I didn't have anything of my own. I was never allowed any toys, whereas my cousin had everything he ever wished for. I'm not feeling sorry for myself," he hastened to add, "but that's just how it was. The only chance I had to entertain myself was to borrow something from him and… his books were the only things I knew he wouldn't miss. My uncle used to lock me up in my cupboard sometimes, and the only thing that stopped me from going stir crazy was being able to read a book. It made me forget where I was. Reading took me somewhere else; it made me feel like I was escaping for a bit. I kind of gave it up when I got to Hogwarts. I had so much else going on, and having a psychopath trying to kill you isn't exactly conducive to being able to relax with a good novel. I've read more since I left, though. I really missed it."

"Well," Draco said softly, "you really are a dark horse, aren't you?" Harry was so idolised these days that it was easy to forget what he had been made to suffer as a child. He seemed almost embarrassed to talk about it – Draco hadn't failed to notice the way he had protested that he wasn't looking for sympathy. It was strange to think that at one point or another in their lives, they had both used books in order to escape from their unhappiness.

“I’ve just finished a Henry James book, The Wings of the Dove,” Harry continued. “You’re a fan of him, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am,” Draco replied, slightly astonished by the fact that Harry read at all, let alone Henry James novels. “How did you get on with it?”

“It took me a while to get through, if I’m honest. He really likes his long, convoluted sentences, doesn’t he? I enjoyed it though. I really liked how none of the big events were actually described. It was like it all happened offstage or something. It could have easily turned into one of those melodramatic novels, but he didn’t do that. It was very clever.”

Draco was so astounded that he almost forgot the awful events of the morning. He had expected Harry to come out with something predictable about how sad the ending was, or to pass some kind of moral judgement on the characters. Clearly there was a lot more to Harry than there seemed. He hated that his friend had been so unhappy. “I’m sorry,” Draco said at length. “I’m sorry you had such a horrible time when you were a kid.”

Harry waved him away awkwardly. “Oh, it’s nothing. We’ve all been though bad times, it’s no big deal.”

“At least I got to have a childhood,” Draco replied, “although I really was spoilt rotten. I’m ashamed to say that I was probably a lot like your cousin when I was little. He sounds like a right tosser.”

Harry laughed. “Oh, he hasn’t turned out so badly. I’ve seen him a few times since the war. We’ve been meeting up quite a bit in the past year actually – he had a bit of a rift with his parents when he came out of the closet, and he isn’t exactly the sharpest of tacks, so I’ve been helping him to set up on his own.”

“Wait,” Draco interrupted, “he’s gay?”

“Oh, big time,” Harry said with a grin. “Really, they should have seen it coming when he took up wrestling as a hobby when he was a teenager. Dear old Uncle Vernon blames me of course. He thinks

that being exposed to my magical powers when growing up has somehow turned Dudley, or something ridiculous. I'm hoping that Aunt Petunia might come around to it. Dudley said that she's met up with him a couple of times." Harry laughed. "I just hope he wore something appropriate. The last time I saw him, he was wearing a skin-tight black t-shirt with the motif 'Daddy Bear' emblazoned across it."

"Good Lord!"

"Well, quite. It was very disturbing."

Draco laughed. They sat silently for a couple of minutes, drinking their tea. Draco began to feel a little steadier.

"Ready to face the music yet?" Harry asked him gently.

Draco sighed and nodded grimly. The sooner he dealt with what had happened the better, and they would need to make a start on cleaning it all up if the library was going to be open tomorrow. He still felt slightly sick when he thought of those poor, ruined books. He hoped that they were not completely beyond repair.

"Come on then," Harry said, rubbing a comforting hand up Draco's arm. "Let's get this over with."

"Thank you for this," Draco replied, putting his empty tea cup on the table. "I really appreciate you taking the time to help me; I know that you don't have to."

"Of course I'm going to help you," Harry said simply, holding the door open for Draco. "That's what friends do, in my experience."

"You're lucky," Draco said quietly as the set out for the ransacked library.

*

Now that Draco's initial shock had worn off and he knew what to expect when he walked in, everything seemed so much worse. There was no possibility that he was dreaming now; this had actually happened. Someone had really done this to him. Someone had wilfully broken into the only place Draco felt at home, and had tried to destroy it. They had targeted Draco through the one thing he really cared about, this beautiful place which Draco had worked so hard on, which he had put his soul into. It had really happened, and it was more awful than he could express.

Looking around the library, he didn't know where to start. The task was simply too great. His first instinct was to do something about the torn and crumpled books strewn across the floor; the books were his friends, and they deserved his help first. However, when it came to putting this into practice, he found that he was too emotionally invested to carry out a methodical and effective system of repair. He sat on the floor, cradling broken books in his hands as if each one was his dead child. He couldn't go on. This had been the final blow, and he wanted to die here with his books. It didn't matter if he never got up again.

"Come on," Harry said, walking over to him and hauling him to his feet, gently removing a ripped copy of Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them from Draco's shaking hands. "Come on, none of that. Let me do the books; I promise I'll be as careful as I can. You work on repairing the desk tops - they're in a terrible state, and you're pretty handy with a good Reparo, if I remember. I'm not going to let you be defeated by this. Come on, get on with it."

Draco was so grateful for Harry's presence. He needed someone there with him, able to think clearly and to tell him how he should go about this horrible task. Now that he knew what to do, he could almost shut himself off from what was happening. He felt no special connection to the green leather which had been so brutally slashed, and was able to summon the presence of mind needed to heal the damaged fabric so that it was impossible to tell that anything had ever happened to it. He felt better once he was finished; he was one step closer to rebuilding his kingdom.

He turned towards Harry, who was sitting by the desk, surrounded by heaps of books. "How are you getting on? Do you think they're going to be all right?"

“It’s a slow old process,” Harry replied, “but I think I’ve got the hang of it.”

“You are making sure that all the pages are put back in in the right order, aren’t you?” Draco asked anxiously.

“Of course I am, though that’s the thing that’s taking so much time. So many pages have been torn out, and they’re scattered all over the place. I’ve got to sort through them all to find the right ones.”

“Let me help you,” Draco said, coming to kneel down next to him.

“Are you sure?”

Draco nodded. “I’ll be okay now; I’m ready. Sorry about before.”

“Hey, don’t worry about it. I understand. It will all be okay, you know. We’re going to sort this mess out and you are going to carry on just as before. Then we’re going to track down the people who did this, and I will personally see to it that they are expelled.”

“Yes, well,” Draco said, “one thing at a time.”

They worked quietly, slowly amassing a pile of repaired books on the desk beside them. It began to grow dark as they laboured, and Draco was getting hungry, but neither of them suggested stopping. Finally, there were no more pieces of ripped paper scattered around, no more empty and broken covers. This accomplished, the two men straightened up the toppled bookcases, and Harry helped Draco to put all the books back into their rightful places. Fortunately, the vandals had not progressed to any of the higher floors. Draco supposed that he should feel grateful for that, at least. There were some really ancient books up there, not to mention the priceless manuscripts, and Draco was sure that he would never have been able to repair those.

Finally, just before one in the morning, their job was almost done. There was only one thing left to do in

order to restore the library to its former condition.

“Right,” Harry said, his eyes steely and his jaw clenched, “let’s deal with this.”

The pair walked over to the desk where the lurid graffiti stood out even in the dim light of the lamps.

“Those little shits,” Harry said, surprising Draco with the raw anger in his voice. “It’s the sheer ignorance that gets to me. It’s like that cow, Umbridge. They claim to stand against the Death Eaters, while at the same time displaying an enormous capacity for cruelty and prejudice and vindictiveness themselves. Sheer fucking ignorance.”

“It’s okay,” Draco said softly, placing his hand on Harry’s shoulder.

“No. No, it’s really not. Christ, Draco, aren’t you angry?”

Draco looked away from the desk, but he could still see those savage words. He wondered if they had been burnt into his vision forever now. “I’m too tired to be angry. Let’s just get it done.”

It took several Scourgify spells before the paint finally faded, and then Draco had to perform a charm on the desk in order to restore its varnish. Whoever had done it obviously hadn’t wanted the message to be easily erased.

And then it was all over. Looking round the room, Draco could no longer detect any visible change from the previous day. He was so exhausted that he could barely stand.

“It’s over,” Harry said. “It’s okay. You’re going to be okay.”

Draco’s eyes were closed, but he could feel how close the other man was. “I’m so tired,” he whispered.

Harry didn't say anything. Instead, he put his arms around Draco and just held him. Draco could feel Harry breathing in and out, he could feel the steady beating of his heart. He loved the way that Harry held him so tenderly, so closely, without actually crushing him. He relaxed into the embrace, slowly bringing his own arms up and wrapping them around the small of Harry's back.

Draco wasn't sure how long they stood there, holding onto each other. Time seemed to have a strange, liquid quality. It was only when he felt Harry stir that he was brought out of his daze.

"Draco," the other man said softly, "you okay?"

Draco nodded, puling back slightly, but not out of the embrace.

"You're going to be fine," Harry said, his face so close to Draco's own. "You're going to come to work tomorrow as if nothing has happened. You are not going to let these little hooligans destroy you."

Draco nodded, bringing his gaze up from Harry's lips to his eyes.

Harry blinked a couple of times. "Draco, I—"

The screech of an owl outside startled Draco, making him pull away. What the hell was he doing? He couldn't allow what had happened to him to bring his guard down. God, he had practically thrown himself at Harry just then! He was sure that the other man had been about to say something, probably along the lines of how he would always be there for Draco as a friend. With emphasis on the word 'friend'. He did not want to make Harry feel uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry," he said, as lightly as possible. "I'm sorry, I'm just really tired. I didn't mean to pass out on you like that. I… I want you to know that I really value your friendship, Harry; it's meant so much to me, and I don't think I could have got through today without you."

“Oh,” Harry said quietly, “um, that’s okay. I’m glad we managed to get through it. I’m always here if you need me, Draco.”

Draco smiled at him. “Thank you. God, you must be tired; we should be getting out of here. I feel like I could sleep for a month.”

“Yeah, me too,” Harry replied. “Let me just do one more thing, then we can leave.” He walked over to the bookcase which hid the secret passageway, and put a Sealing Charm on it. “There, that should prevent anyone getting through until I can get the thing blocked off completely. Just to be on the safe side.”

They left the library, and Draco locked up in silence. Harry insisted on walking him back to his rooms, although there really wasn’t any need. Draco almost wished he wouldn’t – the urge to beg Harry to stay with him became so much greater the longer they were together.

Once alone, Draco finally gave into the tears which had been threatening to overwhelm him all day. He wept for his books, he wept for the cruelty of humankind and he wept for the hatred that was still levelled against him. But most of all, he wept for Harry. Harry, who was so kind and good and wonderful. Harry his friend, who could never be anything more, because Draco simply didn’t deserve him.

*

Dear Mother,

The library was vandalised yesterday. It’s very early on Monday morning right now, and I’ll have to go down there in a bit, but I’m scared to. It was horrible. Whoever it was had completely trashed the place: torn up the books, slashed the desktops, smashed my office window and scrawled an abusive message telling me to get out of the school on my desk. It was completely devastating.

I don't know what I would have done if it wasn't for Harry. We'd had breakfast together and he'd come with me to the library when we found it like that. He was amazing. He kept me as calm as possible and he stayed with me the whole day and most of the night helping me clean up. We managed to repair everything eventually, and I'm hoping I'll be able to keep what happened a secret. He's convinced me that I have to carry on as before and not let them drive me away. Even so, it's going to be really hard. I feel so violated, so insecure. I don't feel safe any more. I was so exhausted yesterday that I thought I'd sleep really deeply, but I only got a couple of hours in the end. I feel sick at the thought of going back there. I have no idea who did it, and they could just walk in at any moment and I wouldn't be any wiser. I think it must have been a student, probably more than one considering the damage that was done. Harry discovered that they'd got in through a secret passage behind one of the bookcases. He's determined to find out who did it, but I don't see how he can. To be honest, I'm not sure I want the publicity; I think I'd rather keep it as it is with only the two of us knowing about it. Besides, I think it would only make people hate me even more if Harry keeps getting all up in arms about people victimising me.

Harry said he'd come and see me as soon as he can. He also said that he'd sort out additional security for the library to make sure that the place is secure overnight. I'm not entirely sure what he'll come up with. I really feel that I just couldn't have gone on if he hadn't been there yesterday. I'm so glad that he's in my life now – he really is the most wonderful person I have ever met, and I hate the fact that we've missed out on so many years of friendship through my stupidity.

So that's pretty much all my news. I'm pretty shaken up, but I'm sure I'll be okay, so don't worry about me too much. I've got to go and get ready, so I'll give this to Artemis now and send it off. I'll let you know how I get on. It's strange – even though I know I'm not actually talking to you, I feel a lot calmer now I've written this.

Love from,

Draco.

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Chapter 7: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'The Death of Lovers', by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

My Dearest Draco,

My darling, I am so sorry. What those people did to you is disgusting, and they can't be allowed to get away with it. Please tell me that you're not going to just sit there and take it. You are not a bad person now, and you do not deserve to be treated like that. I'm glad that Harry knows about it at least – I'm sure that he will pursue this even if you refuse to. Oh, I'm so angry! I want to come and deal with these vile people myself, but I know that there comes a point when a mother had to take a step back and not fight her child's battles, so you must promise me that you will do it yourself!

I'm glad that you have such a good friend in Harry. I don't suppose there's any chance that he could become more than a friend, is there? I'm sorry if I'm interfering or overstepping the mark, but it would be so lovely if you could find a happy relationship – I think it would do you no end of good. You do like him, don't you? You didn't say anything at Christmas, but I had the feeling that you did. He seems to like you, from what you've told me.

Oh dear, I've turned into one of those women who have nothing better to do than to match-make for their children, haven't I? I'm so sorry, darling; you are very good for putting up with me. I just want you to be happy.

Anyway, do let me know what happens about that awful vandalism. I will be very cross if I find that these people have got off scot free! We're all doing fine here. It hasn't been too cold, so your father has been out planting some trees. With any luck, we'll soon be eating our own apples, plums, chestnuts and pears!

Andromeda was wondering if you would like to go and stay with her one weekend. She thought it might

be nice to take you and Teddy out somewhere. Perhaps you could arrange for Harry to come along too. Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I promise I'll stop. Don't take any notice of me.

With all my love, support and sympathy,

Your Mother.

*

"So," Snape said, glaring down at Draco severely, "you have done absolutely nothing towards finding out who committed this hideous act of vandalism?"

"It's only Tuesday," Draco mumbled. "I'm still trying to get my head around what happened. I haven't been able to think about that kind of thing."

"Piffle," Snape hissed. "How can you just sit back and let these little monsters get away with it? If not for yourself, do it for your precious books!"

"I know, I know," Draco sighed. "The thing is, I'm worried that if I make a big fuss about this, it will only make things worse. I don't wish to incite another attack on the books, do I?"

"Well, it would give you a good excuse to have even more brats expelled," Snape reasoned. "We could systematically purge the school. I always said that Hogwarts would be a wonderful place, if it wasn't for all the beastly children."

Draco gave the Potions master a wan smile. "It's not that I don't agree with you, but that would rather defeat the point of the school. Oh, I don't know. To be honest, there are so many people here who hold a grudge against me, it's difficult to know where to start. It could have been anyone. In the meantime, I'm

in a constant state of anxiety. Every student coming into the library immediately becomes a suspect. I spend half my time looking around at them, thinking, 'is it you? Is it you? Did you do this to me?' It's horrible. And I know that whoever it is is off laughing at me, thinking that they've got away with it. And the maddening thing is that they're winning. Okay, so I managed to restore the library, but I don't feel safe there any more. I've got this constant fear hanging over me. If they wanted to drive me out of the school, I guess that this is the right way to go about it. I don't know how much more I can take."

"Which is why you categorically must not allow these people to get away with it!" Snape exclaimed. "Mr Malfoy, I will not see you driven out of the school like this. For one, who could care for that library as much as you do? In addition, it would leave me with no one to talk to apart from that wretched Sir Cadogan, who keeps asking me to go questing with him. It's preposterous."

Draco sighed. "I suppose you're right. Harry keeps coming to tell me about everything he's doing to catch the culprits; I think he's a bit annoyed that I'm not as riled up about it as he is."

"I never thought I'd see the day when I sympathised with Potter," Snape muttered.

"He's been wonderful," Draco said quietly. "I don't know how I would have got through the last couple of days without him. I expect I would have just left the school and gone back to my parents for good. I… I never knew that friendship could be like this. He's such a true, good person, and I really don't deserve the way he's looked out for me after the way I've treated him in the past. When I'm with him I feel… I feel like I can be better, you know? He makes me feel like I've got the strength to persevere, and like maybe I deserve to be happy. When I'm not with him, all I can think about is how much I'm looking forward to seeing him again. It scares me to think that there may come a time when he's not in my life any more, almost as much as it scares me to lose my books. It's really bad, because I always told myself that I would never become attached to another person like this, but it just sort of happened. I mean, I see no reason why we can't always be friends…"

Snape was quiet for a moment, then said, "Have you told him yet?"

"About what?" Draco asked absently.

Snape rolled his eyes. “About the monstrous, steam-rollering crush you’ve developed on him, of course!”

Draco grew pale. “I… I don’t know what you mean.”

“Oh, spare me the protestations. It’s become apparent to me over the last few weeks that your feelings for Mr Potter are… a little more than platonic. I was slightly disappointed in your judgement, of course, but not really surprised. Your relations with the man have always been vested in such intensity of feeling that it was foolish to suppose that you could ever just be friends, and now that you’re not enemies, well…”

“It’s nothing,” Draco said, feeling slightly sick. “Really, it’s nothing. I mean, I’ll admit that I’m slightly attracted to him, but nothing is going to happen. There’s no way that he feels the same. Besides, it would ruin everything, wouldn’t it? As friends, there’s a chance that I’ll always be able to see Harry, but if we got into a relationship and things went wrong – which they would, of course, because that’s what always happens – he’d disappear from my life forever. No, it’s better this way. It’s only a stupid crush, like you said. It’s not like I’m in love with him, or anything.” Draco laughed weakly. “Oh, stop looking at me like that, Severus! I’m not! It’s just a crush, and I’ll get over it! Harry never has to know. Oh God, you don’t think he knows, do you? You don’t think he’s guessed? No, I’d know if he had. He’d start acting weird and avoiding me. Ugh, this is maddening! The sooner I come back to reality and stop having these stupid thoughts about him, the better. There! I’m resolved! I am going to stop living in a stupid fantasy world, and from now on I will only think about Harry Potter as a friend. Because that’s what he is: my good friend. And I don’t want to lose him. End of story.”

“Well, I’m glad you’ve managed to sort that out,” Snape said dryly. “You had me worried for a moment. Draco, you seem to think that you can just turn your feelings off with the flick of a switch.”

“Maybe I can,” Draco protested. “I mean, I’ve been suppressing certain thoughts and feelings for years. I’ll just use the same technique with this as I use to stop myself thinking about the war. You’ll see – this time next week Harry will just be a good friend I enjoy spending time with, and nothing more.”

“Whatever you say, Mr Malfoy,” Snape sighed, rubbing his palm across his forehead wearily. “Whatever you say.”

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Draco hadn't told Melanie about what had happened over the weekend. It would have entailed having to explain to her why the students would target him like that, and as he wasn't entirely sure that she knew about his history, he thought it was better to leave it unsaid. This wasn't without its difficulties, however. Mostly because he had to somehow pretend that everything was fine. He knew that she had picked up on the fact that he was a lot more nervous than usual, and he was glad that he had always been so strict about keeping her at a distance, because he knew that she wanted to ask him about it. He felt fiercely protective towards the library now, but at the same time a little wary of it. He now knew how much pain loving the library could cause him, and he was almost afraid to fully commit again. He couldn't get past the feeling that he had been violated.

It was worst of all when they had to open up together. Every morning, Draco had the horrible feeling in the pit of his stomach that he would walk into the library and find it in ruins again, even though he knew that he was being totally irrational, and it was all he could do to hide his fears from his assistant.

"You do it," Draco said to Melanie as they stood together outside the library that Friday morning. He knew that if he had tried to unlock the door himself she would have seen how badly his hand was shaking.

Melanie shot him a questioning look, but didn't say anything. She deftly performed the Counter-Spells and pushed the door open. The library was quiet and undisturbed, just as it should be. Draco felt himself relax a little; so far, so good.

Melanie went off to open the office, but Draco was distracted by a strange, pale light coming from between two of the bookcases at the far side of the library, and went to investigate. He wasn't concerned; one of the first things he and Harry had done on Monday morning was to enlist the help of the school ghosts in maintaining security in the library. Each night, two of the ghosts would be on patrol duty, sounding an alarm if there was any indication of trouble. Last night it had been the turn of the Bloody Baron, along with the Grey Lady who, after centuries of giving him the cold shoulder, had finally decided to forgive her former lover for murdering her.

Draco rounded the corner of the bookcase and cleared his throat loudly. "All right, break it up, you two.

Didn’t you read the rules? Snogging in the library is strictly forbidden. No exceptions for the deceased!”

*

Just after lunch, when Draco was busy in the office writing off for the latest edition of The Encyclopaedia of Magical Fungi and Their Functions, he got an owl from the headmistress, asking him to see her in her office as soon as possible. A slight frown creased his brow as he read the message. What could McGonagall want to see him about? He hoped that she wasn’t going to harangue him about spending half of that term’s library budget on that first edition of Nancy Merridew’s Magical Travels. He knew it was slightly excessive, but it was a very important book and a wonderful investment for the library. Draco told Melanie to hold the fort for a bit, and set off for McGonagall’s office, preparing his argument in his head.

Draco hated going to the head teacher’s office. He had only been there twice since his return to the school and had always kept his visits as short as possible. He reluctantly gave the password to the gargoyle sentry and shuffled inside. He would knock as quietly as possible, he decided. That way, McGonagall might not hear, and he could escape back to the library with the excuse that he had tried to come to see her, but she had obviously been out of the office. Sadly for Draco, McGonagall was not losing her hearing in her advancing age. He had barely tapped on the door when he heard the headmistress bid him enter.

Draco opened the door and walked reluctantly inside. “You wanted to see me, Headmistress?”

McGonagall was sitting at her desk writing letters, and gestured Draco into the empty chair opposite. “I’ll be with you in a minute, Mr Malfoy; I have to finish off this letter to the Ministry while I still have the resolve to write it. Wretched people.”

He sat down, feeling like a naughty student about to be told off. He shifted uncomfortably. He could hear soft whispering coming from the walls around him, and glanced up at the portraits of the past headmasters and mistresses whose occupants were all looking at him askance and muttering to each other. He caught sight of Snape, who rolled his eyes at him and wandered off. His eyes then rested on the next portrait along, and Draco felt his stomach turn over as he was confronted with the image of Albus Dumbledore gazing down at him gravely. He looked away, feeling uncomfortably hot. He really didn’t

want to be here.

“Right,” McGonagall said at length, “I’m sorry to keep you waiting. Mr Malfoy, I want to talk to you about what happened in the library last weekend.” She eyed him severely. “Why wasn’t I informed straight away?”

Now Draco really did feel like a naughty schoolboy. “I… I’m sorry. The thing is, we – that is, Professor Potter and I – managed to sort everything out ourselves. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to make any unnecessary fuss.”

McGonagall made a noise of outrage. “Unnecessary fuss? Mr Malfoy, any assault on school property, any at all, is of paramount interest to me! Professor Potter informed me of the fact himself yesterday – he had assumed that you would have already told me about it, and wanted to know why the school wasn’t doing more to discover the culprits! You can imagine how shocked and dismayed I was.”

“Please don’t make a big fuss about it!” Draco broke out. “This wasn’t an attack on the school, it was an attack on me! If it all goes public, it will only make everything worse! I do not want you to put yourself on the line for my sake – I know how lucky I am to have secured this job, considering my past, and I don’t think I deserve any kind of defence. I can take whatever abuse is thrown at me, and I can deal with it on my own. I don’t expect the school to take a stand with me, I—”

“Mr Malfoy, that is enough!” McGonagall interrupted. “Would you listen to yourself? I will not put up with this hideous tendency of yours to resign yourself to being miserable! I have no time for it! Now, regardless of why they did it, these people caused serious damage to school property, and it is my responsibility to take a stand against it. They cannot be allowed to get away with it – can’t you see that?” She sighed. “Have a biscuit.”

“What?”

“A biscuit, Mr Malfoy, a biscuit!” she cried, indicating a tartan tin to the left of the desk.

“Er, no thanks,” Draco replied nervously.

“Draco Malfoy, will you do as you’re told for once? Come now, it will make you feel better. Have. A. Biscuit.” She opened the tin and thrust it under Draco’s nose.

Draco took a finger of shortbread nervously.

McGonagall sat back in her chair, looking somewhat pacified. “Now, I am pleased to inform you that since becoming aware of the situation, Professor Potter and I have succeeded in finding the students responsible. It was two sixth year students: Fiona Parish, a Ravenclaw, and Peter Berry, a Gryffindor. Both students have since been expelled. They told us that they did what they did because they both had family members killed by the Death Eaters, but I think that even you will agree that that hardy excuses such a disgusting display of vandalism. I must tell you that I have rarely seen Harry so angry. I think they were glad of the expulsion just so that they didn’t have to face him again. Horrible, cowardly people. So you see? No big fuss, no public manhunt, no holding you up as a victim, nothing to incite future attacks upon you or the institution you are responsible for. Just efficient, swift action. Really, Draco, you should have known better. I am not the kind of woman who likes to make a fuss about anything, and I certainly do not think that such an act deserves any kind of publicity. I am on the side of justice, and of this school and what it represents. You should have known that you could come to me.” She viewed Draco disapprovingly, and if he had thought her the kind of woman to get emotionally involved in anything, he would have said that she looked a little hurt.

“I’m sorry, Professor,” he said quietly, looking at the floor. “I suppose I wasn’t thinking clearly. I… I only really thought of it in the terms of it being an attack on me, and I sort of dismissed the fact that it was also an attack on the school. I know it’s awful of me, but I really didn’t consider that it was worthy of your concern. You’ve already done so much for me, and I… didn’t want you to have to put yourself on the line any more.”

“Well,” McGonagall replied at length, “that is the most ridiculous defence I have ever heard. Still, I can understand that you must have been considerably shaken by the experience and your judgement was probably clouded, so I’ll let you off. Needless to say, I expect to be informed by you immediately if anything similar happens again, no matter how insignificant it may seem. I will not stand for any kind of victimisation in my school. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, Headmistress,” Draco mumbled.

“Good. In that case, you are free to go. Oh, but take another biscuit before you leave.”

“Oh no, I really… um… well, all right, just the one.” Draco took another shortbread finger, seeing from the steely look in McGonagall’s eye that she wasn’t going to take no for an answer.

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It had been a long day. Not much had really happened, Draco thought as he closed up the library for the night, but it felt like it had gone on for a very long time. When he thought about the events of that morning, it was like remembering things that had happened days ago.

Draco decided that he could do with some fresh air. He could just go out for a few minutes and have a brief stroll in front of the castle. He hadn’t been outside all day, and it would do him good. The fact that he knew Harry was having dinner with Hagrid that evening, and would probably be coming back fairly soon, making it likely that Draco would bump into him, had nothing whatever to do with it. Draco ran up to his room to fetch his winter cloak. He wasn’t hurrying because he thought he might miss Harry, he just really wanted to get some fresh air. And if he quickly checked his appearance in the mirror before he left… well, that was neither here nor there.

It was bitterly cold outside. It was one of those really clear, frosty winter nights when the stars are impossibly bright. Draco wished that he had thought to put on his scarf and gloves as well as his cloak. Still, he reminded himself, this was good for him. It didn’t matter that the freezing air felt like it was burning his lungs – it was a healthy pain. The lights were still on at Hagrid’s. Draco hoped that Harry was still there, and that he hadn’t spent all this time freezing out there for nothing. Not that he was out there to see Harry. His toes were starting to go numb.

Draco had been outside for about twenty minutes, and had just made up his mind to go back inside, realising that no stretch of the imagination could convince that catching hypothermia would be good for his health, when he heard Hagrid’s cabin door bang shut. Harry! Draco quickly blew his nose, which had

started to run, and began to stroll nonchalantly towards the castle doors. He started to whistle, but decided that that might be overdoing it a bit. He hoped that it was Harry, and not just Hagrid letting his dog out to go to the toilet.

Draco stamped his feet and blew on his fingers. He could see someone walking across the grounds towards the castle. Okay, this had to be Harry. Draco felt his pulse quicken.

“Draco?”

Draco affected surprise. “Harry? What are you doing out here?” Very smooth, Malfoy.

“I’m just coming back from Hagrid’s,” Harry replied, walking over to Draco. “What about you?”

“Oh, you know, it’s been a really long day. I just needed a bit of fresh air, that’s all.”

“Good idea. Hey, do you fancy a walk around the lake? It’s pretty bright out tonight, and I’ve just been fed Hagrid’s cake, so I could do with a little exercise to aid the digestive process. How about it?”

“Sounds good!” Five minutes ago, Draco had wanted very much to go back inside and have a nice cup of hot chocolate, but now going for a walk around the lake with Harry seemed like the best idea in the world.

They set out together in companionable silence. Draco wished that he had the courage to reach out and link his arm with Harry’s. He wished he had the courage for a lot of things. Being around Harry was like being wrapped up in a blanket. He made Draco feel safe and comforted which, paradoxically, were the most dangerous feelings for Draco to have. He knew how fragile their friendship was and how easily it could be torn apart by the outside world, yet day by day he was becoming increasingly dependent on the other man’s company. He wished he could tell Harry about these things, but he didn’t want to scare him off. Strange that you could feel so close to someone while at the same time having so much that you couldn’t say to them. At least he had a good, relatively safe topic of conversation to light upon this time.

“I had a talk with McGonagall earlier,” he said. “She told me that you’d caught the people who vandalised the library.”

“I expect she was pretty pissed off with you,” Harry replied.

“Yeah, a bit. I guess I should have told her about what happened.”

“Well, of course you should! Draco, why the hell didn’t you? She needs to know what’s going on, you know.”

Draco sighed. “I know. I suppose I was just a bit shaken up; I wasn’t thinking clearly. Thank you for looking out for me.”

“Well, you’re my friend,” Harry said, gently bumping his shoulder against Draco’s. “Of course I’m going to look out for you. I just wish you’d look out for yourself a bit more, that’s all. What else did McGonagall say? Was she pimping the biscuits?”

Draco laughed. “Big time. I had to have two before she was pacified.”

Harry shook his head. “I swear, she is secretly being sponsored by some shortbread corporation. I’m glad she spoke to you, though, and I’m glad that whole situation has been sorted out. Bloody kids.”

“It’s pretty understandable,” Draco said with a shrug. “I mean, I hate that they targeted the library, of course, but I can see why they would want to punish me. I mean, if they had family killed, then of course they wouldn’t want me at the school. I can’t really bring myself to be angry on my own behalf.”

“See, it’s this attitude of yours that really gets me frustrated!” Harry exclaimed. “Okay, so you weren’t exactly the easiest person to get along with at school, but at least you never let anyone walk all over you

back then. You're a great person now; you've changed so much, and you should be holding your head up high, not allowing people to abuse you. I wish you could just see how much you've got going for you. I wish you could forgive yourself."

Draco was quiet for a couple of minutes. It was all very well for Harry to tell him to forgive himself, but Harry really didn't have any idea what it was like to be as guilty as Draco. Harry had never hurt anyone. Harry had never been bigoted, arrogant and selfish. Harry had never been a coward. They were at the far side of the lake now. Everything was very still, quiet and glittering.

"Hey," Harry said softly, "are you okay?"

"I don't know," Draco replied. "I mean, I suppose I understand why you think I should move on from my past and not punish myself any more, but I don't think you realise how hard it is to live with that kind of guilt every day. I messed up in the worst possible way, Harry. I was a bloody great idiot. There's no way you could understand what it's like to know that your actions, your stupid choices, have meant that good people got hurt. I didn't feel it at the time, but I feel it now. I don't deserve to be happy. I don't deserve to be forgiven."

Harry turned towards him. "Seriously? You think I've never made a mistake that's got people hurt? Draco, I am very far from being perfect. God, if it wasn't for me and my stupid hot-headedness, I reckon my godfather Sirius would still be alive. If I had been sensible and just gone to the Order, instead of thinking I was above it all and rushed off on my own… Draco, you have no idea of the amount of times I have fucked up. You have no idea of the amount of times my arrogance has led me down the wrong path. Take Snape for example – I was convinced that he was on Riddle's side, just because he didn't like me. I was prejudiced, and I should have just trusted those who were older and wiser than me. But I didn't. I more or less did to him what the kids here are doing to you now. See, you talk about the mistakes you made, but you made them because you were brought up to believe certain things. Yes, you were arrogant and ignorant, but so was I! Most kids are, Draco!"

"I know," Draco sighed. "I know all that. I know that we all make mistakes. But the fact remains that you are the hero of this piece. You may not be perfect, but you have saved our world and you have done so much good. What the hell have I done? I'm still running away; I'm still a coward. I haven't done anything to really make up for my past – I just skulk around in a library, being hostile to everyone. I don't deserve to be treated well, and I… I can't see why someone like you or McGonagall or… or anyone, would want to have anything to do with me."

Harry made a loud noise of frustration. “Draco, for Merlin’s sake! Do you really have no idea of how amazing you are? How can you say that you’re a coward? What, you think you need to make a big, grand gesture to compensate for your past? Save a baby from a burning building, that kind of thing? Draco, it is so bloody easy to make a big, grand gesture. You do something dramatic and attention-grabbing and yeah, the public might lap it up. But what does it really mean? It’s the easy way out. And you know what? If there’s one thing I’ve learnt over the years, it’s that the public are bloody fickle. No, it’s easy to make the grand gesture. The hard thing is to just get on with your live. Simple, boring, unrewarding life. That’s what you’ve done, Draco! You know, all the Death Eaters who aren’t dead or in prison right now are in hiding or exiled. You are the only person brave enough to come back. And you haven’t made a big deal about it – you’ve just exercised your right to get on with your life and do what gives you contentment; you have proven to everyone that it is possible to change and start over. You should be bloody proud of yourself! And I know that you’ve been made to suffer for your courage, but it’s a bloody injustice, if you ask me. And I know that you’ve been turned away by people, but they were all bloody idiots. Do you know how fucking lucky someone would be to have you?”

“Oh really?” Draco said heavily. “Like who? It’s all very well to talk about my courage, but who in their right mind is actually going to stand up and say that they want to be with me?”

“Well… me, Draco!” Harry cried out. “Me!”

They stared at each other in silence. Harry looked distinctly shaken, and he was panting for breath. He was looking at Draco almost as if he expected to be shouted at.

At last, Draco found his voice. “What?”

Harry ran his fingers through his hair and looked away. “God, isn’t it bloody obvious? Draco… I think you’re magnificent. I’m bloody crazy about you. And I tried not to be, because I didn’t think you’d want anything to happen. I didn’t think there was a chance that you could be attracted to me, and I didn’t want to mess up our friendship, but… oh Merlin, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to say anything. I just… I can’t help it. Do you know you were part of the reason I came back here? I’d been thinking about you so much over the years. I know it’s stupid with our history, but my mind kept being drawn back to you. I’d wonder where you were, how you were doing. I used to hope that you’d managed to turn things around. I… I really wanted to meet you again. And then I was toying with the idea of coming back to teach but I hadn’t decided for sure, when Hagrid mentioned that you were working here, and that clinched it. And

when I saw you that morning in the library, and you were even more beautiful than I remembered you being… And we got to know each other, and you were so smart, and you were so brave… Oh God, I'm so sorry. I really didn't want to say anything. It's just… Draco, there are times when I'm so sure that you feel something for me as well. You'll look at me or say something, and I'll be so sure, and I've almost said something so many times, but I've always chickened out at the last minute, because I get overcome by doubt. And I'm so sorry if I've ruined out friendship by telling you this, but I can't just ignore it any longer. Draco, please tell me if I have the slightest chance with you."

The two men stared at each other. Draco couldn't quite process what he had just heard. Harry Potter wanted him? Harry had come back to the school to see him again, and had had feelings for him ever since? It didn't make any sense! Harry could have anyone he wanted! Why the hell would he want to be with someone like Draco?

"Harry," he said at last, "I don't think you know what you're saying. You can't want to be with me. I mean… don't you know what it would do to your reputation? You, of all people, cannot get involved with a former Death Eater. Besides, you could have anyone you want! You are the best person I have ever known, and you are so far out of my league it's not even funny. You and I could never be together – you know that." Draco felt slightly dizzy. This kind of thing just didn't happen in real life.

"That doesn't answer my question," Harry said quietly, looking out over the lake to avoid Draco's eyes. "You still haven't said whether you have feelings for me as well."

Draco really needed to sit down. He wanted to tell Harry that yes, as much as he had tried to deny it, he did have feelings for him. He wanted to say that Harry had made him believe that the world wasn't a bad place after all, that he had restored Draco's faith in humanity. He wanted to hold the other man and be held back. He wanted to fall with Harry into oblivion, to forget the world together. He wanted to tell Harry everything, but somehow the words froze in his throat. He didn't have that kind of courage, and there was still that sense of who they both were nagging at him. Harry couldn't have thought this through. Draco could never make him happy, and if they acted on their feelings it would only make things worse for them.

"Harry," he whispered, "this is madness. You don't want me; you can't want me. I'm no good – you know that. I could never make you happy."

“I’ll take that as a no, then,” Harry said, his voice pained. “Look, I’m sorry I said anything. Just forget it, okay?” He turned and started to walk away quickly, his arms wrapped around himself.

“Harry,” Draco tried to call after him, but all that came out was a whisper. He could only stand there, frozen to the spot, watching the man he wanted walk away from him into the night.

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By the time he got back to his rooms, Draco hardly noticed that he was cold any more. All he could think about were Harry’s words to him and the look of devastation on his face when he thought that Draco didn’t feel the same. Was Harry insane? How could Draco not have feelings for him after everything that had happened?

He hurriedly changed into his nightclothes and went into his bathroom to brush his teeth, hardly noticing what he was doing. God, how could Harry possibly want him? Okay, so Draco wasn’t bad looking and he was reasonably intelligent, but he was hardly someone a man like Harry would look twice at. Harry must have developed an unrealistic idea of who Draco was. He must have somehow got the impression that Draco was this tragic, glamorous figure, whereas in fact his life was mostly very boring. Draco didn’t have anything to recommend himself, really.

And then, Harry must realise that being with Draco would cause no end of problems for him. He would lose a lot of his popularity. People would never understand. Surely Harry couldn’t be daft enough to give up everything he had for an impoverished, shamed school librarian. The whole thing was bloody ridiculous!

Oh, but Draco had really hurt Harry, he was sure of that. Harry really thought that Draco wasn’t interested, and he was hurt. Draco couldn’t allow him to think that. Harry had had such a rough time; he deserved to know how much he was desired. And Draco did desire him…

Merlin, it had been a long time! Just to be touched again, to feel wanted as a sexual being, would mean

so much, and to be made love to by someone like Harry… Draco felt himself flush at the recollection of one of his vividly erotic fantasies about his friend. He was so close to making that fantasy an actual reality – could he really just walk away from it? It had been so long…

But he couldn't be selfish. He couldn't mess Harry's life up just to satisfy his own desires. But then, wasn't it just as cruel to leave Harry feeling rejected?

Draco cried out in frustration and went back into his bedroom. He stood irresolute for a moment, then walked over to his desk and grabbed a fresh piece of parchment and a quill. Writing to Narcissa had never failed to help him sort his head out before, and he prayed that it would be of some assistance now. Sure enough, as the page slowly filled up with his neat handwriting, Draco felt as if everything was falling into place. Harry had told him before that he was brave. Well, now was the time to put a little of that courage into practice. Draco folded and sealed the finished letter, gave it to his owl, and walked out of his rooms, locking the door behind him.

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When he knocked on Harry's door, there was a part of Draco that hoped the other man wouldn't answer. His resolve had seriously dwindled since he had left his own rooms moments ago, and now he rather wished that he could run away.

"Come in."

Damn. Still, there was no getting out of it now. Feeling slightly queasy, Draco opened the door and stepped inside.

Harry was sitting at his desk by the window, wearing pyjamas and a dressing gown, going through a pile of essays. He looked miserable and tired, but when he saw who his visitor was, he immediately got to his feet.

“Draco? What are you doing here?”

“I wanted to talk to you about what happened earlier,” Draco managed.

Harry coloured. “Look… forget it, okay? I should never have said anything, and I promise I’ll never mention it again. You don’t need to worry that I’ll make things awkward for you.”

“No,” Draco said. “No, I want to apologise. See, you just shocked me. I never thought that you would even look twice at me in that kind of way. Harry, you weren’t wrong to think that I might be attracted to you as well. Seriously, how could I not be?”

A look of hope was beginning to form on Harry’s face. “You… you really mean it? You like me as well? I haven’t just made a massive fool of myself?”

“No, Harry, you haven’t,” Draco replied softly. He looked at the other man. Harry had always been so honest with him, so sincere. When he had left his rooms Draco had known exactly how he was going to handle this situation, but now his plans seemed somewhat ridiculous. He couldn’t deal with Harry in any way that was scripted or planned; he would have to match the other man for honesty, he could see that now. Harry deserved nothing less than the truth. Harry wouldn’t sneer at Draco or hurt him in any way if he bared his soul. He could be vulnerable with Harry.

Harry stood silently, waiting for Draco to speak. He didn’t make any demands or try to control the situation. He just waited. The tension in the room was palpable.

Draco could feel his heart thudding in his chest as he took a couple of steps towards the other man. He hadn’t really thought about what, if anything, he was going to say, but he suddenly became aware that he was speaking, almost as if it wasn’t really him doing it.

“Harry,” he said, “I can’t understand why someone like you would want me. I don’t know why you would think I was worth your time. You see…” Draco undid the tie of his dressing gown. “You see, I don’t have anything. I used to be heir to one of the greatest fortunes in England, but now I can barely afford to clothe myself.” He slipped the dressing gown off his shoulders and let it fall to the floor. “Everything that

my name used to stand for has been torn away, and I still don't know what I am without it."

"And then," Draco continued, "there's the matter of my past. You say that I've moved on and that I've changed, which I guess is true. But that past will always be with me, and it was foolish of me to try to forget it." He stepped out of his left slipper, pushing it away with his foot. "No matter how much I try to make up for it now, I still did all those horrible things. I persecuted you and your friends out of pure malice, Harry. I thought I was better than all of you. I lied and cheated. I let Death Eaters into the school. I took Voldemort's Dark Mark. I tried to kill Albus Dumbledore. Regardless of who I am now, that is who I was, and I'm not sure that once that sinks in, you will really be able to accept it."

Harry was watching him, silently spellbound. Draco was glad that he didn't try to say anything.

"And you talk about me being intelligent," he continued, "but it doesn't really mean anything. I shut myself up with my books, reading to escape from how alone I am. How alone I've made myself. You need someone who can be with you in your world. My intelligence doesn't mean anything – I'm just repeating ideas that others have had before me. I haven't really lived at all. My life is a shrunken, anaemic thing. It's a cowardly life; it's a life of hiding behind facades and sneering at the happiness of others. It's a shameful, boring life. You think that I'm intriguing, but it's all a sham, Harry. It's just a cover for how alone and afraid I am." Draco removed the other slipper and kicked it aside.

Harry made a small noise in the back of his throat.

"Most importantly," Draco said, barely able to speak above a whisper now, his fingers moving to the top button of his pyjama top, "there's my reputation. You have such prestige. You are the people's hero; everybody loves you. I once had the potential to become influential and win people's respect, but I threw it all away. Now I am scorned and hated. I don't resent it – I can understand it perfectly – but I would hate to taint you with it. You have so much going for you, and people would think badly of you if you were with me. They would rip you to shreds, Harry. I have nothing to say for myself, nothing to offer. I could never bring you anything positive in terms of public opinion." The buttons all undone, Draco shrugged the shirt off, allowing it to fall to the floor with his dressing gown.

Harry took a small step towards him, a look of wonder on his face.

“And you see,” Draco whispered, “you might be attracted to me now, but that will all fade. I won’t look like this forever. I’ll grow old and tired. And… and once the initial attraction has worn off, you’ll see that I’m not glamorous or special. All those ideas you have… you’ll see…” Draco hooked his thumbs into his pyjama trousers and pulled them down, stepping out of them completely naked. “You’ll see that once you’ve stripped all of that away, all that’s left is me.”

Draco was shaking, even though Harry’s room was not cold.

Harry approached him slowly, reverently. He reached up to remove his glasses, tucking them into his dressing gown pocket. His eye’s never left Draco’s. He lifted his hand and gently ran his fingers over Draco’s face, tracing the line of the brow, the cheekbone, the jaw, the lips. Draco shuddered.

“Draco,” Harry said, his voice catching a little, “you don’t understand me at all, do you? I don’t care about any of those things; I never cared about what people think, or about having everything the world has to offer. I don’t want money. I don’t want prestige. I don’t want perfection. I only want you.”

Harry opened up his dressing gown and wrapped Draco up in it, pulling him close in the process. Draco couldn’t seem to stop shaking, and he wrapped his arms around Harry to stop himself from falling over as much as anything else. Harry was planting delicious kisses on Draco’s shoulders and neck, his hands caressing him through the material of the dressing gown. Draco couldn’t help moaning in pleasure when Harry’s lips finally met his own and he felt Harry’s tongue push into his mouth. And as his body began to respond in earnest to Harry’s touch, Draco forgot to care about all the things that should keep them apart. All that mattered was that they were together now, and that neither of them showed any signs of letting go.

*

Dear Mother,

Oh, Mum, I’m so confused. I’m in an awful mess and I really don’t know what to do about it, so I’m hoping that writing to you will help me sort my head out. I realise that is hasn’t escaped your attention

that I have developed feelings for Harry. Oh, I really like him. I tried so hard not to, and I tried so hard to deny it to myself, because I knew that it was impossible. I was so scared of developing feelings for someone again, because I knew that it would only lead to me getting hurt. But then, Harry sort of made me trust him. He was so great to be around, and he's been so kind to me, and I felt that he actually enjoyed my company. It was stupid to let my feelings go beyond friendship, but it was something I couldn't stop. I hate the thought of him being with anyone else. I made a real effort to ignore it because I thought that he'd never feel the same.

However, that all changed tonight. Harry and I were taking a walk around the lake, and he was having a go at me about not being more proactive in defending myself. The people who vandalised the library were caught and expelled today, and Harry was annoyed because I said that I didn't blame them for hating me so much. He told me that I should think more highly of myself, and then, out of the blue, he told me that he had feelings for me.

I honestly didn't know what to think. He was telling me that he'd liked me for ages and that part of the reason he came back to Hogwarts was to see me again, and all I could do was stand there like an idiot. I guess my lack of appropriate response made him think that I was horrified by his revelation or something, because he assumed that I didn't feel anything in return and sort of ran away.

Oh, Mother, what the hell should I do? God, if only we were different people. I know that I would be so happy if I could really be with him, and I really want to make him happy too. I just wish that we could go somewhere where nobody knows us.

See, I now have this problem where if I do what I really want to do, it will have negative consequences in the long run. And I know for a fact that any happiness I manage to secure will be temporary, because something horrible is bound to happen, and then I will have lost Harry forever. On the other hand, if I don't do anything Harry will be really upset and think that he's made a fool of himself and that I don't like him, and our friendship might be ruined anyway.

I feel like my heart's breaking. I feel like I'm never going to stop being punished for the way I was before. I wish I could just go back in time and do things differently, then maybe I'd be allowed to be happy now.

But then, maybe Harry's right. Maybe I should just move on from all of that and make my own happiness. Maybe the two of us could work something out. I mean, I like him and he apparently likes me.

I should at least go and talk to him and try to sort out this horrible mess – I owe him that much. It's what you would want me to do, isn't it? I'm getting nervous just thinking about it, but I feel that it's about time I actually did something positive instead of hiding away. Yes: I'm going to talk to Harry. Just talk, mind, and see if we can work out some kind of solution to this mess. Really, I don't know why I'm so nervous; absolutely nothing is going to happen.

Yours, Apprehensively,

Draco. Xx

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Chapter 8: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'Benediction', by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

My Dear Son,

Darling, I am so happy for you! I knew that you and Harry liked each other – I knew it! You see, if you'd just paid attention to your mother, this would all have worked out a long time ago. At any rate, I'm glad that Harry, at least, was brave enough to admit how he felt. And I'm even gladder that you're going to tell him that you feel the same way! I do so want you to be happy.

I'm sure that you don't have as much to worry about as you think you do. Yes, there will be some people

who will object to your relationship, but if you just ride it out I'm sure that it will all blow over. If you and Harry really want to be together, then nothing anyone else can say will drive you apart. I'm really proud of you for at least considering trying to make it work. I don't mind telling you that I was very concerned about you for a long time. I hated seeing you so lonely, cutting yourself off from everyone. I really hope that the two of you can sort something out – I'd hate to see you lose Harry after everything you've been through.

I'm also glad that the people who vandalised the library have been caught, and that the headmistress has seen fit to expel them. I expect that Harry did a lot towards finding them, didn't he? It's good to know that you have people on your side over there.

I haven't mentioned any of this to your father. He knows that you and Harry are friends, but that's it as far as he's concerned. I haven't told him about what happened in the library, or any of your personal developments. It's not that I think he would react badly; it's only that he still isn't very good with coping with surprises, and I don't want to give him another setback. Once I know how things stand with you, I can think about how I might tackle the issue.

So don't keep me in the dark for long!

Wishing you the very best of luck,

Your Loving Mother.

*

It was still very dark when Draco woke up, and it took him a while to figure out where he was. He was unusually warm. He was sure that his window used to be on the other side of the room and… and there was a weight across his chest. Draco shifted a little, vaguely aware of strange aches in his body, and tried to locate himself. Then he remembered. He was in Harry's bed, where he had spent the whole night, and that was Harry's bedroom window he could see. More to the point, the weight across his chest was Harry's arm – Harry must have been holding him all night. He had never slept with anyone who liked to

cuddle before, and he felt that he could get used to it. Harry was still asleep, and his steady breathing gently stirred the little hairs behind Draco's ear.

The previous night, Draco hadn't given a thought to anything but what was happening in that moment. The future hadn't meant anything to him; the world may have ended that very night for all Draco had cared. Now it occurred to him that what had happened the previous night had consequences. This could really be the start of something. He had feelings for Harry, Harry had feelings for him, and last night they had made love. Twice. It occurred to him that this could be the start of an actual relationship. He could wake up like this every morning from now on, warmed by the mingling heat of their bodies. They could spend their days together; they could talk about the past and plan for the future. Harry would be his. Harry would be there for him to reach out and touch, his own, his boyfriend. And Draco himself would belong to nobody other than Harry. Draco's mind filled with a dazzling vision of their future together. It was so exciting, this feeling at the start of a relationship. It was even better now than it had been with Mark or Pansy, because Draco was so sure of Harry. Harry knew all about his past, and he didn't care – he liked Draco anyway.

Draco closed his eyes again, basking in contentment. He looked forward to when Harry would wake up and they could have a proper talk. He wondered how they were going to handle their relationship – would they keep it a secret or go public? Draco would honestly have preferred to keep it a secret for a while. But then… it was bound to get out sooner or later, especially if they were serious about each other. And Draco knew that it wasn't going to be easy.

He stirred uneasily. How on earth were people going to react? He had thought about the problems their relationship might cause a lot over the past weeks, but it had always been a vague, far away problem. Now, lying next to Harry, it became a startling reality. The papers were going to tear them to shreds. His family past, which the Malfoys had all tried so hard to get over, would be dragged up again and analysed. People were bound to come out of the woodwork to share their bit of malevolent gossip in return for a few Galleons. They wouldn't be able to go anywhere without being interrogated and jeered at.

Another horrible thought struck Draco. Aside from the press, how on earth would Harry's friends react? Harry may have forgiven Draco for the way he used to be, but he couldn't expect everyone to be like that. He couldn't expect all those Gryffindor he had been so foul to to welcome him into the fold with open arms. And there was the Weasleys, Harry's adopted family. The bad blood between the Weasleys and the Malfoys had gone on for generations, and Draco was sure that the news of his relationship with Harry would come as a great blow. He wasn't sure that they would ever accept him. He wasn't sure that he even deserved to be accepted. It would break Harry's heart if he felt himself torn between the two of them. Harry's friends were his rock – they had got him through so much, and Draco knew how painful it

would be if Harry felt that he'd hurt or alienated them.

And then they had to consider their professional lives. Things wouldn't really change for Draco – there would be a slight increase in the animosity levelled against him of course, as some students were bound to think that he was corrupting their Defence teacher, but it wouldn't be entirely beyond what he was used to. But what about Harry? Harry was the most popular teacher in the school. He was the great war hero, idolised by kids to the extent that they either dressed like him or like his ex girlfriend. He was relied upon to do the right thing and live up to everyone's expectations. How would all those little kids who played at 'Harry and Voldemort' feel if they discovered that their hero was involved with one of Voldemort's old supporters? It would break their hearts. Harry loved teaching so much – it was his dream, his passion. If the students suddenly lost their respect for him and refused to listen in his classes, he would be devastated.

Draco had lost the feeling of warm security he had enjoyed just minutes before. He lay on his back in Harry's bed, staring at the ceiling, his oblivious lover sleeping peacefully beside him. This relationship wouldn't elevate his own life, it would bring Harry down to his level. He could see now how things would progress. Harry liked Draco, it was true, and he would endure his changed circumstances uncomplainingly. Draco would watch Harry suffering in silence, wretchedly aware of the distance growing between them. Harry would try to defend him, but it would get harder and harder. Harry would slowly realise that being with Draco had brought nothing but misery, that it simply wasn't worth it. All the feelings he had developed for Draco would slowly fade. Harry wouldn't be cruel like Mark was. Harry would keep up a pretence that everything was okay, that he wasn't bothered by the treatment they got, that he didn't secretly want to leave Draco. But of course it would all get too much. There would come a day when Harry would tell him, his face a picture of misery, that he couldn't go on any more. He would protest that it wasn't Draco's fault, but of course they would both know that that wasn't true. Then Harry would be gone from his life, and Draco would have ruined things for the both of them. He felt sick at the thought of it.

It was too late now. Why the hell hadn't he just talked things out with Harry last night as he'd intended? They would have discussed the pros and cons of acting upon their feelings, and they would have come to the realisation that it just wasn't worth it. Then maybe they could have retained their friendship. Now it was all too late for that – the damage had been done. Draco could only see two alternatives: he could either allow the relationship to drag on and put Harry through all the sufferings he knew would come their way, or he could end it now. He could leave right now, and then the only person who would get really hurt would be him. Harry would be upset and angry, but he would have the support of his friends and family to fall back on, and he would have his work. He would soon realise that a relationship with Draco would have been disastrous anyway. They would never be friends again, but at least Harry would be spared the humiliation of being Draco's boyfriend.

Heart thudding dully, Draco carefully got out of the bed, terrified that he was going to wake the other man. The floor was cold, and he shivered. He tiptoed over to the door, opened it as gently as he could, and went to find his clothes.

*

They had stumbled into Harry's bedroom, banging the door shut behind them. Their kisses had become bruising, brutal even. It hadn't mattered if they hurt one another, if only they could get closer.

"Get under the covers," Harry had muttered against Draco's neck, "you're shaking."

"You're coming too, right?" Draco had whispered. The thought of getting into Harry's bed had been highly appealing, especially as his legs had no longer seemed to want to hold him up, but at the same time Draco hadn't wanted to let go of the man himself now that he had him.

Harry had laughed weakly. "Just try and stop me."

This had been all the reassurance Draco had needed, and he had swiftly slipped beneath Harry's bed sheets, scooting over to the far side to make room.

Harry had not taken his eyes off Draco. He threw off his dressing gown, and then tore at his remaining clothes until he stood above Draco, completely naked.

Draco had just had time to let out a moan of longing at the sight, before Harry had joined him in the bed. They had both let out gasps of pleasure as their bodies made contact with each other. They had gripped each other tightly, limbs locking together, kissing and biting and sucking every inch of each other's flesh that became available to them. Draco had never been touched like that before. He had rolled them over so that Harry was on top. He had loved the feeling of Harry's weight above him, covering him, claiming

him. He had wanted to give himself up to Harry completely, to be taken by the other man. He had wanted to be as close to Harry as it was possible for two people to be. He had moved his legs apart, arching his hips upwards towards his lover.

Harry had paused momentarily to give Draco a brief, questioning look. He had soon been reassured, and settled himself between Draco's thighs, running his hands over his torso. Harry had then reached over to his bedside cabinet, opened the drawer and pulled out a packet of condoms and a bottle of lubrication. Draco had pulled him down again, kissing him urgently. He had been almost unbearably aroused; he had denied this for so long, this need to be touched, to be seen as a sexual being.

"Draco," Harry had whispered, "I'm yours."

*

It was even colder in Harry's living room. Draco hurried over to where his discarded clothes lay, painfully self-conscious in his nudity, and began to pull them on clumsily. His breath was coming in funny little gasps. It occurred to him that it wasn't too late – he could still slip back into Harry's warm bed, and bury all his fear and misery beneath the comfort of being with the other man. Harry would wake up, completely ignorant of what had happened, and Draco could pretend that everything was all right. There was still time. But no, he couldn't lie to Harry. He couldn't let Harry ruin his own life, all for the sake of Draco's momentary happiness.

Draco pulled his slippers on and turned to leave. He was just grateful that he'd managed to make his escape before Harry woke up. That painful discussion could wait until he was feeling a little bit stronger.

"Draco?"

Draco felt a jolt go through his body. He turned round slowly, to see Harry standing in the doorway to his bedroom, blinking at him groggily, a small frown of confusion creasing his brow. His heart sank in dismay; he was going to have to tell Harry now, when the other man was so vulnerable, that things between them would have to come to an end.

“Draco, where are you going?”

Draco swallowed. “I’m going back to my rooms,” he said unsteadily.

Harry rubbed his eyes. “You know you can shower here, right? I know you have a thing about bathrooms, but I promise that mine has been well cleaned and my bathroom rules are very lax.” He grinned. “It’s not late – I thought we might grab another hour or so in bed, and then we could have breakfast together, or—”

“It’s not that,” Draco interrupted. “Harry… I have to leave. I really can’t stay here any longer. It’s… it’s not a good idea.”

“Draco, what is it?” Harry asked uneasily, finally detecting that something was wrong.

Draco stared steadfastly at Harry’s desk. He found that it was just too painful to look at the man himself. “Harry… last night was a mistake. I mean, it was great at the time, but… but it really can’t go any further.”

“Draco, what are you talking about? What about everything we said? What’s wrong? Why are you freaking out all of a sudden?”

“Those things we said were irresponsible; we weren’t thinking clearly,” Draco choked out. “Nothing should ever have happened last night. There is no possibility that we could ever have a future together – can’t you see that?”

“No, I can’t! Draco, please tell me what’s wrong, tell me the truth! If I know, then we can fix it!”

“No, we can’t!” Draco almost wailed. “Harry, can’t you see how very wrong we are for each other? God,

I'm so sorry I ever came here last night."

"Why are you doing this?" Harry's voice was very small.

Draco turned away and took a couple of steps towards the door. This was unbearable. "Harry… don't. Just… just think about what it would mean to be with me, every day. Think about what would happen to you. We could never be happy, not ever! We are completely wrong for each other!"

Harry was silent for a moment, then, "You're right – I think you should leave."

Draco turned to look at the other man. Harry's face was pained. He was staring determinedly at the floor, his jaw set, arms wrapping his dressing gown defensively around himself. Harry hadn't understood. He thought that Draco was doing this because he didn't care, or he had only wanted to use Harry. Draco dearly wanted to explain, and make Harry really understand why they could never be together. Even more, he wanted to go to the other man and hold him, to apologise for what he had said and kiss all that pain away. But he couldn't take it back, and the knowledge of Harry's hurt proved too much. Draco turned away once more, and left the room without a word.

*

Draco had tried so hard to stop himself from completely losing control. In all his life, in all the sexual relationships he had had in the past, he had never allowed himself to be completely vulnerable or completely open with another person. With Harry, however, it had been almost impossible not to be. Harry had claimed him thoroughly. Draco hadn't thought it possible to be that sexually aroused; his whole body had been tingling with lust, and he had felt himself writhing under Harry, completely unable to help himself. It had been all he could do to stop himself from screaming.

He had told Harry things, things he had never intended to tell anyone. He had related, in fevered whispers, how lonely he had been, how he had wanted Harry for so long, how he had never felt like anyone had really desired him before now. He had begged Harry not to stop, clung to him, arched his body against him.

Harry had held him, gently but firmly, thrusting into Draco in a way that made him see stars. Harry had told him that he was beautiful, kissing the tears from Draco's cheeks.

Draco had felt faint. He had been sure that if Harry kept doing that thing with his hips, he was going to pass out with the pleasure. His whole body had been pulsing, aching. He had covered his mouth with his hand, biting into the soft flesh. He had never been so aware of the fact that he was alive, and he had never wanted it to end.

*

Draco slammed his door shut and stood for a moment, gazing unseeingly around his empty room. He leaned back against the door and slid down it until he was sitting on the floor. Standing up just seemed like too much of an effort. How could he have hurt Harry like that, after everything they had been through together? After last night? He couldn't get the image of the other man's face, wounded and uncomprehending, out of his mind. How had Harry not been able to see why Draco couldn't stay with him? Surely it must be obvious, even to the most hopeful of romantics. He remembered what Harry had said to him, all those weeks ago when they had gone for drinks together in the Three Broomsticks. I have this problem where I fall for people who like me, but not quite enough. Oh God, did Harry think that was why Draco had left? Because he just wasn't that interested?

Draco pressed the heels of his palms against his eyes, trying to block everything out. He just didn't want to do this any more. He wished that he could escape from himself, but he couldn't. It would have been better after all if he had just kept his distance from Harry. It would have saved them both a lot of pain.

A tapping noise made Draco look up, and he saw his owl perched outside the window with a scroll tied to her leg. His heart sank. His mother must have replied as soon as she had received his letter from the previous night. He hauled himself up from the floor and approached the window with no small amount of trepidation. He could imagine the kind of response Narcissa had written to his hopeful and naïve missive. He really didn't want to read it. At least, he didn't want to read it now.

He let his owl in and untied the letter. She hooted indignantly, probably annoyed by his hesitation and

obvious lack of enthusiasm upon seeing her, and fluttered off to her cage in the corner. Draco looked down at the scroll. He wanted to put it away somewhere and ignore it until he was feeling a bit less fragile, but then he knew that the knowledge of its existence would haunt him. If he left it, he would have the dread of opening it hanging over him all day. It would be better in the long run to just get it over and done with, no matter how much it hurt. Draco took a deep breath and ripped the letter open. He read quickly, eyes skimming over the words in the hope that they would be less painful that way. It didn't really work. His mother's optimism and encouragement was horrible, taunting. He dreaded having to reply to her. She would be so disappointed in him.

Draco sat down on his bed, letting the letter fall from his limp hand to the floor. He felt empty. His life laid itself out in front of him in a depressing sequence of repetitive events. Nothing different or exciting would ever happen to him again. He would do the same thing every day until he grew old and died. What was the point, really, in getting dressed right now? He would only have to get undressed in a few hours. He might as well just lie here and do nothing.

He had a vague, stupid wish that Harry would come after him and demand an explanation. Then perhaps they could just go away together somewhere and be different people. They could leave everything behind them, escape from it all, and be happy.

Draco sighed. He couldn't stay here – he felt claustrophobic. He would have to get out and do something otherwise he would go mad. He wouldn't shower though…He still smelled like Harry, and he didn't want to get rid of that one little piece of last night just yet.

He pulled his plain black robes out of his wardrobe automatically. At least in the library he could bury himself in his work and try to block out what had happened. And at least he had had that short time of feeling wanted. He would always have that, no matter what happened. Harry had been a wonderful person who had come along and enriched Draco's life a little bit. Harry had restored his faith in the human race. It had been lovely. Draco could at least move on from it now, feeling as if he had gained something. Even though what he had lost was much greater.

But it wasn't like he was actually in love with Harry. Yes, he thought very highly of the other man. He was more attracted to Harry that he had ever been to another living person, and the sex had been nothing short of spectacular. Those kind of physical connections had to be rare. But it was only sex. And yes, he liked Harry very much. When he was with the other man, Draco even liked himself. He was at his best when he was with Harry. Harry really understood him, and forgave him his weaknesses. Being with Harry made him feel better than he had ever thought it was possible to feel, and being without him was like

going without oxygen. Harry made him want to be a better person. He wanted to be with Harry, help Harry through any difficulties or hardships he might face. He could imagine them growing old together. Harry even made the idea of starting a family seem vaguely appealing. But… none of that really adds up to love, Draco thought. Not really. I don't even know what love is! How could I have just fallen in love with Harry, when I know full well that it is quite possibly the stupidest thing I could ever do? Falling in love with Harry Potter is completely impractical, illogical, impossible, irresponsible…

Draco walked over to his mirror and stared at his reflection, feeling the panic rise in his chest. He looked pale, scared, and very young. "I'm not in love with Harry Potter," he whispered. "I'm not."

"Yeah, yeah," the mirror grunted back at him. "Whatever you say, darlin'."

*

They had lain, side by side, not quite able to touch each other again yet. Funnily enough, Draco had not had that vaguely depressing feeling of let-down, of it all being over, that he usually had after orgasm. He had just felt warm and contented, basking in that lovely tingly feeling, a pleasant relation of pins and needles, which had prickled his skin.

Finally, Harry had laughed weakly. "Draco… that was…"

"Yeah…"

They were silent again for a few minutes, then Draco had let out a soft chuckle. "I knew you'd be loud."

Harry had laughed again. "Well, you gave me a lot to be loud about. That was quite possibly… Draco, you are amazing."

Draco had reached out and gently taken hold of Harry's hand. Harry had squeezed his fingers, shifting over slightly so that their sides were pressed together. Their skin had still been too sensitive for more contact than that.

"I loved those little noises you made," Harry had said softly. "It was like you were desperately trying to hold back, but you couldn't quite manage it. It was so damn sexy, you have no idea. It… it just makes me think how amazing it would be if you really let go, you know? God, I have no idea how I managed to last as long as I did; just looking at you makes me want to come."

Draco had squeezed Harry's fingers back, turning his head to plant a kiss on the other man's shoulder. He had loved that Harry thought he was sexy. He had always secretly had a feeling that he wasn't actually that attractive, or that the people he was sleeping with would much rather be with someone else. He had loved that Harry really wanted him to let go and lose his inhibitions. Mark had always been quiet in bed. Draco had begun to repress his own sexual responses during that relationship, after he had realised that Mark felt a little uncomfortable when Draco had made too much noise. Harry would never make him feel awkward like that.

Harry had turned towards him, planting soft butterfly kisses on Draco's neck. Draco had made a small noise of contentment. Harry's hand had crept across Draco's torso, his fingers caressing Draco's still sensitive nipples. Draco's breath had caught in his throat. He had turned his head towards Harry, gently kissing his eyelids, breathing in the wonderful scent of the other man. Harry had lifted his chin, his mouth seeking Draco's. The kiss had been lazy, leisurely, an exploration of each other more than anything else. They had not been in any hurry this time. It had been nice to simply spend some time discovering each other, being intimate.

Draco had barely noticed Harry's hand travelling down over his stomach. The other man had taken his time; he had seemed to enjoy just familiarising himself with Draco's whole body. His fingertips had traced patterns on the soft skin at the top of Draco's thighs. Draco had smiled into their kiss, enjoying the delicious teasing. Harry's fingers had moved upwards a bit so that they had brushed over his balls. Draco had made a soft whimpering noise. Harry continued to gently squeeze his sac, his middle finger reaching round to stroke his perineum. Draco's erection, which had never really subsided after their first encounter, was soon back in full force. He wiggled his hips a bit, craving more from Harry's sinful hand. At long last, Harry had given in to Draco's unspoken cravings. Without warning, he had moved his hand upwards and wrapped it round Draco's aching cock, stroking him firmly, lovingly, twisting his wrist so that he could brush his thumb over the sensitive head.

Draco had moaned and arched his hips, pushing his tongue into Harry's mouth. This was like a drug. This had been something he had needed for so long, but he just hadn't realised it.

Harry had bitten Draco's lips gently, pulling him closer with his other arm. "Draco," he had whispered, "you have no idea how good you feel in my hand. I can't wait to feel you inside me."

Draco had pulled back, astonished. "You… what? You want me to..?"

Harry had pulled back too to look at him, his hand slowing slightly in its stroking, but never quite stopping. "Well… yeah. Unless… unless you don't want to. Unless that just isn't your thing, which I completely understand, and that's fine. But- but if you do want to… Well, that would be lovely."

Draco's eyes had grown very wide. "You… you want me to fuck you?"

"Not if you don't want to!" Harry had protested, clearly thinking that he had suggested something Draco found unsavoury.

"It's not that," Draco had said quietly. "I-I mean, I think I'd like to very much. I'm just a little surprised that you'd want me to, that's all. Also… also, I've never really been in a dominant role – not with a man, anyway – and I'm not sure that I'd really know what I was doing."

Harry had looked confused. "But you were with that other guy for months," he had said. "You must have…"

Draco had shaken his head. "He never wanted to. The thought of being, I don't know, submissive made him feel really uncomfortable. He said that it would make him feel less of a man. He always had to be the one in control."

Harry had made a face. "You know, the more I hear about this ex of yours, the more I'm inclined to think that he was a massive tool. I mean, it's one thing to not want to bottom – it isn't everyone's cup of tea –

but to say that getting buggered actually means that you're not a real man is ridiculous, and more than a little insulting to you, considering you were the bottom in that relationship."

"So… you don't feel like that," Draco had said slowly.

"Of course not! I mean, it feels great, and I don't hold with the idea that being a man means you have to be in control all the time. It's stupid."

"And… and you really want me to top you?" Draco had said, blushing slightly, even as his cock grew harder still at the thought.

"If you want to," Harry had replied, almost shyly.

"I do," Draco had whispered, his blush deepening. "I'm still worried that I'd be rubbish, though. I don't want to be bad for you."

Harry had leaned in to kiss him tenderly. "You won't. If you've had it done to you, then you'll know how it works. If you get nervous, I'll talk you through it." He had rolled over onto his back, gently positioning Draco so that he was above him, and wrapping his legs around Draco's waist, pulling him down so that their groins were in delicious contact. "Draco," Harry had whispered, "make love to me."

*

Being in the library didn't help very much. Draco felt himself drifting through his daily duties, hardly aware of what he was actually doing. There had been a lot of returns that day, for which he was grateful – shelving didn't really require him to think too much.

Draco had an awful empty feeling inside himself, and he didn't think that he would ever feel complete

again. He hated the thought that he would never even be able to have a conversation with Harry again. Still, he told himself, it was for the best. Harry would be better off without him, and Draco himself would probably avoid a lot more pain in the long run. After all, even if he and Harry managed to survive the furore their relationship would incite, something else was bound to happen. One of them would get ill, or someone else would come between them. And how long would they really have left? Draco had often had these maudlin thoughts about his own mortality; he would be consumed by the inevitability of his own demise, and the ultimate futility of every action he took in order to enrich his life. It often made him feel like getting into bed and never getting up again. Now was just such an occasion. He and Harry might love each other, but it would all come to an end eventually. They would still have to go through the pain of losing each other.

Art was the one great consolation in life. Art could defeat death. Great literature, great paintings or sculptures, could potentially live on for centuries after the death of their creators. It gave Draco a sense that perhaps time wasn't entirely cruel. Also, there was no mistaking art; you always knew exactly where you stood. With people, there was always that doubt in Draco's mind over whether they were genuine or not, whether they would change. He knew from the beginning that art was entirely artificial, and so it posed no threat. Yes, Draco was far better off dedicating his life to art, rather than trying to form relationships with other people.

It was funny how this argument suddenly wasn't as convincing as it used to be.

Draco had to go to the owlery that afternoon in order to post some request forms. He should have sent Melanie to do that kind of thing, but he had felt the need to get out for a bit. He had already decided that he was going to stay in the library after it closed to do extra work, because the thought of having to go back to his rooms with nothing but his own thoughts for company was too horrible to contemplate. Still, he felt restless and irritable, and had a strange desire to keep moving, and so he decided to send the request forms himself.

Draco had been thinking about Harry so much that day that when he actually came face to face with the other man coming down the stairs from the owlery towards him, there was a moment when he didn't recognise him. Harry stopped abruptly and stared at Draco, seemingly frozen to the spot. He looked as surprised to see Draco as Draco was to see him. Draco blinked, registered that it actually was Harry standing there before him, and felt himself grow hot and cold at the same time. It felt as though he was shrinking into himself; he wanted to disappear, or be somebody else. He couldn't stand the way that Harry was looking at him. It felt as though they had been apart for years, although in truth it was only a few hours. Perhaps it was because everything had changed between them. Harry was no longer his Harry. Draco no longer had the option of happily greeting the other man, or shyly suggesting that they

did something that evening. Harry was gone forever – he could tell by the horrible look of lost trust on his face. Draco stared up at him, slightly breathless with shock, feeling the silence building like a wall between them.

Harry regained his composure after a couple of seconds – although it felt like hours – and he blinked, looked away, and brushed past Draco without a word.

“Harry!” Draco called after him, hardly aware that he had done so. He couldn’t bear the other man to think so badly of him, to think that Draco didn’t want to be with him. “Harry, wait!”

Harry stopped, but didn’t turn round. “Not now, Draco,” he said, his voice stilted. “I can’t talk to you right now. I… I just can’t.”

And then he was gone. Draco stood there at the top of the stairs, hardly aware of the time slipping by, gazing out over the bleak grounds and icy, snow-capped mountains until it had grown quite dark.

*

It had been so hot inside Harry. Draco had become acutely aware of actually being inside another person’s body. That had been mind-blowing in itself – being trusted so much by another person that they would willingly put their body, their pleasure, in his hands. Draco could feel every fluctuation, every muscular spasm, experienced by the other man.

Harry had looked at him with such an expression of adoration. He had reassured Draco, guided him through it until Draco had gained some confidence in what he was doing. He had been very aware of the fact that if he was not careful he could end up hurting the other man, but Harry hadn’t seemed worried for a second.

Draco had wanted to disappear into Harry completely, to be fused with him forever. Harry felt so good. Draco had loved the way that the other man had cried out and clung to him, flexing his hips as much for

Draco's pleasure as for his own. They were completely connected, as close as it was possible to be, and although Draco had had sex before, he had never really felt the intimacy of it. Perhaps it was just Harry.

He had been so aroused, it had almost hurt. Harry had been so hot and tight, and Draco had almost felt that he himself was experiencing each one of the sensations Harry had, so attuned had he been to his lover. They had fallen into an almost hypnotic state, teetering on the edge of oblivion, but never quite pushing over the edge.

It had almost been an out-of-body experience for Draco at times, almost as if he was watching their union from a distance. Part of him had only thought that he was with his Harry, the man he had got to know so well over the past few weeks, his friend and lover who had been so good to him and whom he adored. But then, Draco had been sporadically aware that this was actually Harry Potter. Harry Potter, the war hero, defeater of Voldemort and champion of the people, was letting him, Draco Malfoy, fuck him. Harry had trusted him with his body, had given himself to Draco so willingly, so lovingly. He had wanted to hold Harry as tightly as he could, let him know how much his gesture meant.

Their bodies had been slick with sweat. Draco had felt almost desperate, and had grabbed hold of Harry's hand so tightly. He knew that he was about to come and, if the little muscular spasms inside Harry were anything to go by, so was he. Harry had grabbed his hand right back, crying out and arching against Draco, throwing his head back against the pillow, his heels digging into the tops of Draco's thighs.

When it hit, Draco had been able to feel his orgasm throughout his entire body. He had driven himself as deep as possible into the other man, biting into his shoulder to muffle his wild cries, hardly able to endure the sensations but not wanting them to end.

Harry had not let him go afterwards. He had held onto Draco tightly, and Draco had dozed there, his head resting on Harry's shoulder, feeling like he wanted to cry but not having the energy. Harry had kissed him, soothed him, loved him. Draco had realised then that everything would change. Now that he knew what it was like to be this close to another person, he would never be able to go back to how he was before. The realisation had made him smile.

*

“Um… Mr Malfoy, are you going to be okay?”

Draco glanced up at his assistant. She had donned her cloak, ready to leave for the night, but she had paused at the office door and was looking at him with concern.

“I… I know it’s none of my business,” she continued, “but you don’t really seem yourself today. I’m sorry if I’m overstepping the mark, but, well, I can stay a bit longer if you want.”

Only a matter of weeks ago, Draco would have been irritated by Melanie’s interference, but now he felt strangely touched. He gave her a wan smile. “No, you’re all right; get yourself home. I’m just a bit tired, that’s all. I’ll get this paperwork done, and then I’ll turn in.”

She looked at him uncertainly for a moment, then returned his smile. “All right. I’ll see you on Monday.”

“Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” Melanie turned to go, and Draco heard the library doors open and close as she left.

Draco had a big pile of admin to get through which he had been putting off for weeks, and he figured that now was an excellent opportunity to get on with it. At least it would keep his mind occupied. However, he had only been working for half-an-hour or so before he let his quill fall from his listless fingers, and slumped down in his chair, staring blankly into space. His mind kept running through imaginary conversations he might have with Harry, where he would explain his actions, and Harry would understand perfectly and forgive him. But it wouldn’t be that simple. They could never go back after last night, Draco knew that. Whatever way he looked at the situation, he was stuck.

With a cry of frustration, he got up and began to pace his office restlessly. He had so much nervous energy coursing through him, and yet he was utterly exhausted. He wished that he could just turn his brain off. He would give it another couple of hours, then he would go to his rooms and take some of that

potion for a dreamless sleep he'd brewed a few weeks ago.

His office was too small. Draco was beginning to feel trapped and claustrophobic again. He would walk around the library for a bit, he decided, and make sure that everything was in order.

It was so quiet, he thought. He usually relished the times when the library was deserted like this and he could be alone with the books, but now he realised that it had been a bit easier when it was full of students. He had never been so aware of his own solitude. He climbed the stairs and walked the length of the first floor, glancing down between the bookcases to make sure nothing had been left out by mistake. He shivered a little as he passed the Restricted Section, listening to the strange susurrations which always emanated from it and feeling the hairs stand up on the back of his neck. It had never bothered him before.

Draco decided that he would leave. He had never failed to feel comforted by being in the library before, and it was deeply unsettling. He thought it would be best to just go before he became completely disillusioned.

Just as he reached the top of the staircase, he heard the sound of the library doors being opened. At first he thought that Melanie must have forgotten something and had come back to fetch it. But Melanie never forgot things, and she had left ages ago. Then he thought that it might be a student, unaware that it was past closing time. After all, Draco hadn't locked up yet. Then again, he realised with a jolt, perhaps they knew the library was closed and were hoping that he'd left without closing up properly. It was one week exactly since the vandalism, and maybe those kids had some friends who wanted to exact a little revenge. But that didn't seem likely either. Even if they didn't know about what had happened last week, the students all knew that security in the library had been increased and that the ghosts usually spent their nights there. Surely no one would be stupid enough to target Draco that way again. Perhaps, he thought at last, it was Harry. Perhaps Harry had realised that he was still there, and had decided that he wanted to talk to Draco after all. Perhaps they could still work something out. He missed Harry so much it hurt – perhaps Harry was missing him too. Draco descended to the ground floor, his heart in his mouth.

It was Professor McGonagall. The momentary hopeful feeling Draco had experienced quickly evaporated. "Headmistress?"

McGonagall started and turned round sharply. “Oh! Mr Malfoy, I didn’t hear you there.”

“Sorry to have startled you. Can I help you with anything?”

“Well,” the headmistress said, “I rather hoped you might. Shall we go into the office?” She led the way without waiting for his answer, and Draco followed.

“May I offer you a cup of tea, Headmistress?”

“That’s very kind of you, Draco, but I won’t keep you for long. I saw Miss Dowson earlier, and she told me that you were working late tonight, so I thought I’d stop by and pick your brain about something.”

“All right,” Draco said, perching on his desk.

“I want to talk to you about Harry Potter,” McGonagall said.

Hearing the name which had been running through his head all day being actually pronounced by another person gave Draco a nasty shock. It was as if McGonagall could read his thoughts. He tried to mould his face into a mask of casual concern. “Harry Potter, Professor?”

“Yes. I know that the two of you have become good friends over the last couple of months, and I was wondering if you had any idea of what is wrong with him.”

“Wrong with him?” Draco realised that he would only be able to fob McGonagall off by repeating the last bits of her sentences for so long, but his brain didn’t seem to be working properly yet.

“I think that something has happened,” McGonagall said. “He looked absolutely awful when I saw him earlier. I asked him what the matter was, but he wouldn’t say. I don’t like to interfere, but… I care about my staff and their happiness. Now, I don’t want to know if it’s anything personal, but as you are his close

friend, I thought you might be able to let me know if it's something I should be worried about or not."

Draco looked at her in silence. He had made Harry so miserable that other people had noticed – clearly he was a horrible, horrible person. What the hell could he possible say to McGonagall?

"Mr Malfoy," the headmistress said gently, "are you all right? You're not looking so good yourself – has something happened?"

"No," Draco choked out. "That is, I'm sorry about Harry. I… I don't know what to tell you. We're not… I mean, I'm sure he'll be okay. I don't really know… I feel really bad about it. He… he has to be okay. I mean, he's got his friends and… and he'll be fine, I think."

"I see," McGonagall said slowly. Draco really didn't like the way she was looking at him. Why couldn't he have just kept quiet instead of babbling on like that?

McGonagall stood up and looked down at him. "Will you be fine, though?" she asked.

Draco couldn't look at her. "I have my books," he whispered.

She sighed. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Draco. And I'm sorry if I caused any upset – I assure you that it was unintentional. I hope you're right about Harry, but… perhaps it might be best if you were to… but I won't interfere. Good night, My Malfoy. Don't work too late."

*

Draco had woken up once during the night. Harry had been holding him so closely. Their legs had been all tangled up together, and Draco's head had been nestled comfortably on Harry's shoulder. There had been a strange, fluttering feeling in Draco's chest. He had had just enough time to register that it was

happiness, before sleep had claimed him again.

*

Dear Mother,

I've messed everything up. I really wanted to put off writing this reply to you, because I know how disappointed you will be, but you would have to have found out sooner or later.

You know how I said in my last letter that nothing was going to happen with Harry, and that I was just going to talk? Well, it turns out that my resolve wasn't as strong as I had thought. It was stupid of me to allow things to go so far, but I just couldn't help myself. I like him so much, and… and I let my feelings get the better of me.

I realised the next day what a terrible mistake I'd made. If Harry got together with me, the public would never forgive him. He would be seen as a traitor. His friends would be angry, his students wouldn't respect him any more – and those are the two things he cares about the most. The papers would be merciless. The problem is that he has a responsibility to the wizarding world. He has to live up to their expectations, no matter how unreasonable it may seem. You can imagine their reaction if he got himself mixed up with our family – they would feel betrayed. I couldn't do that to him. I couldn't put him through all that. See, he would only be driven away from me in the end anyway. After losing everything, he would realise that I just wasn't worth it. And human relationships are so fragile. I told Harry that I couldn't be with him, and I left.

I've really hurt him. I think he thinks that I left because I just wasn't that interested, and he won't let me explain. He let himself get so close to me, he trusted me, and now he thinks that I don't care. It's horrible, and I don't know how to make it better. I've ruined everything; now I don't even have him as a friend. I'm hoping that given a bit of time he might figure out that I was right, and he'll forgive me, but it's never going to be the same. I miss him so much; it's like a constant ache.

I'm so sorry. I know you wanted me to make a go of things, but surely you must realise that Harry and I

could never be together? You must see that. I want so badly to make it better. I want to be a good son to you and make you proud and happy. I wish I knew what to do.

Draco.

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Chapter 9: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'A Phantom', by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

Dearest Draco,

There are times when I could quite happily smack you round the back of the head. Now is just such an occasion. Just think yourself lucky that I'm hundreds of miles away.

Why must you always insist on sabotaging yourself? I'm sure you never used to be like that. Poor Harry. You see, I do realise that things would be difficult for the two of you – I'm not completely naïve, you know – but I'm certain that you would find a way to make it work if you really wanted to. You're never going to get anywhere if you don't even try! And I'm not surprised that Harry isn't talking to you if you're willing to give up on him before you even begin.

If I remember correctly, there was a time when Harry was derided by the press before – I doubt he has enough respect for them left to allow what they print to bother him. As for his obligation to the public, I

think it's a bit harsh of you to deny the poor boy a life of his own just because he's famous. He doesn't sound daft; I'm sure that he realises that people would be upset at first by your relationship, and evidently he doesn't care!

I'm sorry if you think that I'm being flippant. I know that I'm out of public life, hidden away in France. I don't know what it's like to have to deal with scorn every day like you do. I know that it must be a daunting prospect. Still, I think that you and Harry would be strong enough to deal with it, if you'd just give it a go. But I may be wrong. Perhaps things won't work out; perhaps you're not right for each other after all. All the same, I think it's sad that you won't even try.

Your father has been a bit restless recently. It's too cold for him to go out in the garden, so he's been wandering round the house, looking very sorry for himself. With any luck this cold snap will come to an end soon, and then he'll get out from under my feet. I've invited Andromeda and Teddy here again for Easter. Have you written to them yet? They would love to hear from you.

I hope that you manage to work something out with Harry. Even if you really can't risk a relationship, I hope that the two of you will manage to retain some form of friendship. He has been so good for you; I have been amazed by the change in you this year. Please don't shut me out – I know I'm only your mother and therefore I couldn't possibly understand, but I do love you very much. At least talk to Severus if you can't talk to me; I don't want you to get isolated. I hope that you will be able to work something out.

All my love,

Your Devoted Mother.

*

It had been over two weeks since that wonderful, fateful evening when he and Harry had slept together, and Draco had almost got used to the horrible numb feeling in the place where his heart used to be. Everything had gone back to exactly as it used to be before Harry had come back into his life, except that

now, no matter how hard he tried to convince himself that it was enough for him, he wasn't entirely sure that it was. Like Plato's cave-dwellers, Draco had been given a little glimpse of how beautiful life could really be, and now there was no way he could be satisfied with his former existence. He had the horrible feeling that, no matter how much he loved it, his library might not actually be enough after all.

Still, he didn't know what else there was to be done. There was no way he could go back, even if he wanted to. He had only seen Harry a couple of times since their falling out, and the other man had studiously avoided his eye. Harry did not want anything to do with him any more, and it broke Draco's heart.

All his old arguments about art versus life and the innate mistrustfulness of the human race seemed stale and unconvincing now. Nothing excited him any more. He felt so depressed, he couldn't even focus his mind enough to read.

It happened that on a certain Tuesday in the middle of February, Draco found himself back in his old alcove in the quad, eating his lunch. It was still a bit too cold for dining alfresco, but Draco didn't care. If he was cold, at least it meant that he was feeling something.

He was finishing off his tangerine without much enthusiasm, and was about to make his way back to the library, when a group of female students walked past. He could tell from the wisps of red hair sticking out from under their hats that he was in the presence of the Harry Potter Fan Club. He knew that he shouldn't follow them. He knew that he should just go back to work, but he hadn't heard anything about Harry in ages, and even listening to the inane gossip of infatuated teenage girls was better than nothing. Draco cautiously peeped out from his hiding place, and followed the students as discreetly as he could, taking refuge behind a stone pillar as soon as he was within earshot.

"What do you think is wrong with him?" one girl asked, blowing on her fingers to warm them. "He looked really sad when we had him on Friday. I mean, he was still making an effort and everything, but you could tell that his heart wasn't in it."

Draco's stomach lurched. He knew they would be talking about Harry.

"He's been like it for ages," another girl agreed. "You know, I couldn't sleep one night last week, and I

was up reading in the common room. I looked out of the window, and I saw him out in the grounds, just pacing up and down. It must have been three in the morning!"

"Maybe he's unhappy in love," a short girl suggested.

Draco wished that he hadn't decided to listen. He hated that Harry was so miserable because of him. The next thing he heard made him feel even worse.

"Well, if that's the case, he might be feeling a bit better soon," the first girl said gloomily. "Danielle said that she saw him in Hogsmeade last night, having dinner with a girl."

The other girls made loud sounds of dismay, and Draco felt his insides turn to ice.

"Who was she? What did she look like?"

"What were they doing?"

"Danielle didn't really see her properly," the young informant said. "She only saw the girl's back. Apparently, she's quite petite with brown hair. They seemed to be having a really intense conversation, and she had her hand over his."

"Ugh," the short girl said, "I can't believe he has a girlfriend!"

"She might not be his girlfriend," one girl reasoned. "Maybe she was just a friend trying to cheer him up. I mean, he still didn't look very happy when he taught us this morning, so—"

The bell went at that point, and the conference was brought to an end. The group of girls hurried off, and Draco slowly made his way back inside, feeling as if his insides had disappeared. What if Harry really had started seeing someone else? Even if he had just gone on a consolation date, it would still mean that he

was trying to move on from Draco. And if he and the mystery girl looked really close… Suddenly Draco's little argument that he wanted Harry to move on and forget him seemed completely irrelevant in the face of his jealousy. He hated the thought of someone else being close to Harry, touching him, talking to him. It was horrible. Still, he thought as he dragged his weary feet back to the library, he had brought this on himself. It had been his choice to end things with Harry, and he couldn't resent the fact that the other man wanted to get over him. It didn't mean he had to be happy about it, though. And it didn't mean that he couldn't desperately hope that it wasn't true.

Once back in the library, Draco made his way over to the re-shelving trolley. Spending some time with the books might just make him feel better. He stared blankly at them, falling into one of those stupors which overcame him so often these days. What was he supposed to be doing again?

Draco felt a hand being placed lightly on his arm, and jumped.

"I'm sorry, Mr Malfoy," Melanie said. "I tried to call you, but I don't think you heard me."

"It's all right," Draco said, rubbing his eyes furiously and trying to bring his mind back into focus. "What is it you wanted?"

"I just thought you might like to know that there's been a delivery. It's only a small box; I've left it in the office."

"Right," Draco said, trying to seem coherent. "Right, I'll go and see to it. Can you do this shelving for me?"

"Of course!" Melanie replied brightly. Draco really appreciated the fact that she pretended not to notice how out of it he was lately.

Draco made his way back to the office and stood in front of his desk, looking down at the wooden crate placed on top of it. It could only be one thing. Draco undid the magical seals, lifted the lid, and smiled gently.

*

That night, Draco found himself the subject of much gratitude and praise.

“But I don’t understand,” Numerological Thinking said. “What on earth made you change your mind?”

“Oh, does it matter?” gushed Wuthering Heights. “Perhaps he has been visited by an angel! All that matters is that we are reunited, and our epic love will go on forever!”

“Well,” Draco said, more than a little embarrassed, “I realised that if you really love each other, I have no right to keep you apart. I ordered some new, non-anthropomorphised copies of you, and they arrived today. That way, the library won’t miss out, and the two of you can be together. I thought you could stay here in the office.”

“Wonderful man!” rhapsodised Wuthering Heights. “Shining example of manhood! Merciful, benevolent, glorious man!”

“Steady on, dearest,” Numerological Thinking protested. “You’re going the right way to make a book jealous!”

Draco was now overwhelmed by the bizarre idea of himself being in an actual relationship with a book, and had to stop himself from laughing.

“Oh, darling,” cooed Wuthering Heights, “don’t be silly. I’m just so happy that we have been reunited.”

“Ah, that’s sweet, dear,” the other book replied, obviously pacified. “But, Mr Malfoy, I still don’t understand why. A couple of months ago, you were adamant that we had to be separated. What made

you change your mind?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” said Wuthering Heights. “He knows what it’s like now. He knows what it’s like to be in love.”

*

“Well?” Snape said interrogatively. “Are you going to actually tell me what’s wrong? You’ve been rambling on about the library and the latest scintillating gossip from Cataloguing Monthly for ages, all the while looking like you’ve just been sentenced to death. Now, I’m sure that you didn’t come here just to tell me about your new cross-referencing system, so you’d better come out with it.”

Draco looked up at his old Potions master resignedly. It was true that he wanted to talk to someone about Harry, but now he was actually here he realised that Snape was probably the worst possible candidate. He wasn’t ready to listen to scathing comments about Harry, or be told that he should have seen it coming. Still, Draco knew that Snape was not the kind of man to give up on things easily.

“It’s Harry,” he confessed. “I’ve messed everything up.”

Snape sighed wearily. “Why am I not surprised? What did you do?”

Draco swallowed, wondering how he was going to go about actually putting the events of the last couple of weeks into words. “We-el,” he began slowly, “I suppose it all began after the kids who vandalised the library had been caught. Harry and I went for a walk around the lake, and he was having a go about how I shouldn’t be so hard on myself. It got a bit heated, and he ended up telling me that he had feelings for me. I was too shocked to respond, so he thought I didn’t feel the same and ran off. I went to his rooms later that night, intending to talk things over and explain to him why we could never have a relationship, but, well, we didn’t get much talking done. One thing led to another and we ended up in bed together. Harry was so amazing; he—”

Draco was interrupted by Snape clapping his hands over his ears and humming loudly. Draco waited for him to finish, his face stony.

Snape gingerly uncovered his ears and glared down at the young librarian. “For the love of Merlin, Draco, there are some things I just don’t need to know!” he exclaimed. “I do not wish to have the mental image of you and Potter being intimate running through my head all day, thank you very much!”

“I wasn’t going to go into detail,” Draco said sulkily.

“For which I am infinitely grateful. However, I fear that even a hazy watercolour sketch would be too much for me in this case.”

“Fine,” Draco said acidly. “Well, suffice to say that relations were had. Anyway, the next morning I realised that the whole thing was a terrible mistake. Being with me would ruin Harry’s life, and there was no way I could do that to him. I told him that we couldn’t be together, he got understandably upset, and we haven’t spoken to each other since. The trouble is that I think he believes I left because I didn’t really want to be with him, which is rubbish. I want to talk to him about it, but he’s avoiding me, and… I wouldn’t know where to start anyway. And I miss him. I miss him so much it hurts, and I can’t seem to stop, and I have a horrible feeling that I’ll never be able to go back to how my life was before.”

Draco stopped talking, and awaited Snape’s judgement. He knew what would happen: the other man would call him an imbecile, tell him that he had an unprecedented capacity for making things worse for himself, and say that he should pull himself together. Then after that, he might express his disappointment that Draco had fallen in love with Harry Potter, that he had always expected more from his favourite student, etc.

“Well,” Snape said at length. “Well, I’m very sorry for you, Draco. I really don’t know what else to say.”

Inexplicably, Draco found himself feeling a little disappointed.

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Draco arrived early to work the following Monday. He had woken up at around five o'clock that morning, jolted out of a wonderful dream in which he and Harry had been enjoying a very physical reunion. He had been both highly disappointed to wake up alone, and painfully aroused. After bringing himself to an ultimately unsatisfying orgasm (he was beginning to suspect that Harry had spoiled him for life), Draco had been unable to get back to sleep, so he had showered, dressed, and made his way to the library.

It was still only quarter-past eight, so he was surprised when his assistant walked into the office, carrying her cloak and a paper bag.

"Good morning, Melanie," Draco said. "What are you doing here?"

"Good morning! I thought I'd get a head start on cataloguing those invoices," she replied cheerfully. "Here," she said, putting the paper bag down on the desk, "I picked you up a pain-au-raisin from Madam Puddifoot's."

Draco was touched. He experienced human kindness at first hand so infrequently that the smallest thing was enough to make him feel all warm and fuzzy. "Thank you," he said softly. "You didn't have to do that."

"Well, I thought you probably wouldn't have had any breakfast. Also, I thought you could do with some cheering up." She paused, looking at him nervously. "I-I'm sorry if I'm being impertinent, but I've noticed that you haven't been happy for the past few weeks. Not even alphabetising seems to bring you out of it these days. I… I was wondering if there was anything I could do to help." She blushed, looking as if she were afraid he would yell at her.

Draco suddenly realised what a complete git he had been. This poor girl, who had been trying so hard and who had such a good heart, was scared of him. He had pushed her away, forbade any kind of friendly interaction between them, criticised her every mistake to the extent that she was on tenterhooks around him, constantly afraid of inciting his displeasure.

“Thank you,” he said again. “I’m sorry if I’ve been… difficult to work for recently.” He sighed. “I’m sorry if I’ve always been difficult to work for. I know that I’m not an easy person to like.”

“It’s okay,” Melanie replied. “I like you.”

Draco looked up in shock. “But… I’m horrible to you!”

She laughed. “Not really. I mean, I know that you don’t give me an easy time of it, but I wouldn’t expect you to.” She sighed and sat down opposite him. “See, my whole life, people have laughed at me or thought I was weird. My mum wanted a pretty daughter who was good at Quidditch and interested in clothes and boys, and there was me, spending all my spare time reading, arranging everything in my room according to size or colour. I knew that she loved me and all, but I couldn’t help but feel that I was a constant disappointment to her. To all my family, actually. I was odd, and they were always nagging at me to try to be a little bit more like other girls. See, when you get angry with me, it’s not because you think I’m a freak or that I’m not good enough – it’s because you know that I can do better, and you want me to try harder. That’s the difference. And that’s why I like you.”

Draco didn’t know what to say. He took his pastry out of the bag and broke off a piece to eat. It was very good. “You’re a wonderful assistant, Melanie.”

She beamed with pleasure. “Thank you! I really do love my job. I’ve been trying really hard to do better.”

“I know you have, and I’m sorry if I’ve made you feel at all nervous. I know what I can be like. I would very much like it if we could be friends.”

“I’d like that too,” Melanie said with a smile.

Draco laughed a little bitterly. “Not many people would. I… I don’t suppose you know about my past, do you?” Draco felt that if he and Melanie were going to be on friendlier terms, he should let her know what she was getting herself into.

She gave him a strange look. “Of course I do! I’m not a complete idiot, you know,” she said with a laugh. “I suppose… I suppose I don’t see the good in judging people by the past, or by what other people say about them. I like to make my own mind up. And you were so dedicated to the library and you loved books, and even though people were sometimes rude to you, you never retaliated once. And then, of course, I may have been slightly biased by the fact that you’d given me a job.”

Draco laughed. “Well, I suppose I should thank you for giving me the benefit of the doubt. I can’t see that I’ve given you much cause to do so.”

Melanie shrugged. “Well, as I said, I’m not the kind of person who’s used to direct friendliness. There are other ways of telling if a person’s decent or not. Besides, friendliness can be deceptive.”

Draco had had no idea that his little assistant had such depth to her. “This is true,” he agreed.

“You know,” Melanie said, a note of caution returning to her voice, “Professor Potter likes you too.”

Not too long ago, Draco would have been annoyed by this observation, but now it didn’t really bother him at all. It only made him sad. He licked the crumbs from his fingers before answering. “He may have done, once. I’m not sure that he likes me too much now, though.”

“That’s why you’ve been so unhappy, isn’t it?”

Draco nodded.

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

“No. I messed everything up, and he has every right to be angry. It’s probably for the best, though. I think… I think he’s better off without me in his life.”

“I don’t know,” Melanie said slowly. “I mean, you know, he really likes you. He’d come into the library all the time in the hopes of seeing you. He’d always ask me questions about how you were doing, and then when he’d see you, his whole face would light up. And… and I couldn’t help but notice that you’d do the same when you saw him.”

Draco looked at her apprehensively. “S-so you know that we’re…”

Melanie made a small gesture of equanimity. “Only because I’m used to observing from the sidelines. I mean, you weren’t obvious about it or anything. Still, I thought you two would be able to work something out. You seemed so right for each other.”

Draco shook his head. “Maybe if we were different people, but… but he’s Harry Potter, Saviour of the Wizarding World, and I’m the son of a Death Eater. Even if we had made a go of it, I don’t think we would have been allowed to stay together for too long. I couldn’t do that to him.”

“I’m sorry,” Melanie said softly. “It’s not fair, really.”

“I don’t know. I don’t know that I deserve to be happy. Come on, it’s nearly nine. You go open the doors and I’ll get the desks ready. Thanks again for breakfast.”

Melanie looked as though she wanted to say something else, but evidently thought better of it, and left the office without a word.

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The worst of winter seemed to be over. They were already though the first half of the term, March had begun, and there was a scent of Spring in the air. For Draco, however, none of this mattered very much. Not when Harry still wasn’t talking to him. Draco hadn’t realised how much he had come to depend on

the Defence teacher, and how badly he would cope without him. It helped, of course, that he was now on friendly terms with Melanie, but it was hardly the same. His estrangement from Harry was awful, and Draco did not think that it was going to get any better. As such, he had made up his mind that he was going to talk to Harry and try to explain himself. It would never be the same, he knew this, but if he could just get to the stage where Harry would occasionally smile at him again or say hello, things might be a little easier. In theory, at least.

However, talking to Harry was easier said than done. He was simply never around. Draco only ever saw him when he was teaching or talking with one of the other professors. He had even plucked up the courage to go and knock on Harry's door, but there had been no answer. He had heard that Harry almost always left the school for the weekends now, and some evenings as well, adding to Draco's fear that he had got involved with someone else. Harry was spending a lot of time with Hagrid too. Draco often saw them walking the grounds together, deep in serious discussions. He had tried many times to write Harry a letter, but they never seemed sincere, and so he had given up. His only hope was to talk to Harry face to face, but he couldn't see how that was ever going to happen. He began running through Harry's weekly schedule, looking for any conceivable chinks that he could slip between. Finally, an idea had come to him. It was a desperate idea, and it probably wouldn't come to anything, but Draco had to try.

He got up very early on the first Saturday of March. He knew that he was probably going to be unsuccessful, but he wanted so much to catch Harry alone that he had to take every chance, no matter how small. He knew it was likely that the other man would leave again for the weekend, but if he intended to go that morning instead of the night before, then maybe there was a chance…

Draco didn't think that it had ever taken him so long to get to the Quidditch pitch, even though he was walking as fast as he could without actually breaking into a run. This was all completely ridiculous anyway; he didn't know why he was bothering. Harry wasn't going to be there.

Draco had expended so much effort convincing himself that his efforts would be fruitless so as to not feel too disappointed, that when he walked onto the pitch and actually saw Harry sitting in the stands, he thought that he was hallucinating. He felt a blush spread across his cheeks, and his breath caught in his throat.

Harry hadn't noticed that he was there. He sat on one of the benches, hunched over and staring pensively at the ground. He looked tired and unhappy, and Draco felt his chest contract in sadness for him.

Draco slowly approached the other man, not entirely sure what kind of reaction he would get. When he was within three feet of Harry, he stopped and waited to be noticed.

Harry blinked and sat up a bit. He shifted his feet slightly.

I've seen him naked, Draco thought. He's been inside me. I've been inside him. I have been more intimate with him than I have ever been with anyone in my entire life. And now I'm too scared to even say hello.

Harry turned and looked up at him, registering no surprise. "Hello," he said, giving Draco a small, heartbreaking smile. "You know, I was hoping you'd come here this morning. Weird." He pressed his lips together and looked away.

Draco sat down beside him. Harry looked so sad and lonely, and Draco desperately wanted to put an arm around him. He tried to think of something to say, but everything he came up with sounded so stupid to him. Every muscle in his body was tensed. He knew that every minute they sat there in silence was an opportunity wasted.

Harry cleared his throat, making Draco jump. "I'm glad you're here. I know that things have been awful, but… I'm glad you're here."

"I'm glad too," Draco replied quietly. If he moved just a fraction of an inch to the left, their arms would be touching.

"I'll have to get going soon," Harry said at length. "I promised Ron and Hermione."

"Are they all right?" Draco asked.

Harry grimaced. “Not really, no. They… they’re having a few problems. I’m going over there as often as I can, trying to help them sort it out. Hermione came up here to see me the other week, asking for my advice.”

“Ooohhhh,” Draco breathed. So that explained the mystery brunette. He couldn’t help but feel a little cheered. “What’s wrong? Or is it private?”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t know, but I can’t see any harm in telling you. I need to talk to someone about it, and Hagrid just gets upset. It’s… it’s complicated. They’ve been married for five years now, and Ron wants them to have another baby, but Hermione wants to wait. Fred is only three, and he’s still a bit of a handful. The thing is, I can see things from both sides. Ron came from such a big family, and he really wants one of his own, whereas Hermione was an only child. And then, they have different work demands. Hermione’s just been promoted at the Ministry and she’s so passionate about her work, so I can see why she wouldn’t want to take time off. And Ron… well, he is a partner in Weasley’s Wizarding Wheezes, but it’s not exactly as demanding. And Hermione’s been spending all her time at the office, and Ron’s feeling undervalued, and they just can’t seem to appreciate the other one’s point of view. I mean, they were always very different, but… I don’t know. And I know they love each other, but I’m terrified that they won’t be able to work through it this time.” Harry looked away miserably.

Draco didn’t know what to say. He had always been surprised that Ron and Hermione had ended up together. As Harry said, they were just so different, and Draco couldn’t see how they could possibly be compatible in the long run. Still, they had been through a lot together, and that must count for something.

“I don’t know what I’ll do if they split up,” Harry said in a small voice. “They have to stay together; they have to.”

Draco looked over at the other man; his face was forlorn and pale. Harry was talking almost as if Ron and Hermione were his own parents, rather than his friends. He was talking as if his own happiness depended on them staying together as a family. It suddenly occurred to Draco that they were his family. At least, they were the closest thing to a family that Harry had ever really known. As famous and universally admired as he was, Harry didn’t have anyone of his own. He was as alone as Draco.

“I’m sure they’ll be able to work something out,” Draco said, realising at the time how trite he must

sound.

“Thank you,” Harry said giving him a small smile. “I hope that they’re getting somewhere. They have so much together; I just hope that they think it’s worth the trouble of working things out.” He gave a short, slightly bitter laugh. “Have you noticed that bad things always seem to happen at the same time?”

Draco didn’t answer for a moment. “…Yes.”

“Draco, these last couple of weeks…”

“I know. Harry, I… I’ve been wanting to talk to you. I want you to know that I didn’t do what I did because I didn’t want to be with you, or that that night we had didn’t mean everything to me.”

“I know.”

“You do?”

“Yeah. I mean, maybe not at first. But then I started thinking about all those things you said to me, all the reasons you had for us not being together. I guess they became a little more real after we’d slept together, right?”

“I’m sorry,” Draco said. “I should never have… I mean, I just came to yours that night so we could talk. I shouldn’t have slept with you.”

“Don’t say that,” Harry said, turning towards him. “Don’t regret that.”

“I would never regret that,” Draco replied, “I just regret that I made things so much more difficult.”

“But… does it really have to be difficult?” Harry said. “Draco, I miss you so much. I’ve hated not being able to talk to you or see you. I can’t just go back to how I was before. There has to be a way we can make things work. Draco, I told you that I didn’t care about public opinion or being criticised by the press. We could get through it together, I know we could!”

“I don’t know,” Draco said sadly. “Harry, we might be able to cope with the press, but could we cope with you losing the support of your students? And what about your friends? I take it that they don’t know about me.”

Harry was quiet for a minute. “I don’t know. I mean, they know that we’d made friends.”

“I can’t imagine they were terribly happy about it.”

Harry didn’t answer at first, which Draco took for an affirmative. “I think Hermione’s guessed,” Harry said at length. “She hasn’t said anything, but I’m sure she knows. I’m certain that Ron doesn’t, though; I think I’d know about it if he did.”

“How did they react when you told them you were bisexual?” Draco asked.

“Oh, they were okay. Most of my friends were absolutely fine about it. I think that Ron felt a bit weird for a while, only because he felt the need to assure me of how cool he was with the whole thing about fifty times.” Harry laughed gently. “I think he’s got used to the idea now.”

“I doubt he’d get used to the idea of me.”

“He might,” Harry said in a voice that lacked conviction.

Draco gave him a look. “Harry, I won’t come between you and your friends. See, even if we can

overcome our own differences, there's still so much against us. We would never get any peace, and that will take its toll after a while. I'm just not a part of your world, Harry."

"But it's so unfair!" Harry cried. "Draco, I want you so much! I know that we're different, and that our past is so complicated, but… When I'm with you, I feel like I belong. I wish you could see yourself as I see you. I just love being with you and talking to you, and I just want to be able to reach out and touch you."

Draco looked down at the other man's fingers, resting on the bench between them. He let his own hand slowly drift over, and placed it on Harry's. Harry twisted his wrist so that they were palm-to-palm, and their fingers twined together. It seemed like the most natural thing in the world. Both of their hands were cold, but Draco could detect a strange warmth building where their skin made contact. It felt so good to sit there holding hands with Harry, but at the same time it was painful, because he knew it must come to an end.

"I hate the thought of anyone else being with you like this," Harry said with a slight catch in his voice.

"You needn't worry about that," Draco replied evenly. "Before you came along, I'd promised myself that I would never be in another relationship, and I don't intend to break that promise. It's just unfortunate that the one person I'd consider breaking it for is out of my reach."

"You're reaching me just fine right now." Harry gave Draco's fingers a small squeeze.

Draco squeezed back. "You know what I mean. We would either spend our whole lives hiding our relationship or putting up with the abuse of other people, and that's no way to live. Face it, Harry: we could never be together in that way. At least we had that night."

Harry shifted closer so that their arms were pressed against each other. "But I don't want it to be just that night! Draco, this is so stupid! Why can't we be together if we want to be?"

Draco sighed wearily. "For many reasons, Harry, and you know it. It's not just me, it's what my family represents. My father, much as I love him, is a war criminal. And yes, there are people who did far worse than he ever did, despite what people might think, but he still caused an awful lot of damage. It's an

association that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. For you to declare a relationship with me would be like aligning yourself with that, and that is something that you of all people could never get away with."

"But I could explain it!" Harry protested. "I could explain how it is and make people understand!"

"Public opinion doesn't listen to reason, Harry."

"Well… well maybe we could run away, go somewhere where no one would know us. We could start new lives, Draco!"

Draco looked at the other man. Harry's face was lit with a desperate optimism. He wanted so badly for Draco to give him some kind of hope, some sign that they could find a way to get though this. Draco thought it was amazing that the same person could break his heart so many times. He had never had anyone want to be with him so much; he had never wanted to be with someone so much. He wished that he could lie to Harry and tell him that everything would be okay, but part of him knew that Harry didn't expect him to. Harry trusted Draco to be honest with him, and he knew that if he lied now, a part of Harry would be disappointed.

"Harry," he said gently, "You know that we couldn't. Could you really give up this job that you've wanted for so long? Could you leave all your friends, disappear from their lives? What about Teddy? You must know how he idolises you. And I'll bet that Ron and Hermione's little boy worships the ground you walk on too. And… and I know how frustrated you must get with having so much attention focussed on you all the time and having to be in the public eye, but I also know that you have a very strong sense of duty. The fact is that you were the one who defeated Lord Voldemort. He had brought so much misery to everyone, and you stopped him. You are a sign of hope for so many, and I know that if you ran away from that, you would never really forgive yourself for letting those people down."

Harry bit his lip and looked away. "When did you get so insightful?"

Draco smiled. "Well, I've had a lot of time to think over the years."

“Okay, so we can’t run away,” Harry said, “but there must be something we can do. See, I think that if we just stand firm together, we’d be able to ride out any opposition we might face.”

Draco groaned. “Harry, we’ve been through this already! I’m not going to do that to you. I could never be really happy if I knew that our relationship was damaging you. I just couldn’t.”

“But… we have to do something! I can’t carry on like this, Draco! I mean, I’ve been cut up about a relationship not working out before, but never like this. It’s like I can’t feel anything any more, like nothing matters. And I miss you so much. Like, all the time, every hour of every day!”

“I know.” Draco gave Harry’s hand another squeeze. “I’ve been the same.”

“Well, this is ridiculous!” Harry exclaimed. “Clearly we cannot carry on like this, for the sake of the people we have to spend time with as much as for ourselves. We have to figure something out.”

“Well,” Draco said softly, “there’s only one solution I can think of. We can try to go back to how we were before. We could hang out occasionally, maybe have the odd breakfast together, but that’s it. You know, just be friends.”

“Draco, we were never just friends.”

“I know. I know, but we could try. We could try just talking. Then maybe one day we’ll get over this… thing that we have, and we really will be just good friends.” Draco hoped that he didn’t sound as stupid as he felt when he said that. “Harry, it’s the only thing I can think of.”

Harry sat in silence. Draco wondered if he was angry. But if he was, surely he would have let go of Draco’s hand. But then, maybe he was the kind of angry that was closer to disappointed, and no longer cared whether he held hands with Draco or not. Or perhaps he wasn’t really angry, but needed some time alone, but didn’t really know how to say it, and was worried about saying it in case Draco thought he was angry, and was hoping that Draco would let go of his hand of his own accord, but then if Draco let go of Harry’s hand, would Harry think that Draco was angry? But then—

Harry suddenly squeezed his hand tightly, and Draco let out a squeak of surprise. “Draco, it’s all well and good suggesting that in theory, but do you really think we can do it?” Harry cried. “See, we couldn’t even sit here for ten minutes without holding hands. And I hate the thought of letting go. Do you really think that we could hang out with each other without something happening?”

“We have to try,” Draco replied stubbornly. “Harry, if you want me in your life, then we have to try.”

“But it’s not fair! Draco, you must see that it’s not fair. Why should we give up on our happiness because it might upset other people? Why is it that we have to do that? Draco, I am telling you now that I will go through whatever it takes to be with you. I will put up with everything they throw at me, if I can just have you.”

Draco saw that Harry’s eyes were brimming with unshed tears, and he had to look away. He hated denying Harry like this, but he had to. He had to, because he couldn’t live with the possibility that Harry would change his mind. What if Draco gave in to Harry’s requests? What if he fell in love with the other man even more, only to have Harry get bored with him? And he would get bored, you know he would, a horrible voice in his head told him. He would get bored and leave you, because no one would actually want to be with you in the long run. He’d realise that you are so not worth the effort, and he’d leave. And what would you do then? No, he couldn’t risk that. It was painful to be apart from Harry now, but it would be even worse if he had Harry, actually had him, only to lose him again. He sat in silence, gazing out unseeingly over the Quidditch grounds.

“Draco,” Harry whispered. He laid his head on Draco’s shoulder.

Draco’s breath caught in his throat.

“Draco…” Harry’s other arm inched round his waist, pulling him towards him. Draco could feel Harry’s hot tears on his neck, and his heart contracted painfully.

The next thing he knew, they were kissing. There was nothing gentle or romantic about it: it was a desperate, bruising kiss. They clung to each other, pressing their cold faces together, whimpering slightly

as they kissed and bit each other's lips.

"Harry," Draco whispered frantically against the other man's cheek, trying to catch his breath. "Harry, we can't. You know we can't; it would never work out."

"And why not?" Harry demanded, pulling back abruptly. His eyes were glittering and intense, his mouth was very red, and Draco didn't think that he had ever looked so beautiful. "Why not, Draco? Because the world won't let us? Or because you won't? Because I've told you that I am willing to work through things; I will do whatever it takes to convince the people I care about to accept you, and that I'll even defend you to the press if I have to! There is no conceivable reason why we cannot try to make this work apart from your blind refusal to do so!"

Draco felt stunned. "Harry," he said, "You know that I want to be with you, but I have to be realistic about our chances! There is so much that could go wrong, and I'd only end up losing you anyway, so—"

"So you're not even going to try," Harry said bluntly. "You would rather just stay shut up with your books and be miserable and alone, rather than taking an actual risk at being happy. Of course it might not work out; of course something might happen! Draco, that's the risk that everybody has to take in relationships, but it doesn't mean that it's not worth even trying! And I know that you've been hurt in the past and that you've lost everything, but couldn't you just, I don't know, make a fresh start? Couldn't you trust me even a little bit?"

Draco looked away.

"So that's it. You're just going to give up on us because it's too much of a risk. Well, I'm afraid I can't do that, Draco." Harry got to his feet. "I can't just pretend that we're only friends and give up on the idea that we might be so much more, just so that I can avoid the possibility of getting hurt. It's a stupid idea, and I won't go along with it!"

"Harry, please don't think badly of me!" Draco protested miserably.

"Well, I'm sorry, Draco, but I can't humour you this time," the other man replied. "I know you've been

through a lot, but I can't just sit back and tell you that it's perfectly all right to just let life slip through your fingers, especially not when my own happiness is so bound up in you. And I could never just be your friend, because it's too damn heartbreaking." Harry raked his fingers through his hair in frustration. "Look… I have to go. I promised Ron and Hermione that I'd babysit so that they could go out together."

"Can we talk again later?" Draco said in a small voice.

"I don't know. Maybe. When I stop being mad at you, or when you stop being an idiot – whatever comes first."

Draco watched Harry step past him and walk out of the Quidditch pitch. A furious battle was being waged inside him – one half was screaming at him to chase after the other man and agree to give it a shot, and the other half was telling him that it was all pointless, that he had caused Harry enough pain already, and that there was no way things would work out. At this point, neither side of the battle was winning, but Draco could tell that the fatalities would be high.

*

Dear Mother,

I'm sorry that I let you down. I wish I could tell you that I've managed to work things out with Harry, but I'm afraid I can't. We had a talk yesterday morning, and he told me that he would be willing to face whatever opposition was thrown at us if I would give our relationship a go, but I still couldn't, and he got cross with me. I don't blame him – I really hate myself sometimes, and I can't see why on earth he would want a basket case like me. The truth is, as Harry astutely observed, that it's not just what other people might do that I'm afraid of. I'm afraid of myself. I'm afraid of life. Real life, where I have to go out into the world and interact with other people. I just can't trust myself not to mess it all up. I feel like if I don't go out and get the things I want, I will never know the pain of losing them.

And I'm so afraid of losing Harry, more so than with any of my previous relationships. This is the first time I've ever felt truly at ease with another person, and like I'm really understood. I just can't stand the

thought of committing to him, allowing myself to believe that I can relax, that I'll have that feeling for life, and then having it taken away. I don't know if I would survive it. And I keep thinking, what if Harry met someone else and decided to leave me? What if Harry died? How would I cope without him? And yes, I realise that I sound like a neurotic freak in dire need of psychiatric help. And I hate the thought of losing him because I'm too much of a coward to go after him, but I can't seem to help it.

At least Melanie and I are getting on now. We had a nice chat the other week, and she is a really nice girl. Rather embarrassingly, she'd guessed about me and Harry, and she keeps hinting that I should give the relationship a chance. God, everyone wants me to give the relationship a chance, including myself, so why the hell can't I do it?

All my love,

Draco.

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Chapter 10: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'Meditation', by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

Dearest, darling Draco,

You needn't tell me that you're afraid of life – I know that you are. We had the rug well and truly pulled out from under our feet during the war, and the dust never really settled afterwards. All the things you were brought up to rely upon – the supremacy of your bloodline, your inheritance, your pride – were

taken from you. It's understandable that you have been left a little traumatised. Still, I am so afraid that you will give up this second chance at happiness due to your fear of losing it, because I know that one day you would bitterly regret it.

Please know that I will love and support you whatever course of action you decide on. I am your mother, and I love you more than anything else in this world. Still, I strongly advise you to see if you can patch things up with Harry. Draco, you can never be entirely certain of anything. There is no fairytale ending in real life – there will always be times of hardship, or times when you feel disheartened. That is just the way things go. The best we can hope for in the long run is contentment

My poor darling. I don't think you know it, but in spite of all you have been through you are still innocent in many ways. You know so little of life, you have been hiding away from it for so long, and it frightens you. You believe that it is safer to stay as you are and depend on the things you can be sure of, and in many ways you're right. Still, safe isn't necessarily best.

There are many people who would tell me, in retrospect of course, that I was wrong to marry your father. I was once part of the greatest wizarding family in Europe – the Blacks were proud and strong, highly thought of by everyone of any import. So were the Malfoys, of course, at the time of my engagement. It was considered an admirable match. And now I have lost everything. My family would certainly have cut me off… if there had been anyone but Andromeda left.

And then, my marriage has never been exactly perfect. It's strange that, even though your father is so changed now, we are closer than we ever were when he had all his faculties. There was always such a distance between us during our time of prosperity. I loved him very much, but I knew that there was so much of his life that I didn't know about. He confided in me more after Voldemort's return, when he was so afraid. We became a team then, whereas I always had a fear before that he saw me as something of a trophy wife. There were times over the years when I felt very alone and unhappy. Still, I would not have done things differently for anything. Poor and shamed as were are, flawed as your father is, I would not have sacrificed one second of our time with each other. Because I love him, and we belong together. And if you feel that about Harry, then please do everything in your power to make things work, otherwise I know you will regret it for the rest of your life. Sometimes you have to make your own happiness, and I feel that you have a much better chance with Harry that I did with Lucius – and you see that I've not done too badly for myself all things considered.

I hope that you will be able to find the courage to overcome your all too understandable fears. Know that I love and support you; I am so proud of all you have done to redeem our name, and you could never

disappoint me. I am only afraid of you disappointing yourself.

All my love, as always,

Your Mother.

*

Draco hoped that his behaviour did not qualify him as a stalker. After all, he reassured himself, it wasn't as if he was trailing Harry wherever he went. He just occasionally listened in on the other man's classes every now and then. It wasn't too much to ask, was it, to want to hear Harry's voice?

Harry was taking a seventh year class now, and they were discussing the subject of duelling. N.E.W.T Defence classes, which were mostly taken by students who hoped to become Aurors, work with dangerous animals, or enter into a career where knowledge of magical law was needed, tended to focus mostly on practical exercises. Harry wanted to train his pupils to be able to cope with any perilous situation that might arise. Still, if they had hoped Harry was going to encourage them in daring acts of valour, they had another thing coming.

"What you need to do, above all," Draco heard Harry say, as he loitered outside the classroom door, "is trust your instincts. And if they are telling you to back off or run, then that is what you have to do. Sometimes the only thing you can do is get everyone to safety as quickly as possible, including yourself. And yes, I know that I am the last person to practice what I preach, but I would be woefully neglecting my duty if I didn't tell you this. Secure the safety of the people around you, especially if there are Muggles involved, then make sure that you yourself are as safe as you can be."

"But surely sometimes risks have to be taken?" a female student said.

"Of course. But there's a difference between taking an educated risk in the line of duty, and looking for trouble. What I'm saying is that you shouldn't believe that you are indestructible. If you have to put

yourself in danger, you should do it in full knowledge of the possible consequences. At least if you go into Auror work, you're almost always able to call for backup. It's awful when you're on your own, and you know that there's absolutely nothing but blind luck standing between you and your death. I wouldn't recommend it."

Peeping through the crack in the classroom door, Draco could see Harry starting to get that awful haunted look in his eyes. He turned away. He doubted that any of those earnest young students really knew how deeply their teacher had been affected by what had happened to him in his youth.

Harry would carry it with him always. He had that quality, Draco felt, that those who had lost their childhoods often had – that of being at once a small boy and a very old man. And yet Harry was so full of hope, so full of optimism for the future. Draco could not fathom it. Harry had such faith in the human race, even though he had experienced its wickedness at first hand so often. Harry kept giving people chances, even though he had been hurt and disappointed so much over the years. Including by you, Draco thought. Harry was right – the only thing stopping the two of them trying to form a relationship was his own cowardice.

No wonder Harry had been angry with him. Draco wished that he had the power to see into the future, to be able to know what would happen between them if they did get together. He was so afraid of hurting Harry even more, of letting him down, and he still felt that he simply wasn't good enough for the other man. He still felt that if he allowed himself to get truly close to Harry, to let Harry see him in all his flawed, terrified rawness, he would inevitably disappoint.

Draco reached the library once more and made his way up to the archives, which he had been compelled to rearrange once more. He ran his hand over the glass display cabinets, glancing down at the literary treasures within. Yes, he thought: in theory, books were so much better than people. Of course there had been times when he had felt disappointed with a book. Still, if he considered it statistically, there had been far, far more disappointing people in his life than there had been disappointing books. And then if he considered the number of works of literature which he worshipped, which he always returned to and which he wanted to be in his life forever, compared to the number of people he felt that way about… well, the difference was ridiculous, really. And then people kept insisting on changing! People could lie, adapt, grow tired, whereas he knew that if he were to revisit any of his favourite works of art, they would be just as he had left them. So why did human beings long to form relationships with one another? Why did the thought of being without Harry fill him with such dread?

Draco closed his eyes and tried to summon up the image of his sometime lover. He couldn't. He knew

the various descriptive components to Harry: messy black hair, athletic frame, green eyes and glasses. However, they wouldn't forge in his mind the truthful representation of what Harry really looked like. Draco had often noticed this before. He would forget the real image of Harry, then when he actually saw the other man, it was like a minor revelation, a moment of pure recognition. Yes, that's Harry! Harry would appear to him anew every time. Then Draco would find himself examining the other man, trying to learn by heart all the features that made him who he was, trying to burn his image into his memory. But it never worked. Trying to imagine Harry when he was not there was like trying to remember one of those dreams which were so vivid, so startling, so powerful and significant, yet slip from the dreamer's mind almost immediately upon waking, leaving only a terrible sense of loss behind.

Draco sighed irritably and turned his attention back to the Daily Prophet periodicals he wanted to rearrange. It was no good thinking about those things when he had so much work to do. He allowed the wall in his mind to descend, blocking off all thoughts of Harry. It was simply too frustrating; Draco had never felt so torn about anything in his life. At least work was something he could depend on.

*

When Melanie came upstairs several hours later to inform her boss that it was closing time, it was to find him seated on the floor surrounded by piles of documents, journals and scrolls.

"It's no good!" Draco cried. "I'm going to have to rearrange the whole thing! I don't know what I was thinking earlier this year – this is clearly not the most efficient way to run a library! In fact… in fact I think the whole lot should be rearranged! Downstairs as well! We could install a new cataloguing system. Perhaps the Universal Decimal System, or… or the Chinese Library Classification! That one's pretty good. Or maybe I could invent a classification system of my very own! Ah, I bet I could out-organise them all, Melanie!"

"I'm sure you could," the girl replied dutifully. "However, you really can't rearrange everything in the library again! The students have barely got used to the system you've just installed. It would be complete chaos if you swapped it all around again, and I think that McGonagall for one would have something to say about it."

Draco groaned. "Oh, you're right. I know. Oh, and look at all the mess I've made!" He surveyed the chaos

around him with dismay.

“Don’t worry,” Melanie said soothingly, “I’ll help you sort it out.” She pulled out her wand and started sending all the papers back into their rightful boxes.

“Oh, Melanie,” Draco sighed. “What on earth would I do without you?”

She laughed. “Best not to think about that! Why the sudden urge to reinvent the library anyway, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“I need a project, Melanie,” Draco said wearily. “If I don’t find something to distract myself from my increasingly problematic personal life I shall go mad.”

Melanie looked at him sympathetically. “I’m sorry to hear that, Mr Malfoy. Still,” she said hesitantly, “if you’re looking for a project, I can think of a couple of things that could be done. I mean… perhaps it might be nice to do some things to encourage more students to use the library. We could start up a book club or something.”

Draco gave her a sceptical look.

“I know you’re not exactly fond of the students, but I think you’d be surprised by how bright some of them are. And you know, a lot of them don’t hate you – they’re just a little intimidated by how you always sweep around majestically, glowering at everyone. I think that if you showed them that you’re willing to accept them, things would be a lot better. We could corner off a special section of the library for student groups!”

Draco narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “You’ve been thinking about this for a while, haven’t you?”

Melanie blushed. “I just think a compromise could be reached. I think it might help.” She seated herself cross-legged on the floor beside him. “I know people haven’t given you an easy time, and I know it must

be difficult to try and reach out to people, but… but one thing I know is that the majority of people are basically good if you just give them a chance."

Draco smiled sadly. "Not in my experience."

"Well, maybe that's because you've been mixing with the wrong people," Melanie replied bracingly. "And the fact is that more often than not, you have to be brave and make an effort with people before they show you their goodness. Can I be honest with you?"

Draco nodded.

"Well, from what I can tell, you're right to think that the students are mistrustful of you. There are all these stories flying around about your past, they don't know what's true and what isn't, and then they see you and… you don't exactly create the most favourable first impression. I mean, you're really strict, you never interact with any of them, you cut yourself off, you're always glaring at them… do you see where I'm going with this?"

Draco nodded again. "The Severus Snape effect. You're basically telling me that I'm impaling myself upon my own wand." He sighed, and was silent for a moment, trying to gather his thoughts. Melanie was right in many ways – he had brought a lot of his suffering upon himself. It was truly amazing, he thought, that his little assistant who had always appeared so shy and timid, could tell him these home truths so boldly. He had never thought her capable of it, and he started to wonder what else he had missed because he had been so focussed on the idea that everyone hated him.

Eventually, he spoke again. "I know that half of the reason that people take a stand against me is because I expect them to. But… what can I do about it? The damage has already been done. Even if I wanted to make things different, don't you think it's already too late?"

"Of course not!" Melanie replied hotly. "See, part of the problem is that you're so determined to just give in to it. I'm sure that you could turn things around if you wanted to. It wouldn't happen overnight, but in time people would come to see you as I do. Just… just believe that it's worth it, believe that you don't have to suffer forever now that you've renounced your old life. And you know that I'll help you

out."

"You will?"

She laughed. "Of course! You're my friend. And I think that together we can make this library into a place where students and librarians can interact amicably. I think that you could do great things."

For the first time in weeks, Draco broke into a genuine smile. He had a friend. He had a system of support that was outside his family, and free from the frightening emotions associated with Harry. He had someone who would support him, whom he could fall back on, who was friends with him simply because she enjoyed his company and thought he was a decent person, not because there was something material she could gain from him. It felt really good. Perhaps, Draco thought, he wasn't a terrible person after all. And perhaps he could turn things around.

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Draco and Melanie left the library some time later, having agreed to get together that weekend in order to discuss how they were going to go about changing the library. Draco made his way back to his rooms, feeling, for the first time in ages, like there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Melanie could be trusted, he was sure of it. She was a decent person like Harry. She and Harry had both chosen Draco as someone they wanted to spend time with, albeit in different ways, so maybe he had become a good person after all. It was certainly an attractive possibility.

Draco turned into the corridor which led to his room, and was surprised to see that someone was sitting on the floor outside his door. It was Harry – he could tell even through the gloom.

Harry got up quickly when he saw Draco, rubbing his stiff limbs back to life. "Hello. I was beginning to think you wouldn't be coming back."

"Sorry," Draco replied softly. "I was in the library with Melanie. We were talking about some changes that

needed to be made, and I lost track of how late it was getting. I hope you haven't been waiting long."

Harry shrugged. "Doesn't matter. Draco… can we talk?"

"Of course," Draco replied. "Would… would you like to come in?" He gestured towards his door. He had never had a visitor there before, and he suddenly felt nervous about Harry seeing where he lived. His rooms were certainly not as impressive as Harry's, and he hoped the other man wouldn't be put off. But Harry wasn't like that and he knew it; Draco was just being silly. He unlocked the door and they passed inside, the lamps lighting automatically as they entered.

Draco only had one chair, and he quickly conjured another so that neither of them would have to sit on his bed. He thought that might be slightly awkward, given the circumstances.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" Draco asked stupidly. He hated that he couldn't speak freely with Harry any more, but he knew that whatever he said was bound to hurt one of them.

Harry shook his head. "No, I'm all right. Draco, I want to apologise for the other day. I shouldn't have got angry with you."

Draco looked at him in surprise. "What are you apologising for? You had every right to get mad – I hurt you. Everything you said was true. I do sabotage myself, and I do back off from any situation which involves any kind of emotional vulnerability because I'm too afraid of what might go wrong. I gave it some thought, and you were completely right, I can see that now. In fact… I've been wanting to apologise to you."

Harry shook his head. "I'm not saying I wasn't right – I know that I was – but I should never have got angry with you for it. I of all people should know what you've been through. You can't help feeling the way that you do, I get that. I was just… I was just hurt and frustrated the other day. It all seems so unfair."

Draco didn't say anything. It was such bittersweet pleasure to be with Harry, and he just wanted to look at him, drink him in, be conscious of the fact that there were only a few inches of air standing between

the two of them. How easy it would be to reach out and touch Harry. How wonderful it would be to draw Harry into his arms, kiss that beautiful mouth, lead Harry over to his bed where they could slowly undress each other, and…

“Draco?”

Draco jumped. “Sorry, I was… I was just thinking. It’s distracting being with you.”

Harry smiled. “Tell me about it. God, this sucks.”

Draco laughed humourlessly. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault. It’s nobody’s fault, really. It’s just a lousy set of circumstances.”

“I wish this had happened before,” Draco said quietly. “I wish that I’d come to my senses at school, while there was still time. I wish I’d discovered you before I was broken.”

Harry smiled at him sadly. “I’ve been thinking that too. I wish you’d come to me in sixth year. I wish I could have helped you out.”

Draco shook his head. “I know, but there’s no use thinking about that now. What’s done is done. If things hadn’t happened as they did, we wouldn’t be the people we are today, and perhaps we would never have—”

“—I know. I do know. But there’s no harm in dreaming, is there?”

“I suppose not.”

“How have you been?” Harry asked. He nudged Draco with his knee, and for a moment it was just like old times, before everything had fallen apart.

“Not too bad,” Draco replied. “I’ve made friends with Melanie. She’s been helping me think of how I might improve my reputation with the students.” Draco laughed nervously.

Harry smiled. “That’s great. I’m really glad the two of you are getting along – she’s a lovely girl.”

“Surprisingly perceptive as well,” Draco added.

“Uh-oh.”

“Yeah, she could rival even you for personal insight.”

Harry laughed. “Oh, I don’t know; I don’t think I’m terribly insightful. I only figure you out sometimes because I spend so much of my time thinking about you. And even then, it often takes a while. You’re not the easiest man to fathom, you know.”

“Neither are you,” Draco replied, “but I’m starting to get the hang of it.”

They sat together in silence for a while, just looking at each other. Draco found that he wasn’t made at all uncomfortable by their intimacy, just very sad. Finally, he broke into a small smile. “What are you doing?”

Harry smiled too. “Nothing. Just learning you by heart. I wish that I could remember you like this.”

“I wish I could remember what you really looked like when you’re not with me,” Draco said softly.

“You get that too?”

“Yes.”

A small flicker of pain crossed Harry’s face.

“How are Ron and Hermione?” Draco asked, wanting to break the sudden tension.

Harry blinked a couple of times. “Oh… they’re fine. I mean, I think they might be okay. They’re communicating now, at least.”

“Good. I’m happy for them.”

Harry shot Draco a quick anxious look. “You know,” he said cautiously, “I told Hermione about us.”

Draco’s stomach did a small back-flip. “You- you did?”

“Yes. I mean, not details or anything, but I said that we were… well, that we had been… oh, you know.”

“What did she do?” Draco asked nervously.

Harry grimaced. “Well, I was right – she had half guessed already. I don’t know. I guess she wasn’t too bad about it. She gave me a cautionary speech, promised not to say anything to Ron… the usual. I think if the two of you met, you might get along.”

Draco gave Harry a sceptical look. “I spent most of our school years calling her a Mudblood and making fun of her hair. I don’t think she’ll be terribly accepting, somehow.”

Harry laughed. “Darling, you made fun of everyone’s hair at school. Anyway, you weren’t exactly pleasant to me, and you see that I’ve got over it. I think you’d be surprised at how forgiving people can be if you’ll let them.”

“Maybe,” Draco said softly. “And in my defence, you all did have terrible hair.”

“Touché.”

They lapsed into silence again. Draco glanced over at the other man, and saw that Harry looked terribly tired. He hated that he had caused Harry so much pain, all because he was too scared to commit to the relationship he so desperately wanted. He trusted Harry, and knew that he would never do anything cruel or let Draco down, and yet… and yet surely it couldn’t last. Surely something awful would happen to drive them apart. Draco was so afraid to be happy. He was so afraid to take a risk and trust that things would work out. And in this case it was especially perilous, because it wasn’t just himself at stake. He hated the thought of Harry putting his trust in him, only to be disappointed.

Harry seemed to be in a dream. His eyes had glazed over, and he was staring unseeingly into middle distance, his face clouded and grave.

Draco reached out and lightly touched his knee. “Harry? Are you all right?”

Harry looked at him slowly. “I don’t know. I mean, this is so nice, just being with you like this, but it’s so—”

“—Painful. I know.”

“I don’t want to ask of you what you can’t give,” Harry said quietly. “I know what you’ve been through, and I want to give you what you need. I know that I should back off, give you time and space. I know that I should accept that maybe we can only ever be friends, but… but I can’t. Draco, every time I see you it breaks my heart. I am so in love with you. I never meant it to happen, but it has. I thought when I came back to Hogwarts that we might be able to put our differences behind us and start to get along, but I never foresaw this. When I see you, I want to die. This is so different from anything I’ve had before, this bond, this invisible… thing… that connects me to you. It scares me, because I can’t control it. And I want to stay with you, but I know that if I do it’ll end up driving me crazy, because I love you so much and we can’t be together.”

Draco’s heart was beating a staccato in his ribcage. He really didn’t like where Harry was going with this. “What are you saying?”

Harry looked up at him, his eyes glittering. “I didn’t just come here to apologise,” he said, unable to hide the tremor in his voice. “Draco… I want to tell you that I’ve decided to resign. I’m going to leave after the summer term.”

Draco felt like he’d been slapped. “What?”

Harry pressed his lips together. “I’m leaving. I can’t do this any more, it’s too painful. Seeing you every day, being so close to you, but not able to be with you… it’s killing me. I can’t do it any more.”

Draco’s brain was whirring. “But… you love your job, Harry! You can’t just give it up!”

Harry grimaced. “I might be able to get another position at a different school.”

Draco found that he was suddenly angry. How could Harry do this? How could he just give up on his job, on his students, on everything he had worked for? More to the point, how could he do this to Draco? “You’re being stupid,” he said coldly. “You can’t just run away! You’re Harry Fucking Potter! You don’t run away!”

“I do this time,” Harry said firmly. “I’m sorry, Draco, but I can’t always be a hero. I know that it’s my duty to stay and be strong, but… but can’t I be selfish sometimes? Can’t I take a break from being Harry Potter? Can’t I just be Harry, a guy who can’t be with the person he loves, and needs to get away before it drives him insane? Can’t I be weak for once?”

“No, you can’t!” Draco shouted, rising to his feet. “Harry, how could you do this to me? How could you put something like this on my shoulders?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you’re basically saying that unless I agree to a proper relationship right now, you’re going to disappear from my life forever!”

“What? No! I’m not trying to blackmail you, Draco! This is about me, and the fact that it’s too painful for me to be around you any longer.”

“Well, whether you intend it or not, you’re still giving me that ultimatum!” Draco retaliated. “Harry, this isn’t fair!”

“I don’t care!” Harry shouted. “I’m sorry, I know that I should just stick it out, but I know that I’m never going to get over you, and the only way I can see of making things easier for both of us is if I just take myself out of the equation.”

“So you are leaving,” Draco said bitterly. “See, I knew this would happen. I knew that you’d leave sooner or later. Now maybe you can understand why I’m so reluctant to start up a relationship.”

A pink tinge had come to Harry’s cheeks. “Now you’re the one who’s being unfair. Draco, I can’t just stay here for you, put all of my own needs aside, forget the fact that you’ve broken my fucking heart, just so that you don’t feel like I’m rejecting you! Of course I’m not rejecting you! I would do anything to be with you – anything! And I know that being apart will be like losing an arm, and I hate the thought of not

being able to talk to you whenever, but this really isn't healthy. You must be able to see that! We can't just pretend that we're not supposed to be together, hide how we feel, because we're too afraid to take that next step. And yeah, of course I would stay if you changed your mind – that goes without saying! And I'm sorry if I'm putting you in a difficult position, I really am, but this is a bloody horrible situation, and I'm doing the only thing I can think of. And you know what? Maybe you need to be given this ultimatum!"

Draco made a noise of outrage.

"I'm sorry, but it's true! I think that me just hanging around, being there for you to come to whenever you need me, is a safety net. You don't have to do anything, you can continue to deliberate, to back off and take the safe option. Well, now you have to choose. Are you going to trust that I would never hurt you, that I would defend you to the world and stand by you proudly? Are you going to give our relationship a chance, and allow yourself to be really loved? Because I would, Draco. I would love you so much. And no relationship is perfect all the time, but I know that it wouldn't matter. I know that I would want to be with you, however bad things got. Are you going to take that risk? Or are you going to let it pass you by, and let your fears keep you cut off from everyone? Are you going to hide forever behind your books, convinced that you don't deserve any happiness in the real world? And I know, I really do, how frightening this is for you. I'm sorry to cause you more pain than I already have, I truly am. But I promise that you would never be left to face things on your own. You have more than earned your happiness, Draco, if you'd just let yourself have it. You are amazing and beautiful and lovely and… and the single most frustrating person I think I have ever met!" Harry turned away, trying to catch his breath.

Draco was too astounded to be angry now. He couldn't believe that he had really reached the point of losing Harry forever. He supposed that, somewhat selfishly, he had believed that Harry would always be there for him. It suddenly occurred to Draco how it would feel if their positions were reversed, and Harry was the one denying them the option of being together. It would be agony, a bitter rejection every single day. God, Harry must really love me. Draco realised that he had never quite believed it before, but what else would make Harry do something so rash, so out of character? Harry was desperate. Draco had earned the love of this wonderful, awe-inspiring, wrath-inducing, passionate, desperate, loving, stupid man. Draco was loved.

Harry was watching him without a word.

"I don't want you to leave," Draco said in a small voice.

“Then give me a reason to stay.” Harry watched him, waited for him to respond, begging for a reaction.

Draco couldn’t. His throat had somehow closed up. He felt that Harry’s mesmerising eyes must have something of the Basilisk in them, because he felt that he had been frozen to the spot.

Harry’s face crumpled in disappointment. “All right. Don’t worry about it – I understand. I’ll still be here next term to see the kids through their exams, but then that’s it. Still… I’ll have to let McGonagall know tomorrow. It’s only fair to give her the chance to find a new Defence teacher.” He laughed bitterly. “Perhaps Riddle’s one year curse is still in place after all.”

Harry turned to leave, but as he reached the door, he spoke again. “I’ll keep Ron and Hermione posted on where I am, so if you ever change your mind or… or if you ever really need to get in touch, they’ll be able to tell you how to reach me. At the risk of sounding horribly melodramatic, I think I’ll always be waiting for you.”

And then he was gone.

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Draco had spent a very bad night. He had paced up and down his small room, going over what Harry had said, re-reading his mother’s letter, changing his mind about what he would do a thousand times. At length he had slept fitfully, fully clothed, sitting in his chair. His jumbled thoughts about Harry had merged with equally turbulent dreams, until Draco had finally dragged himself into the shower at six in the morning, exhausted and anxious. There was an uncontrollable panic rising in his chest, a feeling that he was caught up in a series of disastrous events over which he had no control, even though he knew he had the power to determine exactly how the next few weeks would play out.

At half-past seven, when the castle was still wrapped in silence, Draco made his way to the Trophy Room. He had to talk this over with someone who was rational and methodical, someone who would separate

fact from nonsense, and he could think of no one better for the job than Snape.

He wished he could talk to his mother; he desperately wanted her advice. He wished that he could be with her now. Stupid Harry. Why the hell did he have to do this for? Why couldn't he at least try to be friends with Draco, instead of offering him this ultimatum? He could see Harry's reasoning – he wanted to give Draco a shock, force him to make an actual decision instead of thinking himself into a deadlock – but that didn't mean he had to like it. Harry had said that he understood why Draco was so afraid, so why couldn't he just give him a bit of time? If anything, doing something like this was more likely to make Draco decide against him. His books never gave him ultimatums.

In truth, it was easier to be angry with Harry than face up to how frightened he was of losing him.

Snape was asleep. He was slumped in his chair, snoring gently, the book he had been reading resting on his knees. Draco cleared his throat. Snape shifted slightly, but remained asleep. Draco cleared his throat again, louder this time. Still nothing.

"Professor Snape?" He called. "Professor? Sir? Professor Snape? Severus? PROFESSOR SNAPE!"

Snape started and awoke, looking wildly around him for the cause of his disturbance. When he caught sight of Draco, he scowled. "Oh… you. What are you doing here? What time is it?"

"Nearly eight," Draco replied sheepishly.

Snape glared at him. "On a Saturday? That's my lie-in day! This had better be good, Malfoy."

"It is," Draco said. "Sir, I really need your advice. It's… it's about Harry."

Snape groaned. "Why am I not surprised? All right then, out with it. Let's get this over with."

Draco related, as concisely as he could, the tale of Harry's visit to him the previous night. "It's ridiculous!" he said after he'd finished. "He thinks that if he puts pressure on me, then I'll just give in to everything he wants! Well, he's got another thing coming, hasn't he."

"So you're going to let him leave?" Snape asked.

"Maybe I will," Draco replied, trying to ignore the tremble in his voice. "I don't need him; I was doing perfectly well before he came along."

"Were you now," Snape said sarcastically.

"Yes! Yes, I was! You know, I think that having a relationship just isn't for me. I'm not cut out for it. And a relationship with someone like Harry Potter is sheer madness! No, why the hell should I give in to him just because he's decided to be all dramatic? If he wants to leave, let him. See if I care," Draco finished, with a conviction he certainly did not feel.

Snape didn't say anything.

"Well?" Draco cried. "Come on, this is the part where you agree with me! This is the part where you tell me that you always knew I was stupid to get involved with Potter, and that my energies would be much better spent in the library!"

"No," Snape replied at length. "I think this is the part where I tell you that you are being a silly little boy who is too afraid of his own feelings, and is about to give up on what could be a wonderful thing because he's stubborn. Draco, do you really want to be lonely all your life? I admit that I have never been fond of Potter for personal reasons, but for some reason he wants to take you on, and I say good luck to him! He obviously cares very deeply for you and is willing to put up with a great deal in order to be with you, and you are obviously very much in love with him, so do yourself a favour and stop being an infernal ass! Do you enjoy this? Do you want to be alone for the rest of your life?"

"I'm not alone!" Draco protested feebly. "I could never be alone when I've got my books."

Snape sighed. “Books are wonderful. They offer consolation and inspiration. They are one of the few things which determine that there is still some hope for the miserable human race. I pity the man who does not read, for he has shut himself off from untold joys. However, and I cannot stress this enough, you cannot live your life for books alone. You need human contact; you need affection; you need, dare I say it, sexual fulfilment. You need a fellow human being to talk to and confide in, to push you to change, to challenge you. Books, however wonderful, cannot give that to you.”

“I have you,” Draco said shakily. “I can talk to you – you’re my friend.”

“Draco,” the Potions master said gently. “I am not Severus Snape. He died almost ten years ago. I might have his memories and his characteristics, but I am not him. I am enchanted paint and canvas. You can confide in me and trust me because I am safe. I will never leave this castle, I will never grow old; I will stay exactly as I am for all eternity. I could therefore never hurt you.”

“That’s not it!” Draco protested.

“Oh, I think it is. Now, when I was a few years younger than you, I made the very grave mistake of giving up the person I loved in order to follow a certain philosophy I believed in at the time. I regretted it every day for the rest of my life. Now, I greatly enjoy your company and I appreciate these visits you pay to me, but let me tell you that nothing would disappoint me more than to have you come and see me week after week, year after year, to watch you growing ever more bitter and lonely, to see you becoming what I was. I don’t think that I could forgive you. Now, stop being an imbecilic wretch, stop being afraid of what might happen, and go and take your happiness.”

Draco had stood staring at Snape, astonished beyond the power of speech. God, Snape was right, wasn’t he? They were all right, all these people who told him that he could really change things, that he could be happy. And never mind about Snape, he would never forgive himself if he let Harry get away, and he knew it. It was time he stopped living vicariously through books and started living in the real world again. After all, it was no use to have given up on the old life if he never really committed to the new one. It was time to be brave. It was time to have faith in all the wonderful people – his mother, Snape, Melanie, Harry – who told him that they cared for him. It was time to take what was his.

“Well what are you waiting for?” Snape roared. “Get going!”

Draco ran. He had no idea where Harry might be, but he knew that he had to find him before he spoke to McGonagall and announced his resignation. He pelted along the corridor leading to the main staircase, thinking that if he was lucky he might be able to find Harry in his rooms. It wasn’t that late. He passed several students on their way to breakfast, hardly noticing the weird looks they were giving him. He just hoped that Harry hadn’t decided to write to McGonagall last night…

Draco reached the main staircase and was about to pass it, when something he saw out of the corner of his eye in the hall below made him screech to a halt. He turned to see Harry walking into the Great Hall, oblivious to the fact that Draco was standing above him, too far away to call. Damn. The hall was full of breakfasting students, and really not the place Draco would have chosen in which to tell Harry that he wanted to be with him. Still, McGonagall was probably there – she always was an early riser, damn her – and Harry might tell her over breakfast. Besides, perhaps it was best this way. Perhaps it was time that Draco took a stand in front of everyone, and showed that he was not afraid to be with Harry. Taking a deep breath, he ran after the other man.

“Harry!” he called. “Harry, wait up!”

Harry turned round. He looked surprised to see Draco, and more than a little wary.

“Harry,” Draco gasped, finally coming to a halt in front of the other man, breathless and shaky. “Harry, you can’t… that thing we talked about last night… you can’t do it.”

“Harry looked away, then back to Draco, his eyes doubtful. “Why not?”

Now that he was standing there in front of Harry, aware that several students had turned in their seats to look at them, Draco’s courage began to falter. “Well,” he began, “I mean, you can’t let your students down. They love you, and no other Defence teacher could live up to you.”

Harry looked disappointed. “I’m sure they’d get over it.” He turned to continue towards the staff table.

“Wait! There’s another reason!” Draco said desperately. “That is… well, you’d look a bit stupid. Indecisive. I mean, you always said your ambition was to be an Auror, then you gave it up after a few years to fulfil your new greatest ambition of being a teacher. And now you want to give that up. People will start to mistrust your judgement.”

“I don’t care what people think,” Harry said heavily, turning to walk away again.

Oh, this was stupid. What did it matter that there were so many people around or that Draco was so damn nervous, as long as Harry knew how he felt? Even if Harry then rejected him, at least he would know that he had been brave. At least he would know that he had lived.

“Harry, wait! There’s one more reason!”

Harry turned once more, somewhat impatiently. “What?”

“Well… this,” Draco replied. He walked over to Harry, shutting everything but the two of them from his mind. He focussed on Harry, told himself that he could trust him, that he would never let Draco fall. He stopped when they were almost touching. Harry looked astonished, like a deer caught in headlights – his obvious trepidation and uncertainty gave Draco the extra courage he needed. He reached up to gently touch Harry’s face and then, without letting himself think about it, he leaned in and kissed him.

He felt Harry grow momentarily tense with surprise, and then came the exquisite moment when he started to kiss Draco back. And that was all there was. Draco was real, he was wanted, he was… alive. Harry held him tightly, pulled him closer, kissed him as if it was the end of the world.

Eventually they pulled apart, and it was only then that Draco became aware of the commotion going on around them. He opened his eyes to see every student in the hall staring at them agog. Several of his greatest dissenters were gesturing to each other furiously, pictures of outrage. The first years were blushing, many looking as if they didn’t know such a thing as two men kissing was even possible. Harry’s fangirls looked as if they didn’t know whether to be heartbroken or delighted. Draco turned to the staff table and caught sight of Professor McGonagall. She smiled at them and raised her goblet in a silent

toast.

Harry's arm tightened around his waist, and Draco turned back to him. He looked rapturous. "Do you really mean it?"

Draco laughed weakly. "After this? I think I'd have to!"

Harry broke into a grin. "Come on, let's get the hell out of here."

They grabbed hold of each other's hands and made their way out of the hall and away from the furore they had caused. Draco knew that there was no turning back now – the wheels had been set in motion and there was nothing he could do but wait for events to unfold. They would have to face a lot of difficulties, and he knew that it wouldn't be easy. But that could wait. Right now, his only concern was that he and Harry were together. He could face anything, he knew it, as long as Harry was at his side. In that euphoric moment, Draco felt that nothing would ever frighten him again.

*

Dearest Mother,

Thank you so much for your last letter. It really meant so much, and I think I understand now. Harry and I are going to try and make a go of things. I can't write much, because I'm with him now, but I wanted to let you know. It's so scary, but I know that I made the right choice. Even if I fail, I know that this was the right thing to do. He really loves me, and I trust him. I hope that you're all right and that Father is doing well. Please write back soon.

All my love, Draco.

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Chapter 11: Dukedom Large Enough

Disclaimer – I don't own the boys, they belong to Ms Rowling. The story title is taken from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', and refers to Prospero's line: 'My library was dukedom large enough'. The chapter title is taken from the poem 'The Living Torch', by Charles Baudelaire. Done for fun, not profit!

My Dearest Draco,

I don't know how to keep up with you these days! What on earth is going on? Are you really and truly giving Harry another chance, darling? Oh, I'm so happy if you are. I'm just worried that you'll lose courage at the first sign of difficulty. I'm worried that your tendency to think so badly of yourself will result in you giving him up again because you think it's for his own good. Oh, I hope that you can see now that you've earned the right to be happy. I hope that, having gained both Harry, and a friend in your assistant, you can see that you need no longer be a pariah. I have been telling you this for years now, but of course I'm your mother, so you're not going to listen to me, are you? I hope that you will trust Harry, and that you will let yourself be loved.

Oh, I really hope that this works out for you, my dearest. I can't stand being stuck out here, not knowing what's going on! You know how I hate being left out of things. I really hope that you will find the strength to not let other people's reactions taint this new relationship, and I hope that you will be able to find confidence in your choice. Oh, Harry had better treat you well after all this! I'm sure that he will, but I have a right to worry. I wish I could support you more, because I know that you must be very anxious at the moment in spite of your happiness. I'm so proud of you for being so brave! I knew that you could do it, and I know that you've been through so much, and you are strong enough to cope with anything you might face now. I wish that I could see you.

You know what? I'm coming to visit. I've been so worried about you lately, and I need to make sure that

you're going to be all right. Besides, I'm rather anxious to meet Harry again! I hope that he'll like me. I'm sure that Topsy could cope with your father for a couple of days. I expect Lucius will sulk at my going away, especially as the village fair is coming up (he's looking forward to showing off his vegetables). Still, I think that if I pick up a couple of those raspberry Danishes he likes so much from Paris on my way home, he might just forgive me.

Well, that's it – I've made up my mind to come and see you. I'll set out as soon as I can, so I might just beat this letter to you. Then I can surprise you! Oh dear… I hope I'm not becoming one of those interfering mothers…

Looking forward to seeing you,

Your Affectionate Mother.

*

Harry and Draco ran, hand in hand, through the Entrance Hall and up the staircase. They did not speak or even look at each other; Draco felt as though he was caught up in some surreal dream which had no relation to his real life at all. He couldn't believe that he had just done what he had. He couldn't believe that he was here with Harry now.

When Harry had brought them to the corridor which led to his rooms, he finally stopped. They stood there for a moment, looking at each other. Harry's face was flushed, slightly incredulous, as he pushed Draco up against the wall and claimed his mouth once more in a deep kiss.

Draco made a little noise of rapture. He was trembling in Harry's arms. This, then, was real happiness. This was not the transcendental joy to be found in art; this was real and entirely of Draco's own creation, his to cultivate or destroy. He was terrified. He bit Harry's lips, dug his fingers into Harry's arms, clung to the other man in his fear of losing this moment, this happiness. He buried his face in Harry's neck, consumed by ecstatic agony.

“Shh,” Harry whispered, holding him closely. “It’s all right. You’ve got me now; I’m not going anywhere.”

“I can’t believe I just did that,” Draco said, still half panicked.

Harry laughed softly. “Neither can I! Life with you is never going to be boring, is it?”

Draco pressed his lips to Harry’s cheek, kissing him again and again. “Please be careful, Harry,” he whispered. “Please don’t break my heart; don’t leave me. I’m so scared.”

“I know,” Harry replied, rubbing Draco’s back soothingly. “I know you are, but you don’t have to be afraid of me. You know that I love you. And anyway, I think things like this are supposed to be scary. I’m a bit frightened too, to be honest.”

“You are?” Draco said, pulling back in surprise. It seemed impossible that Harry, who had faced so much and had pursued their relationship so ardently, could be afraid.

“You’re not the only one who’s suffered loss, Draco,” Harry said quietly. His face was completely open, and Draco could see that there really was an element of apprehension in those beautiful green eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Draco whispered, kissing him gently. “I’m sorry I took so long in getting here. I’ve made my decision now, though. I’m absolutely terrified, but I don’t regret a thing. I need you, Harry. You’ve made me realise that there’s more to moving on than simply accepting that I’d done wrong. You made me realise that life is for the living, and that other people aren’t always cruel. And… and I think that as long as I can have you, life won’t be half so scary. At least, it’ll be rollercoaster scary, instead of ‘there might be a serial killer in the house’ scary. I’m not going to leave you.”

Harry kissed him possessively. “No,” he whispered against Draco’s lips. “No, we’ll see it through together now.”

“I don’t have to go to the library today, do I?” Draco said weakly. “I can stay with you? I’m sure Melanie wouldn’t mind taking over for the day if I sent her an owl.”

“I’m sure she wouldn’t,” Harry replied, taking Draco’s hand and leading him towards his rooms. “I’m certainly not letting you out of my sight just yet, so I don’t see that she’s got much choice in the matter!”

Harry was squeezing his hand so tightly, as if he was afraid Draco might escape. He was fragile, Draco realised. Almost as fragile as Draco himself. Harry needed to be taken care of and loved. A fierce protectiveness rose up in Draco’s chest, making his own fears seem irrelevant. He loved Harry, more than he thought he was capable of loving someone, and he wasn’t going to let him get hurt any more. He was going to fight for their relationship, and anything Harry might suffer as a result of it, Draco would compensate for. He wasn’t going to be alone any more.

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They had talked for hours, lying side by side on Harry’s bed. When they had grown hungry, Harry had sent down a request to the kitchens for food, neither of them wanting to leave this private island they had created for themselves just yet. Draco had wished that it could go on forever, this little universe which contained only him and Harry. Still, their conversations had to deal at least partly with the outside world. Draco’s very public declaration meant that news of their love affair would spread like wildfire, and they would very soon have to deal with the fallout. Draco had started to wonder whether he should have been more discreet, at least buying them a little time to establish themselves before they had to justify their relationship to the world, but Harry had been of the opinion that the sooner they got it over with the sooner they could just get on with their lives. He thought that it would be best to be completely open and honest about their relationship; after all, they had nothing to be ashamed of. Harry had made the whole thing seem so simple, so unproblematic, and Draco had felt some of his apprehension begin to lift.

Eventually, they had decided that they had talked enough for the time being. After all, they were together again and lying on Harry’s bed – it would have been silly not to have taken advantage of the situation. Draco had been surprised by the urgency that had possessed them both as soon as they started to touch. There had been nothing gentle about that initial sexual reunion. They had made love

with a passion which bordered on violence, leaving bruises and scratches on one another's skin, pulling each other's hair. It had been overwhelming, visceral, painful… just what Draco had needed.

Later that night, they made love again, taking things slowly this time, savouring every touch, every sigh, wanting to make it last as long as possible.

"Draco," Harry whispered against his cheek. "I have never wanted anyone as much as this. Do you feel it? Do you feel how hard I am inside you? No one else has ever done this to me."

"I know," Draco replied, his voice jagged with desire. "I feel it too. It's almost too much, but I… oh God… I don't want it to stop."

Harry kissed him deeply. "It won't; not if we don't want it to. We're meant to be together. You see? Our bodies know that they belong together, and we just have to trust them."

And finally, Draco did.

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When he awoke, it was still dark. Draco took a moment or two to remember where he was. Harry was spooned up behind him, his arm loosely flung over Draco. He realised that he had been lying on his own right arm, and it had gone completely dead. He shifted, pulled the arm out from beneath him, and made to turn over in order to find a more comfortable position.

Harry must have been aware of his movements, because his arm suddenly tightened its grip around Draco's waist, pulling him close. "Please don't go," Harry whispered, still half asleep. "Don't leave me, Draco."

Harry had thought that he was getting up to leave him again. Draco felt a little like crying. “I’m not going anywhere,” he whispered back, pulling Harry close to him. “I was just turning over, that’s all.”

Harry snuggled up against him, throwing his left leg over Draco as if to prevent him from moving again, and pressing their bodies together. Draco could feel Harry’s heart beating rapidly within his chest, and experienced a jolt of shame. He realised that he had really frightened the other man.

He softly kissed Harry’s forehead. “I’m so sorry, darling,” he whispered. “I promise that I’ll never do that to you again.”

Harry made a sleepy noise of contentment, and moments later they were both asleep once more.

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Draco, who had very reluctantly dragged himself into work the next day, was surprised to see Melanie sitting behind the desk when he walked in.

“Good morning, Mr Malfoy,” she said, wearing an ‘I know you got laid last night’ expression.

“What are you doing here?” Draco asked. “Sunday’s your day off!”

She smiled. “Well, we had arranged to discuss what we were going to do with the library this weekend, so I thought it might be easiest if I came in. Also… well, I thought you might appreciate being at liberty to get away for a couple of hours today.”

Draco grinned. “I’ve said it before, Melanie, and I’ll say it again: you are an excellent assistant.”

She laughed. “I take it that you and Harry have managed to sort things out, then.”

Draco nodded, perching himself on the desk. “Yes. That is, I hope so. I mean, it’s scary, and I’m still not entirely sure what I’m doing, but… but I love him and I know that if I didn’t at least give it a go, I’d never forgive myself. At least there isn’t anything about it in the papers today, but I know that it won’t be long.”

“Yes,” Melanie agreed. “Especially when the whole school is buzzing with the news that you snogged his face off in the hall yesterday.”

“Oh, God,” Draco groaned, smacking his palm to his forehead. “I can’t believe I actually did that.”

“I think it’s sweet,” Melanie said.

“You would,” Draco replied, but he couldn’t suppress a smile. It was so kind of Melanie to come in on her day off like this. He had been very nervous about facing the students again on his own after Saturday’s uncharacteristic display of public affection, and he was grateful for her support. Standing strong beside Harry, proclaiming that he had earned the right to be part of Harry’s world, would be so much easier now that he had a little support group of his own.

The library was unusually busy that morning. Students, teachers, even ghosts, all suddenly had the urge to come inside. Not that any of them seemed especially interested in the books – their main purpose seemed to be to walk slowly past Draco’s desk, looking at him askance before breaking out into furious whispers. Draco was still feeling too fragile to do anything but bend over his paperwork, blushing furiously. It was down to Melanie to chivvy the loiterers outside and glare furiously at those who were making too much noise.

“Really!” she huffed, having just threatened a group of fourth years who were making nasty comments with a two week ban. “Some people have no respect. If they can’t keep their idiotic views to themselves, they could at least not voice them in front of the books!”

Draco looked at her proudly. Melanie was turning into quite the little protégé.

About an hour after opening time, Harry sidled into the library, causing the students to stare and giggle. A faint blush tinged Harry's cheeks by the time he reached the desk, and once more Draco felt that strange surge of protectiveness. He did not want Harry to be embarrassed because of their relationship.

Harry, however, greeted him with a smile. "Can I come and hang out in here today?" he whispered. "I miss you."

Draco nodded, leading the way into the office and away from prying eyes.

As soon as the door was closed, Harry pinned him up against the wall and kissed him. It seemed to be becoming something of a habit with them.

"Harry," Draco sighed, turning his head slightly. "We can't. Melanie could walk in any moment. Besides, there's what looks like the entire student body out there, and they'll know exactly what we're up to."

"I don't care," Harry replied. "I can't help myself. Every time I look at you, I just want to kiss you and… and other things."

Well, when Harry put it that way, Draco supposed that a bit of snogging couldn't hurt.

"How has your morning been?" Harry asked a few minutes later when the finally came up for air.

"Not too bad, I guess. The library has been uncharacteristically busy, but Melanie has been very helpful in keeping things under control. There have been a few comments, but nothing I'm not used to."

Harry nodded. "I think most of them are curious more than anything. I've decided that I'm going to address the issue with my classes first thing. I'll tell them that we're together now and that I'm very happy, and that I hope they'll manage to get over it as quickly as possible. You know, show that we have

nothing to hide. That is, if that's okay with you?" He glanced cautiously at Draco.

"You're asking my opinion on how to deal with this situation?" Draco replied incredulously. "Seriously?"

Harry laughed. "I know, I just want to make sure I don't do something you're not comfortable with. I don't want you to feel like I'm rushing you or putting pressure on—"

"Harry," Draco interrupted. "I'm not going to freak out again. If, God forbid, something drives us apart, it's not going to be me. Don't get me wrong, I'm still scared that I'm going to do something to mess everything up, or that you'll lose interest, but I meant it when I told you that I was ready to commit to you."

Harry pulled him into a gentle hug. "This is just the beginning, you know," he whispered. "There's still a lot that we've got to cope with and it's not going to be easy. Draco, I… I feel bad about this. I feel like I pressurised you into being with me before you were ready, and—"

"Will you stop it?" Draco interrupted. "I'm supposed to be the insecure one. And yeah, maybe you did put the pressure on a bit, but… that's not necessarily a bad thing. I've actually made my choice now, and all I can do is sit back and deal with the consequences. At least I don't have that horrible indecision any more. And trust me, nobody has thought more than me about what will happen once everyone knows about our relationship. As long as you're willing to deal with it, then so am I. Which reminds me, did you tell your friends yet?"

"I'm doing it tonight," Harry replied. "I'm going to floo over to Ron and Hermione's. I think everyone would prefer to hear it from me rather than reading about it in the papers. I can't say I'm looking forward to it especially, but the sooner they all learn to deal with it, the better."

Draco gave him a small squeeze. "Sure you don't want me to come with you?"

"Not this time, I think. Thank you for offering, though; I realise that it must be quite a daunting prospect."

Draco laughed. “What, facing a room full of resentful Gryffindors, whom I spent the best part of my school career doing the utmost to offend, and who are now doubtless under the impression that I have somehow poisoned the mind of their brightest star? How could that possibly be daunting?” He paused. “Harry… what if they can’t accept me?”

“They will,” Harry said firmly.

“But what if they can’t? What if they make you choose between them and me?”

Harry pulled back to look into his eyes. “It’s not going to come to that. They’ll be a little sceptical at first, but once they’ve met you they’ll come around. They wouldn’t make me choose like that, and if they did then they’re obviously not very good friends.” He kissed Draco again. “Don’t worry, love. I told you it would all work out in time, and it will. I know what I’m getting myself into.”

Draco didn’t say anything. He held Harry close to him, breathing him in, loving how Harry’s body fit so well against his own. It couldn’t last long, this peace, and Draco wanted to make the most of it.

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The very next morning, the storm struck.

Harry had got back to the castle quite late the previous night, feeling rather fragile after his conversation with Ron and Hermione. The couple had eventually agreed to come to Hogsmeade on Wednesday evening in order to meet Draco, and Draco had dutifully pretended to be happy about this. Harry didn’t give much away, but he had given the impression that events had not run smoothly in the Weasley household that night. He had curled up in Draco’s lap, and Draco had stroked his soft hair, which was so like the wings of a raven. It was worth it. Just to feel a love like that in a lifetime would be worth even the pain of losing it. Draco had known then, more than ever before, that he had made the right decision.

Draco woke up very early on the Monday morning. Harry was still asleep, so he wandered through to the living room, thinking that he might send down to the kitchens for food. It would be nice to bring his boyfriend breakfast in bed. His boyfriend. It was such a novelty to think about Harry in those terms, and it made him smile.

The latest Daily Prophet was already lying on the table. Draco's heart sank as soon as he saw it – somehow he just knew it was bad news. He approached the paper with trepidation. 'SCANDAL AT HOGWARTS AS POTTER'S GAY AFFAIR WITH FORMER DEATH EATER IS REVEALED!' He had been expecting it, but the headline hit Draco like a punch to the stomach. He stared down at the paper numbly. Certain sentences from the article jumped out at him: 'students sickened by betrayal', 'sordid affair with Malfoy kept hidden for months', 'plot to poison Potter's mind', 'abusing the trust of the public.' Unable to endure it any longer, Draco threw the paper down and walked over to the window. He felt sick. Those people had turned his relationship with Harry, which was so beautiful and innocent, into something shameful. They had trampled it into the mud. Draco was unable to stop the tears coming to his eyes; it was so stupid when he had known exactly what was going to happen, but seeing it there in black and white, all those hurtful words, the way they had abused Harry, was just too much.

Draco heard the bedroom door bang open – Harry was up. He kept his silence and waited.

"Morning," Harry said through a yawn. "I'm sorry for crashing out on you last night; I guess yesterday took it out of me a little. Are you—" Harry's words were abruptly cut off. He had seen the paper. "Oh," he said heavily. "Well, there it is. Ugh, those little shits!" Harry was silent for a few moments, and Draco could only presume that he was reading the article. He didn't know how he could bear to.

At length, Harry sighed. "Well, that's more or less what I was expecting. The only thing we can do for the time being is to carry on as we were and show that we have nothing to be ashamed of. I'll have a word with McGonagall and see if she can vet the post for the time being – I don't think either of us wants to be snowed under with Howlers, do we? I was thinking that if it got too bad, I'd give an interview to the press – if that's okay with you, of course – and tell them the real version of… Draco, are you all right?"

Draco had been unable to hold back a painful sob.

Harry walked over to him and gently turned him around. "Oh, darling, don't get upset. Please don't. I

know it's disgusting what they've done, but we'll get through it. They're the ones in the wrong, not us! Oh, please don't cry!" He held Draco to him, kissing the tears from his cheeks. "Please don't."

"I'm so sorry, Harry," Draco whispered. "I'm sorry I brought this on you."

"Will you stop with that nonsense?" Harry said almost angrily. "I thought we'd got past all of that! You did not do this, okay? This is not your fault. Back in fourth year when you were making up stories about me for Rita Skeeter – that was kind of your fault. This? No. Surely you must be able to see the difference. This is nothing more than a group of reporters who are so desperate for a scandal that they are turning our relationship into something corrupt without having all the facts in front of them. I'm the one who's sorry – I never wanted you to have to go through all this again."

"They make us sound so—"

"I know. I know they do, but we can't pay any attention to them. Please don't let them spoil this, Draco. Please, I love you so much. Please don't…" Harry started to kiss him, almost aggressively. "I love you… please…"

Draco submitted completely to his lover's touch. He let Harry kiss him and caress him, pull him down onto the floor. He wanted to obliterate those dreadful words in the newspaper. He wanted to crawl under Harry's skin, to hide from the world and its cruelty, wrapped up in Harry's love.

He had wanted to be hurt, bruised, branded by his lover, but Harry became frustratingly tender. He slowly pulled Draco's pyjamas open, kissing the exposed skin, working his way down Draco's stomach.

"Harry," Draco hissed urgently. "Harry, please just… can't you…"

"Shh, it's okay, love. You don't have to panic. Just let me do this. Let me love you."

Harry pulled Draco's pyjama trousers off, and began to kiss him there as well. Draco couldn't stand it; it

was too much and not enough all at the same time, and he felt that if Harry didn't do something soon, he might just go mad. And then Harry took him in his mouth, and for the next twenty minutes at least, the newspaper article was completely forgotten.

*

As Draco had expected, it had been a trying day. He thought that he could probably recite that terrible article word for word, so often had it been recited back to him. Everywhere he went, people glared at him or made nasty comments. He would even have been hit by a hex if Melanie hadn't been there to deflect it and send the culprit to the headmistress. At least McGonagall had been supportive. She had readily agreed to hold back all post addressed to him and Harry, and had made it clear at breakfast that anyone alluding to the article or being disrespectful to the couple would be disciplined.

Melanie had agreed to close up that evening, leaving Draco free to leave at seven-thirty, for which he was very grateful. He was exhausted. His nerves were worn to a shred, and he wanted nothing more than to just get away from everyone and not have to think any more.

He hadn't seen Harry since that morning – they had both decided it would be for the best – and it was to Harry's rooms that Draco went immediately upon leaving work. But Harry wasn't there. Draco could only presume that the other man had stayed in his office to do some marking, and couldn't help but feel a little put out. He could have done with a cuddle. Still, he thought, curling up on Harry's bed, it would be good to get some rest while he was on his own. The sheets smelled like Harry…

Draco hadn't been asleep for very long when he was woken by the sound of voices coming from Harry's living room. One of the voices belonged to Harry, but the other voice was that of a woman. What was Harry doing bringing a woman back to his rooms? Hang on… Draco recognised that laugh!

Draco slipped off the bad and, crossing the room quickly, threw the bedroom door wide open. "Mother? What on earth are you doing here?"

Narcissa, who was seated comfortably on Harry's sofa, turned round and smiled at him. "I'm here to see

you, of course! I take it my letter hasn't arrived yet – I thought I might overtake it." She came over to him and pulled him into a hug. Draco stupidly felt like crying. He held onto his mother tightly, feeling how small she was, yet feeling very small himself. He looked at Harry over the top of her head, silently asking for further explanation.

"I was just about to leave my office, when I got an owl from your mother saying that she'd just arrived in Hogsmeade and was wondering if I could come and meet her," Harry said. "She wanted to surprise you."

"Harry turned out to be my knight in shining armour," Narcissa continued, bringing a blush to Harry's cheeks, which made Draco smile. "When he found me, I was trying to check into the Three Broomsticks, and they were being very rude and saying that they weren't going to give a room to someone like me, as they had a reputation to keep up, or some such nonsense. At that point your Harry turned up and gave them a right piece of his mind, saying that in the future he would be taking his business elsewhere. Then he gallantly swept me out of there, leaving them all aghast! Darling, it was wonderful!" Narcissa turned to beam at Harry, whose blush deepened.

"It probably wasn't the wisest thing to do," he said, "especially given the papers this morning. Still, a stand needs to be made against that kind of thing if any difference is going to be made."

"Plus, you seem to have impressed my mother," Draco said, "which, I have to say, is not an easy thing to do."

Harry grinned. "I'll leave you two to chat. I need to see the headmistress about getting a guest room for you tonight, Mrs Malfoy – I'm sure there won't be any problem – then I'll look into getting us all a bit of light supper."

Once Harry had gone, Draco was pulled over to the sofa by his beaming mother and made to sit down beside her. "Now," Narcissa began, "I want to hear everything. Of course, I've read all those horrible lies in the paper this morning. How have you coped with it, my love? I'm glad that the school is being supportive. What have you and Harry decided to do? You're going to be all right, aren't you?"

Draco, still feeling a bit groggy, was a little overwhelmed by his mother's torrent of questions. All he was

able to say was, “What are you doing here?”

She laughed. “I’m sorry, darling. I’ve just been so worried about you recently, and when you wrote that last letter telling me that you and Harry had decided to make a go of things, I just had to come and see you, and make sure that you were going to be okay. You know, lend my support. I’ve left your father with Topsy, so I’m sure that they’ll cope for a couple of days. You know, I had a nice conversation with Harry on the way up here. I asked him outright if he loved you and if his intentions towards you were serious—”

“Mother!”

“Well, it’s my duty as a parent to make sure that you’re going to be well looked after! Anyway, all his answers were very satisfactory, so you needn’t worry.”

“I’m more worried about you interrogating my poor boyfriend!” Draco protested.

His mother smiled at him slowly. “So… he’s definitely your boyfriend then. Oh, darling, I’m so pleased you’ve decided to give him a chance! Now, tell me everything. I want to know what made you change your mind, and what the two of you are going to do next.”

Draco talked and talked. He told his mother all about Harry’s decision to leave the school and their ensuing argument. He told her about his conversation with Snape, and his realisation that he didn’t want to be alone any more, and that he couldn’t let Harry get away. He told her about how he and Harry had talked everything out, and how he had finally realised that Harry was a real person with faults, and that Draco could be his equal. Narcissa listened attentively, smiling her approval.

Things had changed so much. Ten years ago, the thought that the two of them would be happily discussing the fact that Draco was in a relationship with Harry Potter would have been laughable. So would the thought of Narcissa Malfoy being turned away from the Three Broomsticks, an establishment she had hardly deigned to drink at before. He looked at her shabby travelling cloak and her patched-up overnight bag. She had always had only the best, and now…

On the other hand, she looked happy. Now he thought of it, Draco could not remember his mother cracking a genuine smile in the old days. She had been loving towards him, but there had always been a distance to her, a faraway, wistful look in her eyes. He remembered how the corners of her mouth used to turn down. He never thought he would think such a thing, but… perhaps everything had happened for the best. Perhaps the Malfoys had needed to lose everything in order to discover who they really were and realise what was important. None of them were starving, they still had one another… Maybe things weren't so bad after all.

Harry arrived back soon after, bearing a tray of tea and muffins for them. Then the three of them talked long into the night about what this new bond meant for them and what the future might hold. Harry would talk to the press. He would give an exclusive interview with a journalist he trusted, and he would defend his decision to be with Draco. He would argue that it was time to overcome the hatred inspired by the war, and to forgive those people who had decided to turn their lives around. There was so much against them, but Draco felt, as he sat there with the two people who loved him most, that somehow they would win through.

*

Wednesday came round far too soon for Draco's liking. Rather shamefully, he had ended up begging his mother to stay for an extra day and come to the dinner with Ron and Hermione with him, but she had told him that she couldn't leave Lucius for that long, and that he was nearly twenty-seven now and he should be able to face an uncomfortable situation without his mother there to support him. Draco had sulked for a bit, but had finally conceded that she was probably right. He had even resisted the temptation to see if Melanie would accompany him, and was trying to suppress his outlandish fantasies of bringing Snape along. He was sensible enough to admit that carting a giant six-foot portrait into Hogsmeade would be taking things to the extreme, and would hardly convince Ron and Hermione that he was a suitable (not to mention sane) partner for their best friend.

The walk into Hogsmeade was the longest Draco could remember. Harry valiantly tried to keep up the conversation, but as Draco was only capable of giving monosyllabic responses, he quickly gave up. They held each other's hands tightly.

They were meeting Ron and Hermione at Cleone's, a little Italian restaurant on the outskirts of the town. "You don't suppose we'll be turned away?" Draco asked nervously as they walked through the

thoroughfare, attracting their fair share of suspicious and accusatory looks from passers by.

“What?” Harry said abruptly.

“Well, after all the negative media attention. You… you don’t suppose that the restaurant will say we can’t eat there?”

“I’d like to see them try!” Harry said angrily. “We haven’t committed a crime, have we? We have as much right to eat out with friends as anyone else.”

“Right…” Draco said. If he was completely honest, he didn’t know what sounded worse: being turned away from the restaurant, or having to get through an entire evening with the Weasleys glaring at him.

Harry gave his hand a little squeeze. “It’ll be fine, I promise. I’ve told them that I’m serious about you, and that you want to get over everything that happened in the past. I know it’s going to be awkward at first, but they’re going to try their best.” They had reached the restaurant, and Harry pulled Draco round to face him. “I love you so much,” he said, “and I am so grateful to you for doing this. I know how hard it is. I promise I will make it up to you when we get home.” He pulled Draco in for a lingering kiss, then they turned and walked inside.

Ron and Hermione hadn’t arrived yet. The two men were led over to the private table Harry had booked, and sat down to wait. Draco couldn’t help but notice that the waiters were being unusually attentive.

“Hey,” Harry said. “Before the others get here, I want to show you something that might cheer you up a bit.” He pulled a folded-up piece of parchment from his pocket and passed it over. “I found this posted under my office door earlier.”

Draco opened the note.

Dear Professor Potter, (he read)

I am one of your fifth year students and I wanted to let you know that I really admire you for going public with your relationship. I know that the papers have been saying bad things about you, but I'm not paying any attention to it. There are still lots of students who believe in you and know not to trust everything that's written. Anyway, I really wanted to let you know that you have given me the confidence to stop being ashamed of who I am. I have known that I was gay for two years now, but I've always hidden it because I was scared to come out. I was worried that my friends and family wouldn't accept it. Now that someone like you, who has achieved so many wonderful things, is proud to tell the world that he is in a relationship with another man, I can finally feel like I can tell everyone who I really am. Thank you so much for being such a wonderful role model.

P.S. Draco Malfoy is really hot – well done!

Draco laughed. "Well, he clearly has good taste!"

"That's what I thought," Harry said with a grin. "But you see, not everyone's against us. People are mostly good natured – some will have already figured out that there's nothing wrong with our being together, and the others will come around once they know all the facts. We'll be all right, you'll see." He leaned over for a kiss.

Just then, they were interrupted by the sound of someone clearing their throat loudly above them. Their guests had arrived. "I'm sorry if we're intruding," Ron Weasley said, blushing from ear to ear.

"Sorry we're a bit late," Hermione said, pulling her cloak off and sitting down opposite Harry. "Fred kicked up a bit of a fuss when we were leaving. Hello, Harry. Hello, Malf- erm, Draco." She gave Draco a brief, non-committal smile.

Ron nodded at them, sitting down beside his wife.

Draco sighed. This was going to be a very long evening.

The conversation dragged on awkwardly for half-an-hour or so. Draco picked miserably at his pasta, knowing that he should be talking, but feeling as if his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth. He could think of nothing to say that wasn't dreadfully trivial or clichéd, and he was beginning to think that the moment they could get Harry alone, his friends would be begging him to end the relationship, if only for the reason that Draco was an incredible bore. Harry regularly gave his knee a reassuring squeeze under the table, but he knew that he was letting his boyfriend down.

The meal finished, Harry and Ron went off to the bar to order another round of drinks, leaving Draco alone with Hermione.

She smiled at him awkwardly. "How's the library?"

"Hm? Oh, it's good. Very good. And… and your job at the Ministry, that's going well?"

"Oh, yes! Yes, it's going very well, thanks. Erm… the weather's a lot warmer, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

The conversation trailed off into silence. This was ridiculous. Draco couldn't let his nerves and his social awkwardness ruin things. It was so important to Harry that they all learn to get along, and as the one who had caused so much contention in the past, it was down to Draco to make things right.

"Look," he said, leaning across the table towards Hermione, "I know that this isn't exactly what you wanted for Harry. I know that I have caused a lot of hurt to you all in the past, and that welcoming me into your lives now isn't a dream come true. But I love Harry. I have truly repented for the life I used to lead, and I have changed. Harry means the world to me, and I will do anything to make him happy. I'm going to fight for this relationship, and I won't give up until I've proven to you all that I'm not going to hurt him." Draco leaned back, slightly overwhelmed by his own daring.

Hermione observed him coolly for a moment, then broke into a smile. "Good. I'm glad to hear it. See, I

could believe Harry when he said that you'd reformed – he knows enough by now to be able to tell when he's dealing with a decent person – but he's still so impulsive. He falls in love very easily, and he tends to rush things. He can get, I don't know… he gets to the point where he's so determined for everything to be perfect, that he doesn't necessarily think about whether the other person is as committed as he is. He's got this reputation for being so strong, but in many ways…"

"He's lonely. He wants stability and intimacy. He needs to be loved, and he's lost so much…"

"Exactly. I just don't want to see him get hurt again."

"Believe me, I would rather die than hurt Harry again," Draco said with all the sincerity he could muster. "Like I said, I know our relationship isn't going to get the best reception, but I'm not going to leave him."

Hermione nodded. "I believe you."

Draco sighed. "Look, I'm really sorry about the things that happened at school. I know words don't mean that much, but—"

She held up her hand to stop him. "It's okay, you don't have to. We'll say no more about it. We've all changed since then, and… and I think that the only way we're ever going to get over the war is if we all move on, don't you agree?"

Draco grinned. "I think that's an excellent idea. Thank you."

"You're welcome," Hermione said primly. "Now, tell me more about the library. Harry said that you've made some wonderful changes. I must say, it's about time – Madam Pince's system was a disgrace! He… he told me that you've managed to unearth the actual diary of Helga Hufflepuff."

"Yes," Draco replied. "I've found some amazing things, actually – the archives were hiding some real treasures. I've managed to buy a few very important books this year as well; McGonagall has let me get

some display cabinets for them." He paused. "You know… you're welcome to come up and take a look whenever you want. I'll even let you hold things, seeing as you're a friend."

"Really?" Hermione said, her eyes starry.

The other two returned with the drinks. Draco looked up at Harry, who gave him a warm smile. Everything really was going to be all right now, Draco could feel it. Harry's friends really were good people, and once Draco had shown that he had changed and that he was committed to Harry, they would accept him. It may take some time, but eventually he would be forgiven for the person he had been. More importantly, Draco had finally learnt to forgive himself.

The evening took a far happier turn after that. Hermione wanted to talk more about the library, and then they passed on to the subject of children. By the time they left, even Ron had thawed towards Draco slightly.

Harry and Draco walked back to Hogwarts, arm in arm. "You know," Harry said, "you are my absolute hero after tonight."

Draco laughed.

"I'm serious! I know how hard that must have been for you, and it meant so much to me. See, I told you that everything would work out!"

"You did. I'll have to pay more attention to you in the future. It was a good evening. I'm sorry I was so quiet at first."

"Don't be silly, love – I know you were nervous. And I meant it before when I said I'd make it up to you. There is nothing I won't let you do to me tonight."

“Is that right?”

“My body is your personal plaything.”

Draco smiled. Everything was going to be all right. He was with Harry, it was a beautiful night, and everything was going to be fine. “I love you,” he said.

Harry stopped. “You know, you’ve never said that to me before.”

Draco turned towards him. “I haven’t? God, I’m sorry; I was sure that I had. I’ve thought it so many times for so long, that… well, I suppose I’d assumed that I must have said it. You must have realised, though. I mean, it was kind of obvious. You have… Harry, you have given me everything. You’ve made me want to live again.” There were no more words to be said. The only thing left for Draco to do was to step in and claim his lover’s mouth with a kiss. This was better than any book he had read. This time, Draco had made his own happiness, and he would do all he could to make sure that it never ended.

*

Dearest Mother,

It was so wonderful to see you last week. I’d been missing you more than usual, and your visit really did mean the world. The dinner with Harry’s friends wasn’t as bad as I’d thought; I think I won Hermione over by my promise to show her round the library. Harry and I are going to their place for dinner next week, when I’ll get to meet more of his friends. I’m not feeling too nervous about it – my confidence seems to grow the longer I’m with Harry.

He gave his interview to the papers yesterday. He said the sweetest things about me. He’s also said that he’d really like to come and stay in France with us for a few days over Easter, and meet Father again. He says that it’s time to heal old wounds, and I couldn’t agree more.

He's like a miracle that's happened to me. When I look at him, I want to cry because I'm so grateful that he's mine. He came back into my life when I needed him most, even though I didn't realise it at the time, and he's brought me back to life. I think that even Snape's pleased that we're together, although it's like pulling teeth getting him to admit to it (he sends his best wishes, by the way). I'm just so grateful for everything. I'm even grateful for my misfortunes, because without them I never would have discovered who I really was, or the true meanings of love and happiness. I can't believe how skewed my view of things used to be! The world is beautiful and strange and magical, and although I still have a lot to learn, I'm so happy that I'm a part of it.

You have told me so many times that goodness exists, that life doesn't have to be scary, and that I deserve to be happy. Now, I hate to admit that my mother was right, but… I think you have left me with no choice!

With all my love and devotion,

Draco.

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