Midnight on the Janus Thickey Ward by quill lumos

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Chapter 1: Midnight on the Janus Thickey Ward

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Warning(s):EWE

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Author's Notes: This story is complete and will be posted over the next few days. It's a plot bunny which wouldn't let me alone and I spent far too much time in October writing it. Thanks as always to my darling Cyndie for betaing this and to Bets for all her support and encouragement. Also, thanks to 77dmk77 for the final polish.

The little metal wheels of Draco's mop-trolley squeaked along the corridor, drowning out the even more annoying squeak of his hospital-issued, rubber-soled shoes. His back ached as he had spent the last hour stacking crates in the kitchen storeroom. Some nights he hated working at St. Mungo's and he especially hated the Janus Thickey Ward, which meant, of course, that he was stationed there far more often than anywhere else. In the other wards patients came and went. Frequently they went home fully cured, or, at the very least, on their way to being cured. Sometimes, of course, they went somewhere else, somewhere from which no one ever returned. But even then, even when somebody died, it wasn't quite as awful as staying permanently, day in and day out, forever. Not in Draco's opinion, at least.

The Longbottoms, for example, had been here for years and years and probably would be for as long as they lived. Healer Fanthorpe especially liked sending Draco to clean up after them, as, after all, "Your evil bitch of an aunt was responsible for them being here in the first place." It wasn't that the two of them were particularly dirty, it was just that they would forget things: upend their food by accident, drop it on the floor, step in it, mashing it into the scratched linoleum. Alice Longbottom would tear up bits of paper into teeny, tiny little pieces and scatter them in amongst the ruined food; they'd end up sort of glued to the floor and Draco would have to get down on his hands and knees to scrub it clean. But Draco couldn't resent them, no matter what they did, because he did feel somewhat responsible for what had happened to them, a responsibility carried in his genes.

This was his penance – his 'community service' – to work at St. Mungo's, with minimal pay, for a period of eighteen months. At first he'd been pleased...well, to be strictly honest, he'd been relieved...as he was sure it could have been far worse. He thought of his work at St. Mungo's as a chance to finally atone for his past mistakes. Now that the war was over, Draco couldn't quite seem to get past his losses, some of

which were the result of his own actions. When people shunned him, spat at him, called him for the Death Eater he had once been, he'd felt obliged to accept their contempt as no more than his due. St. Mungo's was to be his salvation. But he'd been assigned to Fanthorpe and Fanthorpe hated him. The man did everything he could to heap misery upon misery on Draco, until even his monumental feelings of guilt shrank little by little under the onslaught.

Fanthorpe seemed to thrive on ever more inventive ways of making Draco suffer and had him scrubbing and cleaning – most often on his knees – and he would taunt Draco with nasty little jibes and snide comments and occasionally with the odd 'accidental' kick or push. He constantly derided Draco's father, his mother, and his bat-shit insane aunt (seemingly oblivious to the fact that Draco agreed with him when it came to her.) His father probably deserved the snide remarks and downright insults, but Draco felt deeply hurt by the barbs against his mother. He hated being humiliated, but had long ago decided there was nothing he could do about it.

Draco was habitually assigned the midnight shift, despite the fact shifts were supposed to change weekly, on a rota basis. Draco, however, had been on this particular shift now for over a year, which meant he started work at ten and finished at six, which further meant he went home against the early morning traffic, slept till late afternoon, leaving only a few hours to himself before eating dinner and getting ready to go to work. It also meant he hardly ever went out anymore and rarely got to spend quality time with his friends, or anyone at all, come to that; and in the time he'd been working he'd been allowed only two weekends off to visit his parents. In theory, he could have complained, but the only person he could complain to was Fanthorpe and Fanthorpe was the one who assigned him this duty.

He pushed his mop-trolley into the ward, humming quietly to himself. The Janus Thickey Ward was a long, gloomy room, divided into curtained areas. The walls were a sludge-green colour and the windows were far too high for any of the inhabitants to be able to see the view of Oxford Street, far below. Everyone was asleep and if he were quick he could probably get the Longbottoms' part of the room nice and clean before morning. They never woke at night, looking far more peaceful in sleep than they ever did awake.

This night, though, there was something different about the ward. In the furthest corner, well away from the Longbottoms' homely little space, there was another cubicle, a new bed, someone new in the ward. A light glowed warmly, heating up the pale-green walls with a yellow wash and on the bed there was a small hunched figure, a figure instantly familiar to Draco.

Harry Potter.

Potter looked so lost. The blue, stripped pyjamas they'd dressed him in were obviously far too large. His glasses had been removed so his eyes, which stared fearfully around the room, could clearly be seen. They were wide and green and full of terror. He was sitting curled up on the neatly made bed, cuddling his knees and muttering to himself as he seemingly tried to make sense of his surroundings. Draco moved closer, not sure of what he was going to do when he got nearer to the bed. The other man had obviously been brought in before Draco started his shift. There was no one about right now; the ward Healer had disappeared somewhere and all the other patients were asleep, everyone but Potter. Draco stood, leaning on the end of his mop, just watching the other man. He wasn't sure what he could say. 'Hello, Potter, looks like you've not done well since the end of the war,' or, 'Hi, scar-head, what brings you here; slumming it, are we?' or 'Hi, old bean, good to see you. How about we bury the hatchet and talk over old times?'

"His friends brought him in earlier."

The voice startled him out of his thoughts. It was Constance Nightingale, the ward Healer, who'd spoken. She hadn't been so far away after all, it seemed. Healer Nightingale was nice. She always spoke to Draco like he was a real person and deflected the worst of Fanthorpe's ire whenever she found him giving Draco a verbal lashing.

"You shouldn't be able to see him," she said, jerking her head in the direction of Potter. "He's supposed to be protected and screened. The wards around his bed are supposed to screen him from anyone who's a stranger or anyone who means him harm. He's wearing a cuff that restricts his magic and prevents him from crossing the wards. He's invisible to everyone here tonight, except me... and apparently you. So, I guess that means you know him and you aren't planning on hurting him, either."

"We were at school together," Draco told her simply, "and he saved my life."

"Ah," Healer Nightingale said. "Do you want to go talk to him, then?"

"No! No, he wouldn't want to talk to me."

“I think he would. He’s alone and scared and I think he’d like to see a friend.”

“I’m not a friend! And I can guarantee that he wouldn’t want to see me. He needs a Healer or something.”

“Draco.” Healer Nightingale’s voice was gentle. “I have known you now for more than a year. You have turned up here, on time, I might add, every single night when you were told to and you have never complained, no matter what awful task Fanthorpe assigned you. You work hard and you’re good with the patients; I’ve seen you sitting and talking to them.”

Draco flushed. He didn’t realise anyone had noticed the time he took to pat hands or listen to distracted ramblings. “I... er... I’m sorry. I know I’m not supposed to, but sometimes people just seem to need someone, some company or a comforting touch. I’m not a Healer, though!”

“Maybe not, dear, but you could be, that is if you wanted it. And you don’t have to apologise.”

Draco gasped.

Healer Nightingale smiled at him. “When you were first assigned to this ward I was fully prepared to dislike you. You are, after all, the son of a Death Eater and you did support him. But I told you, you impressed me and I think you should seriously think about training properly when your probation is over. I am not without influence, you know, and I think you could have a future here. Now go and see to your friend.”

Draco seemed unable to swallow around the lump that had suddenly appeared in his throat. He didn’t know what to say. He doubted the Healer, formidable though she was, could do very much for him, but he was very touched she’d offered to try.

“Go on, lad,” she said, giving him a gentle nudge. “Get on with it. I’ll go and put the kettle on.”

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Draco still hadn't decided what to say, but he abandoned his mop and bucket and headed over to Potter's bed, as directed. The man wasn't looking at him. Instead, he was staring at the far corner of the ward and muttering to himself, and every so often he would rock a little and clasp his knees tight against his chest.

"Potter?" Draco said, and he was surprised that he actually felt quite distressed to see the other man start violently.

Potter shivered a little and stared hard in his direction, green eyes squinting. Draco couldn't quite believe it was fear, however, not from this man – the hero of the Wizarding world, who'd never shown fear in his life as far as Draco could remember. Then Draco realised Potter wasn't wearing his glasses and probably couldn't see him; his eyes were really bad, weren't they? And Draco was standing in the gloom of the ward, beyond the warm light of the candles. He moved closer, so that he was illuminated.

"It's me, Malfoy," he said, and then, just in case Potter mistook him for his father, he continued. "Draco Malfoy."

"Malfoy?" Potter's eyes actually seemed to focus on him for the first time.

"Yeah," Draco answered.

"Quick," urged Potter, shifting over on the bed. He patted the covers beside himself. "Come here." And when Draco didn't move, Harry said, "Quick, Malfoy, they're here, in the shadows; hurry or they'll get you. Quickly!"

"Okay," Draco replied, moving to sit beside the other man on the bed. Potter was trembling and he grabbed Draco's wrist with hands as cold as ice.

“You’re safe here, but you mustn’t go into the darkness, Malfoy. Do you understand?”

Draco found that his eyes were stinging with tears. Potter…no, Harry…looked ravaged. His jewel green eyes wore dark circles beneath them and they sparkled with a feverish madness. Harry’s hands were like claws, his fingers digging into Draco’s wrist, his own wrists wrapped in bandages stark white, even against his pale skin, his throat circled in bruises. Draco nodded. “I’ll stay, Harry, don’t worry.”

“Good,” Harry said, licking his lips and staring around them, eyes as wide as ever. “Good, you’ll be safe here, safe. I can’t lose...can’t lose anyone else.”

“You won’t lose me, Harry.”

“I might, if you go into the darkness. They say it’s not safe. But I can’t watch much longer. I’m so very, very tired.”

“Don’t worry. I’m going to stay here with you, all night if I have to.”

“You will?” Green eyes shone with hope and gratitude.

“I will, Harry.”

Harry put his head to one side, looking at him with frank curiosity. “You keep calling me Harry. Does that mean we’re friends now?”

“Yeah, we’re friends... if you want us to be?”

“Oh. Oh yes, that would be good,” Harry whispered. “Erm... does that mean you forgive me?”

Draco had to struggle to keep his tears from falling. Harry seemed so lost, so desperate. “There’s nothing to forgive.”

Harry nodded emphatically. “There is. There is. It’s my fault they died, my fault.” His hand dug even further into Draco’s wrist. “Please forgive me, please?”

“I forgive you.” Draco’s voice was raspy and shook a little.

“Good, good, that’s good. That’ll keep them away just a little bit longer.”

“Harry, you need to sleep.”

“I can’t sleep; I haven’t slept for months. The voices talk at me all the time. They tried to help me, the Healers did. They’ve made me potions.” He indicated the line of phials sitting on his bedside table. “But if I take them, they’ll get me.”

“No they won’t, ‘cause I’m here. Don’t forget, I’m staying with you. I won’t let them get to you and then, when you’ve slept, you’ll be stronger, more able to fight them.”

Draco didn’t know why it was so important to him to get the other man to take the potions that had been provided; he just knew it was. This Harry Potter, the one in the Janus Thickey Ward, was nothing like the one he’d grown up with. This Harry was so pale he was almost translucent and his eyes sparkled with a peculiar madness. Draco felt a strange, and very strong, urge to protect him.

Harry shook his head. “They’ll come if I close my eyes. They know when I sleep. They’re watching me.”

“But I’m here, remember?” Draco whispered. He pulled Harry closer, instinctively knowing the man

needed to be comforted. Harry felt so thin, Draco could feel the bones protruding against him. At first Harry held himself rigidly against the Slytherin's body and Draco found himself acting without thinking. He started to stroke Harry's back making little shushing sounds and as he did so Harry relaxed, leaning into Draco's embrace.

"They're very tricky," Harry confided to him, his eyes seeming even bigger when he peered up at Draco. "You can't trust them."

"I won't. I learned my lesson about trusting the bad guys. I'm only trusting the good ones from now on."

"How do you know the good guys?"

"They're the ones who aren't bad."

"Oh, okay. Erm... that sounds sensible. But what if you have to go?"

"I think it'll be all right for me to stay. Healer Nightingale sent me over to you, so I don't think she'll mind." Draco sent a silent prayer that he was right and that he could stay with Harry as long as possible and then come back before the other man awoke.

Harry chuckled, "Healer Nightingale. I have a nurse called Nightingale, how apt!"

Draco decided Harry was rambling again. He didn't think Nightingale was a particularly fitting name for the Healer, who was far more like a bird of paradise in his opinion because she wore bright robes and a matching turban, in yellows and reds and oranges. Nightingales were drab little birds whose one saving grace was their amazing song, but having heard the Healer humming to herself in the sluice room, he knew her singing voice was far from melodious.

Harry sobered again almost immediately. His left hand grasped Draco's arm while pulling at his ear with the right. "No, no, not true, leave me alone," he mumbled, burying his face against Draco's mud-coloured

robe.

“Hush. Hush, Harry.”

“Please, Draco. Please make them leave me alone!” Harry’s voice was plaintive, pleading.

“Here, take this.” Draco was a little desperate. He handed the distraught young man a phial of Dreamless Sleep. Harry was trembling again, but he wrapped his hand around the phial and held it tightly.

When he spoke again, Harry’s voice was muffled. “But if I take the potion, I won’t be able to help you when they come.”

“Yes, you will,” Draco told him. “Look. Healer Nightingale has left the antidote to all the potions they’ve prescribed.”

“She has?” Harry sounded interested in something other than his voices for the first time.

“Yes, look.” Draco held up a phial of counter-potion.

“Oh, why did she do that?”

“It’s standard procedure, I think. Just in case the patient has a reaction.” Draco wasn’t sure this was so, but he’d been around enough on the wards to notice the Healers rarely gave a patient something without having its antidote nearby.

Harry still looked dubious. “Look, why don’t you hold the phial of counter-potion too? Then you’ll know

just where it is if you need it."

"But I won't be able to take it if I'm unconscious." Harry sounded totally logical and if Draco hadn't heard him worrying about voices and rambling on about birds, if he hadn't known him before and seen how pale and thin he'd become, he'd have been sure there was nothing wrong with the Gryffindor.

"But I'll know it's there and I'll help you take it."

Harry stared at him for some considerable time, green eyes seeming to bore into the very heart of him. "Why are you helping me?" he finally asked.

"I--I don't know." Draco couldn't meet his gaze any longer so he looked at his lap instead. "I just know that you were there for me when I needed it, and you look like you need help now."

For several heartbeats Harry said not a word. "All right," he finally said. "W--w--ill you take first watch then? Would that be okay? Just for a little while because I am so very tired."

"Yeah, I can do that. I work nights anyway, so I'm not tired yet."

Harry looked up at him again and for a second his eyes were clear and bright. "Are you sure?"

Draco nodded.

But it was several more moments before Harry swallowed the potion and Draco wondered how hard it was for the other man to give up control, to trust someone else. He felt proud and a little elated that the person Harry had decided to trust was him.

Harry became heavier as the Dreamless Sleep seemed to take hold and he sagged into Draco's arms. Finally he spoke, his voice a little breathy and his speech a little slurred. "You promise you won't leave

me?”

“I promise,” Draco said, wondering once again how on earth he could keep such a promise. Maybe Healer Nightingale would let him stay in the ward, as she had asked him to sit with Harry in the first place. He determined that he would sneak back if he had to.

“So tired,” Harry sighed.

“I know you are,” Draco told him, wrapping his arms more tightly around the other man and pulling him close. “You need to sleep.” He couldn’t help that he dropped a kiss on charcoal-black locks, or that a tear finally managed to escape and wound a trail down his cheek to land in that same wild hair. “You’re safe now, Harry.”

But Harry didn’t answer him; he had melted into Draco’s embrace and was curled, half in, half out of Draco’s lap, breathing deeply and fast asleep.

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Chapter 2: Midnight on the Janus Thickey Ward

A/N I have warned for self harm and attempted suicide in this chapter. Harry is harming himself but this story does not contain any graphic descriptions of self harm. There are also no graphic descriptions of attempted suicide.

Chapter two

Draco was sitting at a very uncomfortable angle and it hadn't taken long before his back started to ache and pins and needles danced up and down the thigh Harry's head was lying against. He wasn't moving though, not yet. He could hardly believe that the Hero-of-the-Wizarding-world was asleep in his lap. Not that he looked very much like a hero right now in his too-large pyjamas, he looked small and fragile and heartbreakingly young.

"But you never were the classical idea of a hero, were you, Harry?" he asked the sleeping form softly. No, that had been Cedric Diggory with his square jaw and dark-good-looks, but Diggory had died and Harry was still here. He'd always been unquenchable, somewhat rumpled and rough about the edges perhaps, but indomitable. He'd never, ever given up and, in the end, he had done the impossible despite all the odds stacked against him. "Maybe that's why you always fascinated me," he told the sleeping man softly, "maybe that's why you still do."

"Good boy! I knew you'd do it."

Draco started at the intrusion on his thoughts; Healer Nightingale was standing a few feet away, holding two steaming mugs of tea, smiling at him.

"Yeah, well, I obviously have the magic touch," Draco said dryly.

"I think perhaps you do."

Draco flushed. "I was joking, Healer Nightingale."

"Yeah, well, I wasn't. I do think you've got something. That boy's been really distressed ever since they brought him in. You've calmed him right down, and I see that you managed to get him to take a potion. The Dreamless Sleep will work, now that you've got some inside him and relaxed him."

"Why's he here?" Draco asked, gently carding his fingers through Harry's hair.

“Let me levitate him under the covers and I’ll tell you. You can’t be comfortable like that.”

Draco was getting more uncomfortable by the moment but Harry’s weight on his lap felt right somehow.

“I... er... I promised him I’d stay.”

“I’m not asking you to leave, hon. But you do need to be able to walk and getting cramp won’t help with that.”

Draco grinned. “Okay...” he said, “erm... as long as I can stay?”

The Healer smiled and nodded at him.

Once they were seated beside Harry’s bed, Healer Nightingale told Draco a little more about how the man had come to be admitted.

“Although we don’t know for sure, we think the auditory hallucinations started some time after the final battle and his friends say he’s been getting progressively worse over the past year. He hears voices and they apparently tell him to hurt himself.”

“Is that why his wrists are bandaged and his neck is bruised?”

“Yes, seemingly, he cut his wrists two weeks ago; they finally brought him in when he tried to hang himself.”

“Oh,” Draco said. ”Oh, Harry! Why did he do that? Why would he do that?”

“That’s why he’s here. That’s what we have to find out.”

Draco sipped his tea and considered the object of their discussion. Harry was hugging his pillow tightly; his forehead was creased with anxiety, even in sleep. The bandages peeked out beneath the over long sleeves of his pyjamas and a livid, dark bruise circled his neck. Draco sighed. If Harry Potter – the hero, He-who-defeated-Voldemort – if he didn’t want to live, what hope was there for the rest of humanity?

Draco sighed. “Well, thanks for letting me see him.”

“That’s just it, Draco,” Constance said steadily, swallowing the last of her own brew. “Remember, I told you there are privacy wards around his bed? Only his close friends and his Healers should be able to see through the wards. You shouldn’t have been able to see him at all and you most definitely shouldn’t have been able to cross the wards.”

Draco didn’t know what to say to that. “Um...r--i--ght! Well, why did you leave me here then?”

“I wanted to see what would happen. I suspected there might be something between you that would allow you access; at least, I hoped there would be. We have been struggling with that poor boy since he came here. The potions didn’t work because he wouldn’t take them, and we couldn’t get anywhere near him to make him take them. Even in his weakened state, his magic was too strong.” Her voice softened. “He was so frightened. I think he’s been frightened for such a long time.”

“Yeah, I think so too,” Draco said. He took another sip of his tea and regarded Harry for a while longer. “So what do you want me to do?”

“Can you stay with him, just for a while?”

“Yeah,” Draco said in relief, glad he didn’t have to let Harry down or try and make a case for staying. “Yeah, I can do that.”

“Thank you. Oh, and Draco?” Draco looked up at her. “Call me Constance.” She said.

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The ward was so quiet at this time of night, everyone was asleep. Normally Draco didn’t notice the hours ticking by, as he was working so hard. Most evenings he didn’t stop until clocking-off-time, then he would head back to his little room in Clapham and fall into bed, to sleep. But here, watching over Harry, surrounded by silence, Draco dozed.

“No! NO!” Draco jerked awake, disturbed by the shouting. Harry was sitting bolt-upright, his eyes glazed and staring sightlessly into the darkness. “Not again, please not again.” He mumbled, breath quickening, head moving from side-to-side. Draco’s flesh crawled, Harry shouldn’t have been able to dream or wake-up at all, not after taking such a large dose of potion, but he was dreaming and he did seem to be stirring.

“Harry?” he asked nervously.

“Don’t call me that!” Harry begged, still staring fixedly ahead, seemingly unaware of Draco’s presence. “I’m not! That’s not true. Please stop it!”

Draco grabbed one of Harry’s hands in his own, in a desperate attempt to comfort him and the other man grew still. He turned his unseeing gaze on Draco, apparently attempting to focus for a second or two. Then, suddenly, he grabbed Draco’s hand tightly in his turn and pulled him closer. Draco felt little puffs of air on his cheek and he shivered. Harry’s voice was tremulous and he sounded desperately afraid when he whispered. “They’re back!”

Draco felt chills up and down his spine when Harry spoke these words, but he steeled himself.

“It’s okay. They’re not going to hurt you. I’m keeping a look-out, remember?”

Harry seemed puzzled. “Oh, yeah,” he said, finally seeming to see Draco. “Is it my turn to watch for them?”

“No, it’s all right. I’m not tired yet.”

“Okay.” Harry told him, snuggling down again. “The voices never go away,” he whispered, once he had settled again in Draco’s embrace. He looked up at Draco through his messy fringe, when he spoke again he sounded about eight-years-old. “W--w--ould you hold my hand tonight?” he said.

“Course I will,” Draco assured him, taking Harry’s hand again. It was still as cold as ice, but he clutched at Draco with a strength he would not have suspected Harry to have. Harry smiled at him and closed long, dark-lashes over bright-green eyes and Draco sat in the semi-darkness of the Janus Thickey Ward and wondered who or what had finally broken Harry Potter.

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Draco sat with Harry for the next three nights, because Constance wouldn’t hear of him doing anything else. On Draco’s third night as Harry Potter’s caregiver, Healer Fanthorpe bustled in, looking for him, wearing a deep scowl and a thunderous demeanour. Constance, however, intercepted the irate Healer and sent him away. Draco couldn’t hear what was said because she cast a privacy spell, but he could tell by her expansive gestures that she was giving the other Healer a definite telling-off. As he watched the man getting thoroughly chastised, Draco was hard-pressed to keep from grinning triumphantly. But he was also rather glad he had never seen this side of Healer Nightingale, - at least, not directed at him.

After this incident, Draco seemingly had a new job. Someone else mopped the ward and disinfected the sluice whilst he sat and listened as Constance chatted to him about Harry’s progress (or rather the lack of it) during the day when Draco wasn’t there.

In the mornings, when the shadows receded, Harry would let him leave. He’d be reluctant and even a little sulky, but Draco would tell him that he needed to sleep if he were to keep his late night vigil at Harry’s side and eventually, after Draco promised time and again that he would return, Harry would let

him go. Every night Draco returned and the routine would be the same. Harry would become more and more agitated as the evening wore on, he'd refuse to take any potions, and the only one who could calm him would be Draco. With Draco, he would relax and the voices would recede, for a little while at least. It didn't take many nights before he was actually getting onto the bed and dozing off with Harry cuddled in his arms.

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Draco's luck, finally ran out and he ran into Granger and Weasley on his seventh night as Harry's caregiver.

He'd been getting ready in his little room when the tiny Floo flared.

Draco lived in one of those tall, old houses that backed onto Clapham Common. His room was up several flights of long narrow stairs, with a nice view of the green space outside and over the last year he'd become quite fond of his room. It had become a bit of a sanctuary against Fanthorpe's persecution and the hatred of others, especially as his Floo travel and apparition rights were restricted by the terms of his community service – the authorities didn't wanting Draco escaping, after all. Being forced to travel like a Muggle severely limited his ability to visit The Manor, except on weekends (which, thanks to Fanthorpe, he very rarely got to enjoy.).

Draco's landlady had been a friend of Narcissa's, from their school days, though she seemed totally unlike his mother's other friends. She was airy and Bohemian and friendly and had a large collection of stones and crystals dotted all over the rambling house. She also had a number of Muggle friends and occasional tenants. Since Narcissa's marriage, however, the contact between the friends had dwindled. Draco wasn't surprised his mother had kept their friendship from his fanatically pure-blooded father.

Drucilla, however, didn't seem to hold his mother's defection from their friendship against Draco. She made sure he had plenty to eat and sneaked him extra cash so the restrictions against him using Malfoy money didn't make him suffer too much. He still remembered the sneering official who'd told him, "Of course we can't magically keep your fortune away from you, but we would see your co-operation as a sign of good faith Mr Malfoy." So he hadn't had any sort of choice but to say yes, really. He didn't see a lot of Drucilla, as she was out of the house during most of the hours he was awake. It was a restful place, though, and Draco had the run of it, even if he did spend most of his time in his room.

His mother had sent him some furniture from the attics at home and his room was clean and nicely decorated. It had white wallpaper with tiny blue flowers on it and dark blue velvet curtains. A small oak desk sat beneath his window and along one wall was a white enamel fireplace that was currently squealing loudly, letting him know he had a message.

“Draco.” It was Constance Nightingale’s face that awaited in the flickering flames. “Can you come in early? We’ve had a bit of an emergency.” She said.

Arriving on the ward in record time, Draco found the room full of people and Harry cowering naked in the corner of his bed, hands clamped desperately over his ears. He appeared to be soaking wet, as well. “What happened?” he asked, totally mystified.

Constance turned to him, but before she could speak, a large red-headed man shoved her, none to gently, out of the way.

“What the fuck is he doing here?” Weasley asked snippily, looming over Draco, enormous and angry and very red, Draco couldn’t help taking a step back. “You go anywhere near Harry, Malfoy, and I won’t be responsible for my actions.” Weasley continued as agressively as before.

“I suggest you step back, Mr. Weasley. Otherwise, it’ll be you who finds yourself ejected.” Constance said, turning on the tall red-head in a flurry of purple, blue and yellow robes; she was furious. “Draco is my assistant and he’s here early by my request. He’s been looking after Harry for more than a week and Harry needs him now! Oh, and I know you’re upset, but if you touch me again, then I will have you thrown out.”

Weasley paled and moved closer to Granger. Draco was sure he looked like a gaping idiot himself. It was news to him that Healer Nightingale looked on him as an assistant, but he didn’t really have time to think about it right then. Once Weasley moved out of the way, he could see how totally wretched Harry looked.

“Oh, Harry, what have they done to you?” he murmured, half under his breath.

“He tried to drown himself... in his bath,” said Granger. Her voice was shaky and she sounded desperately sad.

Draco didn’t wait to hear anymore. He simply moved forward, climbed onto the bed, and took the trembling man into his arms. Harry was freezing, but as Draco closed his arms around the shivering man, Harry relaxed. Someone, he didn’t notice who, handed him a blanket and he wrapped it round Harry, absorbing some of the dampness still clinging to Harry’s skin.

Draco ignored the shocked comments and whispers from the onlookers. It seemed as if half the hospital had gathered in the ward, but all of his attention was focussed on Harry.

“What the hell did you think you were doing, you silly bugger?” Draco growled, running his hand along Harry’s back, lifting his chin to look in his eyes. “You could have died, daft prat!”

“S--s--sorry.” Harry was shivering even more violently now and Draco dried him a bit more before casting a warming charm. “T--t--thank you. I--I’m s--sorry.” he said through chattering teeth.

“So you should be; bloody idiotic, scar-headed git!”

Draco was finding it hard not to tremble himself. His mind could hardly process what had happened; Harry had tried to kill himself in his bath. The man had fought dragons and Death Eaters and the darkest wizard in centuries and he’d tried to drown himself in a tub of shallow water. Draco felt ice-cold inside. He could have lost Harry and, surprisingly, he found he couldn’t bear to even contemplate that possibility.

“Why, Harry, why did you do it?” he asked desperately.

Harry tried to burrow closer into Draco’s arms but Draco wouldn’t let him. “No,” he said firmly, “tell me why.”

“The voices,” Harry whispered. He was so close to Draco that he could see the freckles on Harry’s nose, the myriad shades of green in his remarkable eyes, and feel the breath on his cheek. “I... I... ca--can’t ignore them, not anymore.”

“Oh, Harry.” Draco pulled the other man closer so they were forehead to forehead. Cupping Harry’s cheeks with his hands, his thumbs brushed away stray tears as they trickled from the corners of Harry’s eyes.

“T--t--hey say I’m d--d--isgusting, that I don’t deserve to live,” Harry told him, his voice shaky.

“That’s not true. It. Is. Not. True.”

Harry was trembling even harder. “B--but they say it is! And they won’t stop. They won’t stop, Draco!” Harry pulled back a little and his hands lifted until his fists were against Draco’s shoulders. “I can’t make them stop.”

“Shhh!” Draco whispered, pulling Harry closer again until the man was practically sitting in his lap. “We’ll find a way,” he assured the other man. “Somehow we will, Harry. We’ll make the voices go away.”

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“You have no right to promise that!” Granger hissed. “We’ve been dealing with this for months and we haven’t managed to help him and he’s getting worse. This is the third suicide attempt in less than a month and you’re telling him you’ll make it all better! What gives you the right?”

“I had to tell him something!” Draco retorted. “Didn’t you see him? He needed to hear that!” Draco was on his feet; he was shaking again, but with anger this time.

They had withdrawn to Healer Nightingale's office, after Harry had taken his potions and finally settled into sleep. He was huddled under the covers with the Weasley matriarch sitting close by, knitting something particularly hideous. Draco could see them quite clearly from where he stood and he couldn't quite stop himself from checking every so often.

"Why do you care, anyway? You always hated Harry before," challenged Weasley whilst scowling fiercely at Draco.

"Yeah, Weasley, I did, and then he saved my life. Funnily enough, I can't seem to hate him as much as I used to, not since he stopped my arse from being fried! He's hurting and it isn't right. He shouldn't be in such pain."

"Look," Constance said calmly. "You all need to calm down, all of you." She glared around the room at them as if daring them to contradict her. "Now sit down and listen to me!"

"I understand that you care about your friend," she continued, much more softly, looking at Weasley and Granger in a way that, for her at least, was almost kindly. "And I realise that things were not good between you and Draco at school." She glanced at him as he gasped. "Oh don't worry, my loves, I did my research before I let Draco anywhere near Harry." Draco flinched and looked away as she continued. "But Draco has been on my ward now for over a year and I've grown very fond of him. He has been steadfast and honest and totally reliable – and what is more, he's wonderful with Harry."

Weasley made a humph noise.

"Just look at Harry if you don't believe me!" she snapped. "He looks so much better than a week ago: he's sleeping now, he's eating, he's put on weight."

"He tried to kill himself again," Weasley interjected.

"Not while Draco was here," Constance said firmly.

“Look, Healer Nightingale,” Granger began, and Draco found himself deeply gratified that she obviously hadn’t been asked to call Constance by her first name. “Harry and Malfoy were actually total enemies at school; they hated each other, it was far more than school-boy emnity. It isn’t easy for us to believe that he’s changed so much in such a short time.”

Draco could understand how Granger felt, he had changed so much. He couldn't dislike Harry as he once had done, not after everything that had happened, and when he stopped trying so hard to see him as an enemy he realised that he'd never actually hated him at all, really. He’d learned that he cared about people more than he ever thought he would, and not only that, he couldn’t hide his emotions in the way he’d once been able to do. People saw through you here, especially on this ward, however skilled at Occlumency you might be. So he’d stopped trying to hide things, there was no-longer any point and it was actually quite liberating not having to be quite so buttoned-up. Draco thought that he was more himself at St Mungo’s, than he’d ever been in his life. But he felt had to explain himself, try and make Harry’s friends understand what had happened to him, whether they understood or not, he owed it to Harry.

“The world changed,” Draco said, so quietly he could see Granger and Weasley lean forward to hear what he was saying, but it wouldn’t have been possible for him to speak more loudly. He just couldn’t have done it right then. “It turned out not to be the way I thought it was. Everything that I believed was erroneous, everything was wrong. I was so scared for so very long, all the time. I saw people tortured.” He couldn’t even look at Granger as he spoke. “Not as bad as being tortured, I know. I understand. But to see someone tortured? To hear them scream and beg, to not be able to do anything to prevent it, and then to have to relive their pain, their agony, time after time, knowing that you did nothing.” He closed his eyes.

“I was so scared that year, scared it would be my mother that V--v--oldemort tortured to death and not my Muggle studies teacher. I know I’ll always carry the guilt for her death, because I didn’t try to help her, because I chose my mother over her. I’m so sorry, so very sorry. All those things that happened, that I couldn’t stop.”

He looked at Granger, forcing himself to meet her gaze. “I’m sorry for what happened to you, to Luna, to everyone. It was a frantic time, a terrifying time. It was as if my brain had been frozen and I couldn’t think or plan, only react, and nothing, nothing I did seemed to help. I just couldn’t see how it would possibly end well for anyone.

“When we were in the Room of Requirement, me and Greg and Vince, I thought that was it. I thought I was going to die and I couldn’t help think that I deserved it. But then Harry saved me. I still dream of it. I dream that he saves Vince instead of me. I dream that I fall from his broom, but even more often I dream of how it felt to be saved, to be safe at last.

“And now he feels as lost as I did. I can see it in his eyes, feel it in his rapid pulse. I owe Harry Potter more than I can ever repay and if that means I have to sit up every night and hold him for the rest of my life, then I will. I want to.” His words left ripples in the silence of the room and nobody stirred.

Granger looked at him for the longest time, then she gave a very slight nod, obviously deciding something and began to speak. “We’ve tried everything. He didn’t tell us about it at first so I’m still not sure how long it’s been since he started hearing the voices, but I’d guess a year at least, perhaps even since the final battle, and it’s become much worse recently. We think he has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.” she paused and when Draco looked up he could see her eyes were damp with tears. “It’s not surprising really, considering everything he’s been through.”

“What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?” Draco asked.

“It’s a symtom of a severe stress experience. Sufferers disassociate, lose sight of reality, have terrifying flashbacks,” Constance explained. “But I’m not completely convinced that’s what he has.”

“I think it is,” Hermione interjected. “I’ve done a lot of reading, a lot of research and Harry definitely fits the profile.”

Constance gazed at the other woman coolly. “Yes, he does, but patients with PTSD have flashbacks. Flashbacks that are so real they completely subsume reality. I do not think that’s the case with Mr Potter.”

“But he hears his parents, his godfather, and Remus Lupin. Those are flashbacks...” Granger said, then she stopped speaking and thinned her lips, cutting a glance at Draco, not saying anything for a moment. “I think that’s what you should treat him for,” she finished firmly.

“We shall see,” Constance said, with equal finality.

That night Constance sent Draco to the hospital library. “You spend the most time with him,” she said. “See what you think.”

Draco did as he was told. He went to the cavernous rooms and wandered among the shelves and read about pathologies and prognoses and he wondered. Later, when Harry was restless again and Draco held him, he wondered some more.

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Chapter 3: Midnight on the Janus Thickey Ward

Chapter three

At three in the morning, when the ward was quiet once again, Harry surfaced to consciousness as he tended to do at that time of night.

“Hey,” Draco said softly as Harry’s eyes sprang open and he stiffened automatically in Draco’s arms.

“Hey,” Harry said with a soft smile. For a second or two when Harry first awoke his eyes would be clear and his forehead un-creased, then Draco’s heart would ache as Harry’s smooth countenance wrinkled

and his eyes would take on that, now familiar, haunted look.

“Is it my turn now?” Harry asked him, sitting up and shivering slightly in the chill of the ward as the covers fell away from shoulders that were still far too thin.

“No, it’s fine. Cuddle down, it’s early yet.”

Harry frowned at him. “It’s never my turn. You’re always the one that watches out for them. Why is that?” His eyes were still clear, reflecting honest curiosity instead of the fear and confusion that normally lurked there.

“Because I’m here to look after you.”

Harry licked his lips and tilted his head to one side, regarding Draco as if he were a singular peculiarity.

“Why?”

“It’s my job and I really don’t mind.”

“Why do you think I need to be looked after?” Harry asked.

“Because you keep hurting yourself. Look.” Draco took Harry’s hand in his own and tilted it so Harry could see his wrist, bandaged and criss-crossed with scars that had been left to heal without magic. Apparently, because Harry’s magic was in some sort of flux, magical healing had been limited as much as possible.

Harry studied the scars closely. “I know. I’ve seen them. I just can’t seem to stop myself. The voices just...” he paused momentarily. “So you think I’m mad, then?”

“I don’t know, Harry,” Draco said simply.

“The voices are real, you know. I know Ron and Hermione think I’ve got some sort of disorder, but I don’t. I hear them. I hear them all the time and sometimes it just gets to be too much and I’d do anything to get them to stop.” Harry’s eyes met his and they were as clear and untroubled as he had ever seen them.

Draco bit his lip and the hairs stood up on the back of his neck... Harry completely believed what he was saying. He didn’t believe the voices were auditory hallucinations or whatever else the books described them as. Draco wondered if Granger or Weasley had actually sat down and talked to Harry; he wondered if anyone had.

“Why do you do as they say then; why do you hurt yourself?” he asked. “It’s not like you’re some pushover. You never did as you were told at school, or let yourself be bullied into things. I should know – I tried hard enough. Remember Rita Skeeter and the Potter Stinks campaign?”

Harry laughed, an honest to goodness laugh, and Draco couldn’t help grinning back. “So you haven’t changed that much, Malfoy. I was getting worried for a while.”

“I live to please,” Draco replied, his grin widening.

Harry sighed and looked up at the ceiling and then back at Draco. “I don’t know what to tell you,” he finally said. “Sometimes I can almost tune them out and they seem more like whispers in another room. I can ignore them, if only for a while. But most of the time they block out everything else; it’s like drowning in vitriol! The things they say to me.”

“What do they say?”

Harry’s eyes met his and Draco was startled to see that they were wet with tears. “I can’t tell you.”

Draco grabbed his hand and squeezed it tightly. “I know some of it already. I know they tell you that you’re a killer; they try and make you feel guilty.”

“I am guilty, Draco.” Harry’s tears still glittered, but they didn’t fall. His gaze was steady again.

“No, you’re not. Look, there are plenty of people who have reason to feel far more guilty than you do, than you should.” All at once Draco found he couldn’t meet Harry’s eyes. “Including me,” he finished quietly.

“Nah, not you,” Harry said, grabbing Draco’s hand and catching it in his own. “You were... erm... a victim of circumstance?”

“Don’t talk such crap, Potter!” Draco grabbed his hand back as if Harry had burned him. He was far too agitated to handle being touched right then. “I was a bigoted little arsehole! I know. I get that. People tell me that all the time. But I tell them to shut the fuck up, and I get on with it anyway. Shit! You didn’t let anybody get you down before, not even V-voldemort could stop you. Why are you giving up now?”

“But I can’t fight anymore, it’s just too much. They say I’m disgusting, filthy, dirty, that I killed them, that I don’t deserve to live.”

He’d had a good idea what the voices were saying to Harry, telling him to do. He knew they called him names, they persuaded him to hurt himself, they tortured him. Hearing Harry’s words and seeing how much the other man was suffering, Draco’s heart ached for the young man resting in his arms.

“Who are they, Harry? Who says that to you?”

“My mum and dad,” Harry whispered, his voice soft and trembly. “It’s my fault they died; they are so ashamed of me.” He closed his eyes.

“But they died so that you would live, didn’t they? I mean I know I was a git to you about it when we were kids, but they loved you. They protected you. Why would they condemn you for that?”

Harry shook his head, as if he didn’t know, as if he didn’t want to talk about it anymore. “Remus and Sirius are there, too,” Harry continued. “Sirius, was my godfather, he says I’m perverted, sordid and repulsive.”

“Sirius, Sirius Black? One of your voices is Sirius Black? He’s your godfather? I didn’t know that.” Draco’s voice was squeaky with surprise. Harry’s gaze met his again and he nodded wearily. “Sirius Black says you’re perverted? He was my mother’s cousin. He would never call you perverted or repulsive and certainly not sordid. Sirius was a total slut; he’d sleep with anyone. His name was burnt off the family tapestry because he was banging Lupin. I can’t imagine him telling you that you were perverted. Why would he?”

Harry looked deeply puzzled for a moment. “Remus and Sirius were gay?”

“Yeah, well, sort of,” Draco continued. “From what Aunt Bella said, Black would have anything that had a pulse. So why would he call you perverted?”

“But the things he says to me!” Harry blurted out in anguish. “Because I... because I like boys!”

Draco scoffed, “For Merlin’s sake, Potter! From what I’ve heard, he’d be cheering you on, giving you tips! Besides which, there’s nothing wrong with liking boys. That’s fucking Muggle morality, that is. We’re wizards, for Merlin’s sake. We can be male, female, we can even fuck a number of different species. Why else do you think there are all those half-giants and Veelas and sidhe? Don’t you think a pureblood like Black would know that? He had to bend the broomstick even further of course and have a long term relationship with a werewolf, that was the final straw for the Blacks. But a little boy-on-boy action wouldn’t even make him raise an eyebrow.”

“Oh,” said Harry looking more hopeful. “Are you sure? Cos he wasn’t like that when I was a kid, he was the nearest thing I had to a p—parent and there was a time...” He stopped and all at once his expression

became desperately sad. “But he died, it hurts so much that he thinks I’m disgusting.”

“Trust me, he wouldn’t.”

“Really?”

“Really!” Draco said and he smiled. Harry looked so vulnerable, so sweet. He started to close the distance between them, because Harry’s mouth looked so very kissable and the guy had just come out as gay, or possibly bi, and Draco was a Slytherin who had just spent the last few nights snuggling with him, then he stopped himself. He couldn’t initiate such a thing, he was meant to be helping Harry, that would be taking advantage of someone when they were vulnerable, however much Harry might seem to want it. For a few seconds they simply sat and looked at one another the air between them seeming heavy with potential, but then Harry covered his ears with both his hands, threw his head back and began to scream.

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It took nearly an hour for Harry to calm down and almost as long for the other patients on the Janus Thickey Ward to go back to sleep. Constance, with Draco’s help, had to give him a calming potion and another small dose of Dreamless Sleep. Draco had held Harry whilst he screamed and railed at the voices and pulled at his ears and fought like a wild thing and now Draco felt exhausted.

“I don’t understand,” Draco mused a short time later, when Harry was finally calm and was curled up against him again, not yet asleep but quiet at least. He’d been murmuring to himself in a low tone, or maybe he was talking to the voices once more, but Draco hoped that at least part of him was paying attention.

“Hmm?”

“Why would your parents say such horrible things to you? Why would they hurt you like that when I try to defend you?” He thought maybe he should just shut up, that maybe he’d caused enough trouble for

one night. But he found he couldn't help himself, it didn't make sense to him, none of it did.

Harry was staring around the room again, fearful once more. "Dunno," he shrugged. "Maybe they hate me?"

His voice broke slightly when he said the word hate, but other than that he seemed strangely unmoved. Just for a second, Draco saw how awful it must have been for Harry to be worn down, day after day, to have detestation spewed at him. He had never known his parents, had he? He'd grown up with those Muggles, Draco had read about. Everyone had, after the war, when The Daily Prophet decided to do a series on Harry, show the world just how much their hero had sacrificed for them. But to have people, who provided the only love he'd apparently ever known, say such things. Well, it must surely tear him apart. Then something occurred to Draco.

"Harry, how do you know it's them? How do you know it's their voices you are hearing?"

But Harry didn't answer him, the potions they'd dosed him with had obviously, finally, had an effect and he was asleep.

But Draco was puzzled. Granger had said Harry recognised the voices and Harry had obviously seemed to know them. He'd told Draco who they were. But whilst that would undoubtedly be true for his godfather and for the werewolf, how could Harry, who hadn't known his parents, possibly recognise their voices? How could he be having flashbacks if he'd been too young to really remember them when they'd died?

Draco was sure he wasn't going to sleep that night. His head was spinning and there was no way he was getting any help from Harry, not right then at least. The voices told Harry he was filthy and disgusting because he liked boys rather than girls, but that didn't make sense. Draco knew for a fact that his mother's cousin had a colourful reputation. Harry hadn't known that, until Draco had told him, which led him to the obvious conclusion that Harry's voices were truly in his head, that they were born of self-loathing. But that still didn't feel right and he couldn't quite believe it somehow. The PSTD that Granger had talked about, he was certain that Harry was not suffering from that. Harry wasn't having flashbacks, because Draco doubted that Sirius Black, or indeed the werewolf, Lupin had ever said such things to him. He sighed and leaned back against the pillows piled on the bed behind him. Harry's breaths had evened out and Draco welcomed the weight of the other man against him. Nevertheless, the mystery wouldn't let him sleep.

As the night wore on Draco became aware that the Longbottoms had woken again. He could hear the couple whispering in the darkness. The previous disturbance must be making it hard for them to settle down. He wondered where Constance was and decided he'd better tend to them, not wanting to leave them in distress. Still deep in thought, he gently moved Harry aside and shuffled to the other side of the darkened ward. But when he got to the Longbottoms... there was no doubt that they were asleep, fast asleep, both curled in their beds, faces more relaxed than they ever were in the daytime. Neither of them possessed enough guile to pretend otherwise.

It was silent tonight, the ward was. Harry and the Longbottoms were the only ones here, yet in the quietude of the near empty room he could still hear whispering. In some confusion, Draco paused and listened. All at once, his Dark Mark, which hadn't bothered him since the death of the man who'd branded it into his skin, began to tingle and burn.

Draco returned to Harry's bed and sat stunned while holding the young man tight in his arms. Had he actually heard the whispers? There had definitely been no one around the ward, inside or out. Were these Harry's voices? Could they be real? He'd heard them himself, definitely heard them and his mark had burned... he knew without a doubt Voldemort was dead, so what on earth could be causing the mark to burn? Draco spent the rest of the night in thought, holding a sleeping Harry, until dawn peeked over the windowsills of the Janus Thickey Ward.

****

In the morning Constance called him into her office for a cup of tea, a slice of fruit cake, and a debrief session. During his night vigil, Draco had decided not to mention his little adventure just yet. He needed time to think, to process and understand what his experience might mean – and to come up with an explanation that wouldn't land him in the bed next to Harry.

"Are you okay, honey?" she asked, sympathy shining in her chocolate brown eyes.

"Me?" Draco asked, feeling far more tired than he had in ages. "Yeah, I'm fine."

“Last night was a little stressful, wasn’t it?”

Draco started for a second, thinking she meant him before he realized she was speaking of Harry’s outburst, then he sighed and nodded.

“Do you know what happened?”

“We were talking. Harry was telling me about his voices and then...” Draco stopped. What had actually happened? He tried to process what had occurred for a moment or two and then he continued.

“Do you know what Harry’s voices are saying to him?” he finally asked

“He feels guilt over the deaths of people he knew in the war, and he has issues with his sexuality.” Constance said.

Draco nodded, he wasn’t sure that he should share Harry’s secrets with Constance, even if she was a Healer, they were Harry’s secrets after all. But she obviously had some idea about what was upsetting Harry, so maybe it would be all right.

“We were talking and laughing.” Draco continued. “He told me a bit about what the voices were saying to him, how he couldn’t shut them out. He said they were saying things about his sexuality, that his godfather was telling him he was disgusting. Did you know Harry’s godfather was Sirius Black?”

Constance didn’t seem to, as she shook her head in a negative gesture.

“He thinks that his godfather – the very same Sirius Black who supposedly slept his way through half the magical world – he thinks that’s who’s been telling him these awful things. But Harry can’t have known his godfather that well, can he? How would he know what the man thought? And even if he did know him well, he was a kid when Black died, Black wouldn’t have said such things to him then, would he? And

if he didn't really know his parents how could he be having flashbacks peopled by them?"

Constance's eyes sparkled. "Well reasoned, Draco. I don't think he's having flashbacks, either, I believe that you're right. I do think he's hearing voices though. His voices will say whatever Harry thinks," Constance said. "It's actually his conscience, his own self-disgust, that's talking to him. He's ascribing it to someone else, that's all. If Harry thinks there is something wrong with his sexuality, then he'll put those thoughts into words, into the mouths of those he knew or those who should have cared for him." She didn't continue. Although Harry's childhood had been laid pretty bare thanks to the poisoned pen of Rita Skeeter, she left it unsaid between them that there were obviously still things they didn't know, the Black connection being an obvious one.

When he thought about it, it seemed a logical conclusion to Draco that Harry would very likely project his fears and uncertainties in such a manner, anyone would. 'It's totally obvious that Harry is as nuts as they say he is,' Draco told himself. 'Except he isn't!' He just knew Harry wasn't insane. After all, he'd heard...well, he'd heard something the night before, unless of course that had been a dream?

"But Harry told me the voices are real; they're not in his head." Draco said. "He really hears them and I... I believe him, C-constance." He tried out her name, to see if he'd be rebuked, but he wasn't.

Instead she smiled at him and said, "That's not likely though, is it, Draco?" It was not a rebuke but it was a denial.

"Why not?" Draco asked her softly. "I read those books you suggested, and what Harry's been going through doesn't quite fit any of the prognoses. I don't know why, call it intuition if you want, just a stupid feeling, but... but, I still think the voices are real."

Draco didn't know why he believed this so strongly; after all, he didn't have any real evidence to back it up. In fact, all the evidence, such as it was, pointed to the contrary and supported with perfect sense what Constance and the others were saying. But Draco was sure he was right; he suspected his belief came from those few whispered words and a stinging dark mark, and one other reason. He'd known Potter for years and the Gryffindor was a lousy liar. Potter was telling the truth and Draco felt it, deep in his bones. There must be some way of proving that Harry was being haunted by something and Draco was going to find it.

“You should head home, kiddo, and get some sleep,” Constance suggested gently to Draco, smiling at him. “You’ve had such an eventful night and it looks like you didn’t get much sleep. And, Draco, perhaps you should stop talking to Harry about his voices, we’ll get one of the Healers to talk to him instead.

Draco took the rebuke as he thought it was meant, and not as a sign of personal dislike on her part toward himself. Still, he couldn’t help the twinge of sadness that assailed him at the thought he might have disappointed her and that she did not take his opinions any more seriously than the others had.

None of this, however, made a dent in his belief that Harry was telling the truth. Draco blithely ignored the fact that everyone except himself thought Potter was several bristles short of a broomstick. Not even for the chance of keeping Constance’s regard would Draco agree with them. He’d always been a stubborn git, and it wasn’t the first time in his life he’d gone against the grain, nor would it be the last. He was not changing his mind... that he knew for sure. The only problem was how to prove that he was right?

****

It was a bright, sunny day and yet Draco, despite his fatigue from the night before, found he could not sleep. Oh, he tried. He returned to his room and took the hot bath as Drucilla suggested, had some hot chocolate and then fell into bed. But sleep would not come. He lay there for hours and watched the autumn sunlight bleed through the blue velvet curtains, catching the crystal his landlady had hung there, sparking rainbows that danced and rippled across the ceiling. In the end, he gave it up and got out of bed and went for a walk.

It seemed strange to be outside in the sunlight for a change. The hospital was full of long, dark corridors and high windows that were hard to see out of. Draco had been so tired the last few days, after sitting up with Harry all night, that he had gone straight to bed upon reaching home. But the day was so lovely Draco drank in the gloriousness of it. He wandered for a while on the nearby common, feeling the warmth of the sun on his face, watching the children play and the occasional dog chasing a slobber-covered ball or a chewed-up stick. Then he saw a girl, a Muggle, running slowly along a path. He seemed to remember this was called jogging, an activity Muggles did to get exercise. She had something in her ears that was attached to some wires which ran to a little box clipped to her belt.

Draco sat on a bench and watched her for a while. The box, or maybe the things in her ears, were making

tinny little sounds, like the whispers in another room that Harry mentioned yesterday. It was music. A man walking his dog passed Draco and he had one of the box thingys, too. Draco's eyes narrowed and he watched the man. The low thumping sounds coming from the man's box were softer, but still audible if Draco listened carefully enough. Then a boy sat beside him. He was holding a box in his hands as well and wires were running up from it to his ears. The music was louder from the boy's music-making box and Draco formed a plan. He was going to get Harry one of those things, those box things, because if the voices weren't inside Harry's head, if they were external, then maybe, just maybe, one of the boxes of music might help, might give him some peace.

It took most of the rest of the day to sort it out. First of all, he had to speak to one of the Muggles wearing a music box and find out what they were called (personal CD players) and where the heck he could get one. Then he'd had to track one down, with the help of Drucilla, and buy it with the little money he had saved.

The 'voluntary' restricted access to his bank account, which forced him to live on the tiny stipend he'd been allowed by the Ministry's Department of Wizarding Finance, Office for Criminal Rehabilitation and Atonement, meant that he had very little spare cash. Luckily, his job, and its unsociable hours, left him no real social life at all and nothing to spend any money on, which meant he could just afford to buy Harry a personal CD player... and so he did.

Then he had to track down Granger and ask her to help him charm the dratted thing so Harry could use it. Drucilla didn't know any spells that could make something Muggle work in a magical place, and St Mungo's was full of magic. He was sure he knew one person who could help him, though. Even though he was reluctant to ask her, luckily she wasn't too hard to find and she took his Floo call. Hermione obviously thought Draco had gone mad but she did know a spell that would allow the CD player to work around magic, even going so far as to lend him some of her own, personal CDs she thought Harry might like.

"What are you going to do when it doesn't work, Draco?" she finally commented, when the charm was completed, looking and sounding quite smug.

"What are you going to do when it does?" retorted Draco.

But later, standing at the door of the ward, he felt less confident, even a bit stupid. Harry, though,

seemed pleased to see him.

“Hey,” he greeted Draco, sitting up and smiling. He had a book in his hands, not that he seemed to be reading it.

“Hi,” Draco answered with a smile of his own. “How are you tonight?”

Harry shrugged, his smile fading slightly. “You know,” he responded a little dully. “Same old, same old.”

“Would you mind if I came and sat by you?” Draco asked.

Harry looked surprised. “No, of course not; why would I mind?”

Then it was Draco’s turn to shrug. “Well, I did cause that er... incident last night.”

“No you didn’t!” Harry sounded indignant. He moved over and patted the bed beside him.

Draco sat down. “But last night...”

“The hissy fit I had? Nah, that wasn’t your fault. I’ve had a number of those, believe me,” Harry told him, rolling his eyes. “It was really good, the way we talked last night.” He sighed, “No-one listens to me like that anymore. They all think that I’m totally batshit. You listened to me and it was really nice.” Harry’s eyes wrinkled and the corners and his mouth curved, once again, into a rather sweet smile.

“How are the voices?”

Harry sighed once more, “They’re there. Not too bad right now.” He grinned ruefully. “Like someone

shouting in another room."

"Ah," said Draco, "well, today, I... erm... I might have found something that will help."

The hopeful, pleading look that crossed Harry's face made Draco's heart ache. Draco didn't know what to say, so he thrust the box into Harry's hands.

"I got you this."

Harry's jaw dropped. Draco thought this was something people only wrote about in books, he never expected to see it actually happen in real life.

"Wow!" Harry sputtered. "Oh, wow! Thanks, Draco. This is just... this is... wow!" He held the CD player in his hands as if it was a precious treasure, as if it was the best thing he'd ever seen. "Do you know what this means? God! stupid question, of course you do. It means you believe me."

'Shouts in another room', that's what Harry had called it, 'Shouts'! Suddenly, Draco heard them, surging from nowhere, howling in indignation, voices shrieking and yelling with anger. Harry flinched at the sudden surge of noise and almost dropped the music box. And Draco couldn't help thinking, if the voices were loud to him then what must it feel like to Harry? Draco grabbed at the CD player and frantically helped Harry unwrap it. Together they tore off the paper wrapping and fumbled with the shiny hard cover that encased the disc Drucilla had showed him how to play. She'd given him a selection of music, too, some of which he'd even recognized. Draco had always assumed they were the product of wizard musicians, but Drucilla had assured him that this was not so. The soothing, inspiring music had, in fact, been created by Muggle composers: Mozart, Beethoven, Bach... men who'd had not an ounce of magic between them.

Draco chose Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Ode to Joy. Fingers fumbling, they tore at the clear wrappings on the CD case. Harry's breath hitched and came out in little panicky puffs. He was beginning to tremble, ever more violently. But together, somehow, they managed. They got the earphones (Draco had learned the rather odd name from Hermione) onto Harry's ears and then Draco pushed the button marked 'play'.

Harry relaxed, almost at once. He breathed more deeply and his lips curled in a shallow but satisfied smile. He leaned back against Draco and the tinny echo seeping from the headphones told Draco the music was beginning to swell and drown out the cacophony of voices haunting Harry.

Harry took Draco's hand and squeezed it, his eyes sparkling with delight. "It works!" he said, far more loudly than he needed to, for Draco to hear him. "You did it!" Then he gave Draco a hug and pulled him close. "Thank you," he breathed in Draco's ear, "thank you, Draco."

Draco sighed with relief. It worked, it fucking worked. He had been right all along and, as Harry almost glowed with happiness, he tried very hard to ignore the voices. No longer whispering, they were shouting now, though still from a distance, and he could clearly hear what they were saying to him: 'Slut, murderer, Death Eater whore.'

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Chapter 4: Midnight on the Janus Thickey Ward

Chapter four

Draco watched Harry from the window in Constance's office. He was on his bed, reading a book - actually reading it. He sat cross-legged, idly twiddling his hair while his knee was joggling a little as he tried to keep time with whatever music was playing on his CD player. Beside him rested a notepad Draco had found on which he had earlier been making little sketches. He looked happier and more relaxed, certainly more contented, than he'd been for a very long time.

"You were right," Constance commented, plying him with more tea, Vanilla Roobos, this time strangely matched with a plate of sugar-powdered shortbread.

“Makes a change,” Draco admitted with a shrug. He put a piece of the sugary biscuit in his mouth and sucked it, softening it a little to enjoy the feeling of the sweetness oozing over his teeth and tongue, taking him right back to childhood and parcels from home.

Constance peered over her mug at him. “I sense that I’ve prodded a nerve?”

Draco sighed. “I believed some bloody stupid things... once upon a time.”

“Didn’t we all, sweetheart, at one time or another? At least you wised-up, before it was too late.” Constance’s smile was wry and Draco wondered how she had messed up in her time. But somehow, the fact she was prepared to share weaknesses with him made it easier for him to tell her everything.

“I’m hearing the voices now, too.”

Constance’s eyebrows raised, making their way towards her hairline. “And you didn’t tell me because?”

“I didn’t fancy being confined to the bed next to Harry’s.”

Constance laughed. “I like you, Draco Malfoy. I think you are going to go far.” She said, then she leaned over and patted Draco’s hand and then sat back in her chair regarding him with narrowed eyes. “So, what do you think is wrong with Harry? Where are the voices coming from and why are you hearing them too?”

“I don’t know,” answered Draco frowning. “But I do know they seem to be attached to Harry, because I can’t hear them now. Yet, when I’m near Harry, I can. They scream obscenities,” Draco shuddered, “horrible things. No wonder Harry was so...” he couldn’t think how to finish the sentence.

“You think Harry is being haunted by malevolent spirits, or demons of some sort?”

“Yeah,” Draco said softly. “Yeah, I do.”

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“So, you want to tell me about it?” Drucilla was waiting when he got back to his room and at his headshake. “Want some breakfast?”

Draco often wondered whether he’d have made it through the last year without the help and support of Drucilla. As his first year of penance had progressed, he’d become increasingly fond of her. In some ways, she reminded him of the Divination teacher at Hogwarts; Draco struggled to remember her name, what was it again? Trelawny, that was it! Drucilla had the look of her, all flowing scarves and wild curls. At other times, however, she seemed very sharp and focussed and almost reminded him of McGonagall – except that Drucilla actually seemed to like Draco. She was very different from his mother and he wondered yet again what they possibly saw in each other that had allowed their friendship to endure for so many years.

“Bad day on the wards, love?” Drucilla asked him as she served him a pile of fluffy yellow scrambled eggs.

Draco shrugged, loading his fork and starting to eat. It tasted delicious. His landlady, having no house-elves, did all the cooking herself. She’d even taught him a few recipes and he was rather looking forward, with some degree of delight, to showing his father his newly acquired Muggle skills. Lucius would absolutely, and with extreme prejudice, hate seeing his son cook. But, Draco thought chuckling to himself, he couldn’t seem to help it, he delighted in aggravating his father whenever he could these days. Drucilla thought Draco was still angry with his father and Draco knew she was right, but he loved to needle his Lucius anyway. It made him feel better about things, loads better.

Draco had gradually discovered it was nice to come home to someone who showed an interest in what you were doing and he found he liked telling Drucilla about his day. She’s always managed to impart good advice and she always leant a sympathetic ear, especially when Fanthorpe was at his worst. Once he’d shovelled in enough eggs to keep his stomach rumbling to a minimum, he began to tell her about what had happened with Harry that day. She’d already known about the CD player of course, but not why he’d needed it, or whether or not it had worked as Draco had hoped. Drucilla sat opposite him at the little table, cupping a mug of tea with one hand, leaning her cheek on the other.

“It does sound like he’s troubled by some sort of malevolent force. You’ll need to investigate it, because until you have some idea what the spirits are and where they came from, there’s little we can do. I can give you some stones for protection. I have a garnet pendant I can give you to wear and one for your friend. I have a large amethyst that we can place in his cubicle, but I can’t do more until we have more to go on.”

Draco didn’t quite know what to say. While he was very fond of Drucilla, he didn’t think her stone collection was going to be of any use and he doubted whether Constance would let her anywhere near Harry anyway.

Drucilla grinned at him. “Well, dear boy, I can see your doubt written large.” Draco blushed. He hadn’t realised that his thoughts were that obvious. “Don’t worry, Draco. I think you’re probably rather good at hiding your emotions on the whole. It’s just that I’ve come to know you rather well in the last year. I think I’m possibly one of the few people who can help your friend. I’m a Crystalmancer, you see.”

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“It’s an honour to meet you, again, Crystalmancer Beryllis,” greeted Constance, standing and shaking Drucilla’s hand warmly. Drucilla nodded and smiled at Constance somewhat smugly, and Draco wondered if these two women already knew each other, there was certainly something between them.

Constance’s office was already full of people and she continued to make introductions, but Draco barely noticed who was there. He felt a growing need to check on Harry before he was escorted to a chair. He could see the young Gryffindor was lying on his bed, staring up at the stars through the high window. Harry was playing with his hair and he looked so wistful, so lonely, that Draco wanted to go to him, hold him.

“So why are we all here?” It was Weasley who’d spoken, pulling Draco’s attention away from the person he really wanted to be with.

“Because Harry isn’t mad, he never was,” Draco stated evenly.

Weasley snorted, loudly.

“Do you think Harry is insane, Mr. Weasley?” Constance’s voice was chilly.

Weasley blushed, deeply. “No, I’m not saying that. He just sounds so smug.” Ron jerked his head in Draco’s suggestion, shooting him a look of dislike.

“Hmm, do you think so?” Constance continued. “I must say I have to disagree. I think Draco is right and has been all along. He stuck to his beliefs even when nobody else agreed with him and gave us evidence that Harry’s voices are indeed external.”

“He should never have been allowed to work so closely with Harry Potter. He’s a Death Eater!” Fanthorpe spat the words into the room, his scowl at Draco even worse than Weasley’s.

“That will do!” Constance whirled to face her audience. She seemed to be quivering with rage. “Draco is my assistant. He has been wonderful with Mr. Potter and if it were not for him, then we would not be having this meeting, and Harry would be...”

“He might not even be alive.” It was Granger who’d spoken, her voice soft and a little trembly. “I think we owe Mal--Draco, a thank you.” Her gaze met his and she smiled at him, somewhat nervously.

“I think you all do.” Another voice said.

The man who was seated at the head of the table had spoken this time. Draco hadn’t really noticed him before, he’d been too distracted staring at Harry. But he wasn’t too surprised that Kingsley Shacklebolt was here. Before he’d become interim Minister for Magic, he had been Head Auror, and since the person they were here to discuss was Harry Potter, Shacklebolt obviously felt he had a vested interest.

“I understand this young man has been dogged in his belief that something other than severe stress was afflicting Harry and has searched for ways to help him.” Shacklebolt continued, “ Those who treated Mr Malfoy badly owe him an apology. I think that’s especially pertinent to you, Healer Fanthorpe. I trusted you understood, when Mr. Malfoy was placed in your care, that you were supposed to treat him well, encourage him to become reformed. Constance tells me, instead, that you showered him with petty cruelties, but that he has constantly and silently risen above them.”

Fanthorpe flushed and looked away.

The Minister continued again, “We owe Harry everything... our freedom, perhaps even our very lives... and I, for one, will do anything I can to safeguard his well-being.”

Draco felt like shaking himself. He was being defended by the Minister of Magic?

The room was silent for a moment whilst Shacklebolt waited for Fanthorpe to say something. But it was Weasley who broke the silence.

“Yeah, you’re right, Kingsley,” he blurted, surprising Draco with the fact that he was on first name terms with the Minister. The red-head stood and came over to where Draco was seated. “I still dislike you and think you are a slimy git, but you really did make things so much better for Harry. Thanks.”

Draco didn’t know what to say, he simply held out his hand and Weasley crushed it in his ham-like fist. Then turned around and returned to his seat. This was undoubtedly the most peculiar meeting Draco had ever attended.

Shacklebolt glared at Fanthorpe, who kept his own gaze fixed firmly on the floor. Draco could see the barely suppressed anger, the way the man’s jaw worked as he tried to control himself.

“Nothing to say for yourself?” the Minister finally queried. “Right, then, I think you have duties from which we have kept you long enough.”

Draco was sure that his jaw had dropped as far has Harry's had the other day, as he watched the suitably chastised Healer slam out of the office. He thought Weasley and Granger looked almost as surprised as he felt.

"Right," Constance piped up, "now that he's out of the picture, what does everyone say to a nice cup of tea?"

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"But what is Crystalmancy?" Granger asked, looking a little nonplussed, presumably because here was something she knew nothing about. Draco couldn't hold it against her, though (whereas, at one time, he would have rejoiced at her discomfort). He'd been living in Drucilla's house for more than a year and hadn't realised who, or what, his landlady was.

"It's not Divination, fortune-telling, is it?" Granger continued, looking disgusted. "You're not going to be crystal ball gazing, I hope?"

"That's Crystallomancy!" corrected Draco, causing Granger to blush hotly.

"It is easy to confuse the two," Drucilla told the girl, causing her blush to deepen. "A Crystalmancer works with the magic in stones. We read the stones and weave their magic into talismans for protection and healing. There aren't many of us left."

"There aren't any as able as you are, Dru," Constance said. "We're lucky to have you."

The two women smiled at one another and all at once Draco knew, simply knew, that he'd been right and that they were more than just acquaintances.

“Are you able to tell what’s affecting Harry, though?” Kingsley asked.

“I might well be able to, but I suggest we do some research first,” Drucilla said. “We need to know whether Harry has been exposed to Dark magic.”

“Well, Voldemort!” Granger commented, at exactly the same time as Weasley interjected,

“Harry wouldn’t do anything, Dark!”

“I’ve read about some of the Dark magic that He-who-was-not-named practiced – the report that you showed me, Kingsley. However, I think Harry’s death destroyed that particular evil.”

“Wait a minute!” Draco interrupted. “What do you mean, Harry’s death? When did Harry die?”

Nobody spoke for a moment and then Kingsley said, “Are you going to tell him?”

Granger sighed, “It’s hard to trust him... no, it was hard.” She looked directly at Draco. “I do know how much you’ve done for Harry in the last few days. I believe you are trying to be different from the way you were. It’s just...” She turned to look at Shacklebolt. “Do you really think it’s okay?”

“He wouldn’t be here if I didn’t.”

Draco didn’t know what to think, what to say. There were obviously things he didn’t know about that had happened at the last battle; things hardly anyone knew. But Harry had died? Harry had died!”

“He-who-was-not-named, created something called, Horcruxes, Draco. Do you know what they are?” It was Constance who’d spoken. Granger’s eyes were wide and Weasley looked like he swallowed something disgusting.

Draco nodded, feeling sick. He did know what they were, having been privy to discussions involving the deepest, Darkest magics known, when the Dark Lord had been in residence at the Manor. But what did such things, what did such evil have to do with Harry?

“Harry was a Horcrux,” Kingsley asserted bluntly. “In order to be able to fight Voldemort, he had to allow the Horcrux to be extinguished; he had to choose to die.”

Draco felt icy-cold. Harry had chosen to die? Harry had been polluted by something so foul? How had he been able to resist, how had he not become, Dark himself?

“Do you think it was that?” Granger asked. “Do you think that when Harry died he somehow brought something with him... when he came back, I mean?”

“It seems plausible,” mused Drucilla, but she sounded doubtful.

“But why would that be the case?” Granger said, “Surely, Harry was in a good place when he chose to came back. It was a good choice. He must have come from somewhere good, somewhere without demons or evil spirits?” she sounded distressed.

“I think it was the Resurrection Stone.” Weasley’s spoke next, his voice was wooden, sad.

“The what?” Constance questioned just as Drucilla blurted,

“But that’s a legend, surely. Isn’t it?”

“No, it exists, existed,” Weasley continued. “Harry had it with him when he went into the Forbidden Forest. He said it enabled him to see his mum and dad, and Sirius and Remus.”

So that's how Harry recognized his parents voices, Draco thought, distracted as he processed what he was hearing. He'd actually seen them at some point. He'd used the Resurrection Stone.

"But they're who he thinks are haunting him!" Draco said, he could barely sit still. He'd heard the stories, of course he had, Beedle the Bard. His mother had read the stories to him when he'd been just a little boy. He had thought them to be just stories, fairytales; he'd never dreamt they might be true.

"What did you do for a cleansing ceremony?" Drucilla asked, she looked as eager as Draco did.

"A what?" Granger said.

Weasley blushed a dull brick red. "We didn't do one," he whispered, his voice low and raspy.

"Well, there you are then," Drucilla sounded triumphant. "There's our answer... where they're coming from... the spirits, because they are spirits, malevolent ones. Something as powerful as the Resurrection Stone, must be treated with respect, it must be used carefully. It resurrects the dead, pierces the veil, and sometimes, other things, less savoury things than the shades of loved ones come through. In this case, these spirits attached themselves to Harry and the fact that there was never a cleansing or protection ceremony made it easy for them. Slowly but surely they moved in on their victim. They assumed the identities of his loved ones who have passed-over, knowing it would cause him the most pain and anguish possible. They pushed him, tortured him and if he had given in to their taunts and succeeded in taking his own life, we might have lost him forever."

Granger let out a sob and buried her face in her hands. "We didn't know." She said, her voice muffled, none of us, we didn't know."

Draco suspected that Weasley'd had some idea, had known that something should have been done, but he couldn't blame the other man really. They were kids after all, weren't they? There should have been adults looking after them, advising them. But the red-haired man looked as stricken as Granger was.

“So what do we do?” Constance asked.

“Well, first I’ll do a reading, just to be sure. But if we are right, if he is besieged by malevolent spirits, then we could do a banishment spell tonight, stones are, after all my area of expertise. I think we have a good chance of cleansing him, even after all this time.”

“We do?” Granger’s said, dropping her hands and staring at Drucilla, her eyebrows were raised; she didn’t look like she was quite ready to trust Draco’s landlady, but seemed willing to give her the benefit of the doubt, for now at least.

“Yes, tonight would be perfect. It’s clear and bright and the moon is still quite full enough to help charge the gemstones as they do their work, and, of course, it is waning, which is the right phase for banishment. Tonight would be fine.”

“Well,” said Constance, standing and moving towards the doorway, “there’s no time like the present. Let’s go and explain all of this to Harry.”

Draco stayed put and watched through the window again. Shacklebolt and Weasley also remained behind, chatting quietly in their seats, mostly in whispers and probably about him.

He tuned them out and watched Granger, Constance, and Drucilla walk along the ward towards Harry’s bed. Harry was still lying on a pile of pillows and still gazing up at the window, foot joggling along with whatever tune was playing on his CD player. He looked content and not nearly as wistful as earlier. “I did that,” Draco told himself. “I helped, at least. I made them see Harry wasn’t ill.”

Harry looked up to see his visitors and his face broke into a smile. He looked happy to see them and, even from the confines of Constance’s office, Draco could see how much better he was. True, he was still pale, still had dark circles under his eyes and he was far too thin, but he no longer had the dejected, defeated look he’d had since entering St. Mungo’s. Draco also knew Harry would not be getting better overnight, after all, he’d been tortured by the voices for a very long time, but at least he had a chance now.

As Draco observed them, Granger started writing in a notebook she was holding whilst gesturing to Drucilla and nodding and smiling. Then Harry sat up and read the note and held out his hand to Drucilla. It was as if they were all in a little bubble of life and he was on the outside looking in, once again... and he tried very hard not to mind.

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Chapter 5: Midnight on the Janus Thickey Ward

A/N. This chapter is quite a long one, but I warn you, there is a cliffie!

Chapter five

“You did a good job, Mr. Malfoy.” Shacklebolt’s voice at his shoulder startled him, so much so that he didn’t dissemble or pretend false modesty, which would normally have been his first instinct.

“T--thanks, Minister.”

“It’s good to finally meet you, my sister told me a lot about you.” Shacklebolt said.

“Your sister?” Draco said, wishing he could be more composed, that he didn’t sound like such an idiot, stuttering like a second year in front of the Minister of Magic. After all, the man had the power to rescind Draco’s community service, if he wished, and send him to Azkaban.

Shacklebolt smiled, wide and happy, chocolate-brown eyes twinkling, and suddenly Draco knew exactly who his sister was; the resemblance was striking. “Constance has been watching you for months.” Shacklebolt told him, “She thinks you would be a really good Healer and she’s going to recommend you for training.”

“Oh!” Draco’s said, his voice sounded feeble, even to his own ears.

“You have made mistakes in the past, significant mistakes, but I believe that you regret them most sincerely. I am convinced that you were encouraged to believe as you did, by your father and your upbringing.”

Draco blushed, his father had been lucky to escape prison, it had been Harry’s championing of his mother which had kept his father at home, albeit under a sort of house-arrest. Draco also suspected that many of the restrictions that he was under were aimed at preventing him from going home and spending time with the man, rather than at stopping him from escaping, after all, where would he have gone? He could have told them all, if they’d asked him, that Lucius had no control over him at all anymore, that any respect he’d had for his father had long since died.

I’m absolutely positive you will never be tempted to make these same mistakes or to be involved in such conspiracies... ever again.” Shacklebolt said, fixing Draco with a hard stare.

A shiver ran down Draco’s spine and he realised he was standing next to a very powerful wizard, who was giving him a warning – albeit a very subtle one – and Draco was not going to take any of it for granted.

“Don’t worry, sir.” He said, turning from his Harry-watching to face the ex-Auror. He needed to show his sincerity; he wanted this man to like him. Kingsley Shacklebolt impressed him as being a good man, a brave man; a man who’d stood against the Dark Lord, when so many others ran to hide or capitulate. “I’ve learned a lot of lessons in the past few years and I’m not likely to forget any of them.”

Shacklebolt’s smile appeared again and he inclined his head in Draco’s direction. “I’m very pleased to hear it, Mr. Malfoy.”

Draco had always loved the idea of power, of being associated with it. Part of his attraction to Harry in the past, at least, if he were honest with himself, was due to the power Harry had always wielded. After the debacle of his last few years at school, when he had managed to make one wrong decision after

another and seriously piss-off anyone whom he might have wished to impress, he'd given up all hope of redeeming himself. But standing here with the Minister of Magic, who talked to him as if he were salvageable, as if he thought Draco might be worth something, made Draco's chest ache with something he couldn't define and his spine straighten with a sort of fierce pride.

"Well then, I think we can say that, as far as I'm concerned, you have served your community service and that I'll be recommending any application you might consider making to train here." Shacklebolt said, "Oh, and by the way, please consider any and all restrictions against you and your magic lifted." The Minister waved his wand over Draco in a complex movement and Draco felt lighter than he had for months.

"Thank you, Minister," he managed to say without choking and with as much dignity as he could muster, though his throat was dry and his heart felt like it was in his mouth.

"You're welcome, young man. I have a lot of respect for my sister's opinion. I'm sure you won't let her down. I'll send an owl later, confirming the changes."

Draco was somewhat stunned. Once upon a time he would have given anything to hear those words, would have written a long, gloating letter to his parents. He would have been smug and probably somewhat unbearable. Now he felt nothing but relief and a certain amount of worry over Harry.

"I have things to be getting back to," continued the Minister, "but it was very nice talking to you." He patted Draco on the shoulder, nearly knocking him through the wall, and then turned and left the office.

Draco wasn't sure what to do next. Harry was in the care of Granger, Drucilla, and Constance; Kingsley Shacklebolt had gone. His shift hadn't officially started but there wasn't really time to go home, and there was no bloody way he was going looking for Fanthorpe.

"I still don't like you," grumbled Weasley, appearing beside him suddenly, startling Draco into a small grunt of surprise, he hadn't heard the other man coming. It was no wonder he had been a lousy Death Eater, he just didn't seem to notice danger. Maybe he had a death wish or something? "You were a git at school, especially to Harry," Weasley said, "and you had very questionable views, besides which you are far too snide and...er...pointy. But Kingsley says I should give you another chance and get over myself,

and... well, I've seen what you did for Harry. He's finally getting some rest and, thanks to you bringing Crystalmancer Beryllis here, we might even be able to cure him."

Draco turned to look at Weasley and regarded him coolly. So this was it, him and Ron Weasley, finally burying the hatchet. He could either sneer at the man and leave or he could accept the grudging, graceless attempt that Weasley was making to cease their enmity. He wanted Harry's friendship and he knew that Harry cared about this man, so really he didn't have an option. But he wasn't a pushover, he didn't have to fall to pieces and be grateful for a few crumbs, he worked hard for his new found dignity after all.

"Perhaps, we can cure him, tonight." he finally said, once the Gryffindor started to look uncomfortable, perhaps suspecting that his advance might be rejected. "If anyone can sort this out, I think it'll be Drucilla. I hope it works; whatever she's planning. Harry deserves peace."

He pondered his next words carefully before continuing. "As for the past, well, I was certainly no angel at school, but you were a git to me, too. I seem to remember some pretty questionable ideas and actions on your part; you weren't always a good friend to Harry either, Weasley. Remember the term you didn't speak to Harry because you thought he'd put his own name in for the Triwizard Tournament?" Weasley opened his mouth to say something, but Draco held up a hand to stop him. "You've given me your opinion, and very full and frank it was, but now it's my turn!"

Weasley shut his mouth again with an audible clack and flushed a dull brick red.

"I--I don't want to hurt, Harry." Draco said, cursing the fact that he was stuttering again. "I--I like him, a lot. I owe him for saving me, but more than that... he's nice to me. He treats me like he treats everyone, not like I'm some sort of evil scumbag..." he paused, waiting for the redhead to scoff, but Weasley didn't even grunt. He just stared out of the office window at Harry's bed, where Harry was still interacting with the three women using a combination of gestures and writing. It was obvious he was listening carefully, even though he wouldn't meet Draco's eyes.

"It was awful when Harry first came in." Draco continued. "He seemed so weak and fragile and I felt so... I just wanted to help him, protect him. Then I actually did find something to help him… and it's working; he's already beginning to look better. Why would I want to do anything to spoil that? It's nice not to be an outcast anymore. I think we might even become friends and I'd like that."

Weasley nodded, just once. An acceptance of sorts, but Draco hadn't quite finished.

"Oh, and by the way," he said, causing the other man to look at him at last. "I might be pointy, Weasley, but at least I'm not ginger."

Weasley made a noise that sounded somewhat like someone trying to strangle a cat and Draco stared at him in alarm. The man had gone bright red; he was spluttering.

"Weasley, are you laughing?"

"Touché!" Weasley gasped, when he finally stopped bellowing like a buffalo stuck in a swamp. Draco schooled his face, ruthlessly squashing the smile that had sprung up reflexively at Weasley's laughter.

But the other man was abruptly, equally serious. "Harry is besotted with you."

Draco couldn't move as his heart thumped madly in his chest. He couldn't breathe. "W-what?"

"Harry, likes you – has for ages, years, in fact – ever since he followed you round in sixth year. You were all he could talk about and I guess I hated you for it, but I can't do that anymore, not after this."

Draco opened his mouth but no words emerged; what could he say, anyway. The words were there, almost forming themselves, but they were totally out of Draco's grasp.

"And now," Weasley continued, "every time we see him it's 'Draco said this', or 'look what he brought me', or 'what do you think Draco's doing now'. He can't form a sentence without your name being in it."

“But he’s very vulnerable. So bloody vulnerable!”

Weasley, Ron, ran his hands, large freckled mitts, over his face, holding them there for a minute, breathing into them.

“He really likes you, Malfoy, and he’s totally clueless. He’s the fucking poster boy for clueless, Harry is, always has been. He’s still not that comfortable with the fact he’s probably gay, and he... well, it’s no secret he had a crap upbringing. He doesn’t get it, relationships and stuff, and I don’t want his heart broken, not again.”

Draco’s world felt like it had been turned upside down. He hated this big arrogant sod, always had, ever since he first saw him, ever since Harry rejected Draco for his sake. But Weasley and Granger... um, Ron and Hermione... they cared about Harry, really cared, they didn’t always get it right, sometimes in fact they were misguided, like Granger had been about Harry’s voices. But they still supported him, they were still loyal. It was suddenly obvious to Draco in a way it never had been before. Their friendship wasn’t self-serving or shallow; it was real and tangible and very, very deep. But more important than that, at least as far as Draco was concerned, was the fact that Harry liked him, had for years according to his best friend. ‘Well, fuck!’ Draco thought, amazed.

“Why are you telling me this?” he asked. “Why would you give me this information?” His mind’s-eye was flooded with images, memories of Harry and him. Harry cuddled close to him. Harry’s wide green eyes full of pain. Harry’s hand, pale and listless, clutching his.

“I guess I owe him,” Weasley confided. “My sister broke his heart, not long ago. It wouldn’t have worked, of course, a relationship between those two. I love Ginny. I really do, but she’d have trampled all over Harry. Besides, I don’t think he really loved her, he just thought he ought to.” He gave a small bitter laugh, and the continued speaking. “He was too besotted with you, remember? But Harry wouldn’t have ever cheated on Ginny. He’d have stayed with her. He‘s too noble not to. But she...” he sighed. “Let’s just say Ginny got fed up with the voices thing and she didn’t let Harry down easy. He deserves more than that.”

“I don’t want to break his heart, Ron.” Draco tried out the other man’s name for the first time, carefully, purposefully; it felt very strange on his lips. “I really do care about him.” Draco knew, as he said the words, that he had rarely cared about anyone more, ever.

Ron laughed and this time it was a dry, almost painful sound. “Yeah, I really think you do, Draco.” He just chucked Draco’s name out, with total casualness, but Draco was grateful that he didn’t infuse it with scorn, or with something worse. “I think we should go in there.” Ron nodded towards the ward, Harry’s cubicle. “See what the plan is for getting rid of whatever it is that’s been taunting Harry for so long. Don’t you?”

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The ward seemed longer than it ever had and Draco couldn’t stop thinking about what the red-head had said. Harry liked him. Harry liked him. It couldn’t be true, of course, and he couldn’t make himself believe it. But he also couldn’t stop thinking of all those times he and Harry had snuggled on his bed and the one night they had almost kissed. Draco hadn’t thought, hadn’t let himself think, that it meant anything.

By then he and Weasley reached Harry’s cubicle and Harry looked at him... and he glowed, he fucking glowed. He peered up at Draco through those long dark lashes of his and smiled shyly.

Oh, fuck!

“Hi, Draco.” Harry was practically beaming at him and Draco couldn’t help grinning back.

Weasley had been right all along.

As Draco approached Harry’s bed, the voices started whispering to each other; as he drew closer still, the voices started yelling obscenities, shouting as loudly as possible as if they knew this was their last chance. The voices became even more frantic, almost drowning out everything else, and he wondered how Harry had stood it for so long. He could just about hear Drucilla chanting quietly through the cacophony. She was placing a variety of stones in what seemed to be strategic places around Harry’s bed and the song she was singing seemed to be in one of the Celtic languages Draco couldn’t quite place, probably Gaelic or Welsh. The Malfoys had come to Britain with the Norman invasion and so much of the truly ancient magic, like Drucilla’s branch of it, seemed alien to him.

A particularly deafening scream from one of the unquiet spirits, directly behind Draco and in the vicinity of his left ear, caused him to flinch uncontrollably. Drucilla noticed; she had carefully draped Draco with protective charms and amulets before they had returned to the hospital, but it didn't seem to be enough, the grip of the spirits was still too strong.

Granger had noticed, too. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"Draco hears Harry's voices. That's one of the reasons you believed the voices were external, wasn't it Draco?" It was Constance who'd asked, her brown eyes sympathetic.

"Really?" Granger's voice bubbled with curiosity.

Drucilla's hand grasped his arm over the Dark Mark and Draco flinched again. "This is their gateway," she said, her eyes the colour of lapis lazuli, glittering as brightly as any of her collection of stones. "This is their conduit to you Draco. You once willingly embraced Darkness and you will always have a weakness here."

Draco felt hot with shame. He pulled his arm back from Drucilla's grip. "I… I..." he couldn't look at any of them anymore.

The voices were screaming again, and this time they saved their ire for him. "Slut, cocksucker, Death Eater whore. You disgust them, you make them sick."

Draco turned and ran.

He got as far as the corridor outside the ward before he finally made himself stop. It had all been going so well. Constance had liked him. The Minister of Magic had talked to him, been nice to him. He'd even had a civil conversation with Weasley. And Harry, oh Harry, the way he had looked at Draco – what must he think now?

“Draco?”

It was Constance; she put her hand on his shoulder. “Hey, honey, what is it?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Draco’s question was harsh with anguish. “This!” He lifted his arm and sort of brandished it at Constance. “This is never going away.”

Constance smiled at him, a sad little smile. “Nope, you’re stuck with it, I guess. I’m told they fade with time – a lot of time – but it’s not just about that, is it? It’s everything it represents as well. Although it may seem an age to you since the final battle, it’s not actually been all that long. You’re young, Draco, and you must give it some time.” She turned back towards the ward. “I’m sure it’s seemed an eternity to Harry, as well.” Then she sighed and guided him gently towards a nearby bench seat; she sat, indicating that Draco should sit beside her.

“The voices…” he said, his own voice sounding choked with emotion, “I don’t know how Harry stood it for so long. The things they say!”

“I don’t know much about these spirits, Draco.” Constance said. “They’re really outside my area of expertise. But it seems to me that they take some time to stalk their prey, learn about them. That’s why you didn’t hear them at first, you didn’t hear them until a day or so ago did you?” She looked at him quizzically and Draco shook his head.

“They were attached to Harry, because of his experience with the Resurrection stone and your Dark Mark, is their connection to you.”

But I thought that now that V—voldemort had gone, that it would go too. I’ll never be rid of it will I?”

“Voldemort’s mark was a sign of possession and control.” she said, Draco shivered at that, the thought of what he’d once opened himself too and Constance placed her hand on his arm and squeezed it gently.

“But it was a sort of protection too, one source of evil protecting you from another. Then after he was gone, it left a weakness, a conduit that you will need to be aware of.”

“So I’ll never be free of it.” Draco’s tone was dull, defeated.

“Oh, dear boy, I think you are already more free of it than you were. I think that you have already begun to atone, Draco. I think that if Harry had been brought in a few months ago the spirits would have moved in on you much faster than they did. All that you’ve done, all that you’ve tried to do, that’ll help the mark fade as quickly as possible. You’ve matured such a lot in the last year and I’m proud of you, of the progress you’ve made.”

Draco looked up at her. “You are? Why would you be, why do you care?”

Constance smiled and patted his arm again. “I’ve got a vested interest in you, Draco Malfoy. I wasn’t sure what you’d be like when you first came to us. Drucilla Firecalled me before you actually arrived. She said you were staying with her, that you’d been through a bad time and that I should look out for you, for Cissy’s sake. We were all friends, you see, when we were young and still at Hogwarts. Cissy, well, she was a bit of a pureblood princess, a little spoiled, always wearing the latest wizarding fashions, listening to the latest bands, going on expensive holidays. She was a good friend, though and at first the three of us were inseparable from each other, even though we were in different houses. But then things changed.

“He-who-should-not-be-named was attracting more followers, people like Reg Black, who was in my year, and Severus Snape, who was a year older. They started spouting this cause, all about how they were suffering because of Muggleborns, how ‘The Dark Lord’ had all these wonderful ideas that we really should listen to. And it wasn’t just Slytherins, either, who listened to the propaganda. There were plenty from my house, Ravenclaw, and even some from Hufflepuff and Gryffindor. Not that you’d have believed it, if you listened to some. Sirius Black for instance, went on and on about how all Dark wizards came from Slytherin. It wasn’t true, of course, but that didn’t stop him saying it.

“And... well, it made it difficult for Slytherins. They had nowhere else to go really; they either joined with the leaders, the ones espousing He-who-was-not-to-be-named’s cause, or they were on their own. Cissy sort of got drawn in and by the time she left Hogwarts, she was going around with a really bad group and she was dating your father out of school. He was her parent’s choice for her, and after what happened

with Andromeda, she wanted to make things better again for her family. Poor Cissy… I don't think she bought into all of it, not really. Slytherin closed ranks and if you supported them, you were a pariah in your own house. Some people tried, of course – Lily Potter for one. She was Lily Evans then. She tried very hard to stay friends with Severus Snape, but it didn't work out, couldn't really… and they'd been friends since before they came to Hogwarts."

She sighed again and patted Draco's hand. "My shame is that I didn't try harder, that I let Cissy drift away, that I didn't stand up to the bullies. But that shame is what made me give you a chance, Draco, because loads of people objected to you being here. Fanthorpe was just one of many."

Draco winced, but she smiled at him and squeezed his hand again.

"I'm glad I did, though, because regardless of the mistakes you made, I think you've really tried hard to make-up for them and that impressed me, that's what I told my brother. You can't change the things you did or the mistakes you made, and believe me, Draco, some people will always hold them against you. But possibly, just possibly, those mistakes have made you a better person than you might otherwise have been. And the future is yours to shape as you please."

Draco wasn't sure how to process everything she had told him. He didn't know much about his mother's school-days. She had never really talked about them, unlike his father, who had been vociferous about his. But his mother's influence was still protecting him, just like it had with Snape, just as her actions in the final battle had kept him out of Azkaban.

He tried to swallow around the lump that formed in his throat. He wanted to know more. Constance obviously had a great deal of fondness for his mother. He could hear it in her voice, and he'd been given plenty of evidence today that Constance thought highly of him, too.

"I don't know what to do now," he said flatly. "I just can't go back in there and face everyone; they all know about me."

Constance gave him a hard stare. "They've known about you all along, Draco. It's not like they've just had a sudden revelation."

What with Constance spelling it out like that, Draco felt somewhat silly. Of course Harry had known, and Weasley and Granger. He hung his head, suddenly finding his lap far more interesting than it ever seemed before.

“Come back into the ward. We need to discuss the ritual and I really think you should be part of it.”

Draco nodded, but he could not seem to make his legs move… they felt heavy, leaden.

“Malfoy?” said a voice. Draco looked up to find Granger was standing in the doorway to the ward. She bustled over to them, curly hair bouncing in her wake. “What’s wrong?”

Draco didn’t know what to say, so he settled for giving a shrug.

“Well, Harry’s worried, so I think you should come back.” she continued.

She was so bossy, as bossy as she had ever been with her mouth firmed in that tight little line he’d always hated at Hogwarts. But then, abruptly, her mouth softened and she tilted her head to one side and wrinkled her brow.

“Were the voices too much?” She must have taken his silence for agreement, because she continued in the same tone, “Yeah, I thought they might be!” She bit her lip. “I don’t know how Harry coped. Drucilla said she thinks most people would have been driven to suicide in a few weeks. It appears Harry’s dealt with them for over a year. But then…” she paused, rolled her eyes and smiled at him, “he is Harry and when has he ever done what he was supposed to?

“Erm... your idea, about the CD Player, it was such a good one. You were right, it helped Harry lots.” She was holding one out to him. “I brought mine. Would you like to borrow it, Mal-Draco?”

Draco felt warm again, but in a different way. He couldn't have repressed the resultant smile, even if he'd tried.

The next few hours were amongst the strangest he'd ever spent, and considering exactly what Draco had been through in the last few years that was certainly saying something.

Harry had been anxiously waiting when Draco returned to his bedside. He was pressed flush against the wards that prevented him from leaving his bed, looking worried, but upon spying Draco's approach, he broke into a glorious smile. There was no chance for them to be alone together, though, what with all the preparations in progress for the ritual. Constance and Drucilla buzzed back and forth, setting stones in what seemed to be random places to Draco, but were apparently complex and precise patterns.

While all the bustle was taking place, Hermione and Draco sat in chairs by Harry's bed, just far enough away that he couldn't hear the voices and talked softly about the music on her CD player. She liked 'light classical' Muggle music and was particularly enamored of a composer called Verdi. Draco had heard some of his music, but had thought him to be a wizard, wrongly it seemed.

Meanwhile, Ron sat on Harry's bed and played a game called 'hangman'. It was another Muggle thing whereby one player thought of a word and the other player had to guess the word and if the player that had to guess got it wrong then the player who'd thought of the word drew a line. The lines finally made a hanged man and if you got to that stage then you'd lost the game. Weasley kept charming the man in various stages of its creation so that it danced or jumped about the page. Harry seemed to think it was hilarious. His eyes sparkled with laughter and Draco couldn't stop watching him. Harry seemed high with relief. Drucilla's charms were certainly helping, at one point the voices had been so loud that Draco was sure Harry must be hearing them, above even the music. The stones muted the voices, Drucilla said it wouldn't work forever, but, for now at least there was the semblance of peace.

Finally, finally, it was time for the ceremony. A somewhat nervous Harry held Draco's hand on the way up to the roof. Draco wondered if he was scared. Harry had been through so much, far more than he had ever realized. How on earth did a seventeen-year-old boy, knowingly, walk to his own death? Draco had known paralyzing fear, fear that he was going to die or that his parents might. Harry must have known fear also, but the Gryffindor had chosen to face death in order to destroy the Horcrux inside him. There was no way Draco could conceive of the kind of courage Harry had needed to complete that task. Harry was a total enigma, one that Draco really wanted to learn more about.

Draco pressed close to Harry as they climbed the stairs and emerged into the cloudless night, so close he could see the way Harry's jaw tightened, the way he worried his lower lip, the way his fingers squeezed Draco's just a little too tightly. The worst of it was that Draco just knew Harry was also remembering the long walk to his own death and the fact that he'd been haunted by the voices of those that accompanied him ever since. At least he knew Harry couldn't hear them right now, those vicious spirits who had haunted him for so long. All he could hear was whatever music was playing on his CD Player. Draco knew this because he couldn't hear them either… he was listening to The Magic of Verdi.

The night was still and clear, though cold and there was barely a breath of wind. The roof of the hospital was dotted with candles and lit by a huge waning moon, a moon so bright that the stars were almost invisible. There was a table set in the middle of the roof-space. It, too, was surrounded by candles and ringed with a myriad of Aquamarines, Garnets and Clear Quartz. Harry faltered for a moment and his eyes widened; he squeezed Draco's hand, gently. Draco squeezed back, endeavoring to put everything he wanted to say into the gesture.

At last, Harry dropped Draco's hand and moved forward to the makeshift podium, reminding Draco of a place of sacrifice. But Harry didn't falter; he merely took a deep breath, clenched his fists, and then walked onwards alone.

It was ethereal, haunting and strange, watching Harry walk towards the podium while at the same time listening to the glorious strains of Verdi. Drucilla was standing by the table and she took Harry's hand, the very hand that Draco had been holding not moments before, and helped him lie down on the table. From where he was standing, Draco could see Harry's face clearly. He was smiling at Drucilla, the smile tentative and shy, and then he lay back as Drucilla raised her wand and began to chant. Her wand moved in a series of ever more complicated patterns as she raised her hands towards the moon. All around them the stones began to glow.

Slowly, ever so slowly, Harry began to rise from the table until he was levitating, his body arched like a fully stretched bow, his arms stretched wide, just like Drucilla's. The stones rose in unison with Harry, surrounding him in a perfect circle of aquamarine and red and gold. Suddenly, almost as if the man was tied, spread-eagled on a giant wheel, he began to spin as shards of coloured light encompassed the wheel, emphasised it, encapsulated it. Draco had rarely seen anything more beautiful in all of his life. Then Harry arched even more, jerking into a parody of his former relaxed pose and his mouth opened in what seemed to Draco to be a silent scream. Instinctively Draco moved forward. Harry was in pain and, as had come to pass in the last week or so, Draco saw the easing of Harry's pain as his responsibility.

However, before he could reach the spinning form, a slim brown hand steadied him and Constance shook her head and mouthed the word “no”. So Draco stood and watched Harry spinning in amongst the stones surrounded by myriad slivers of dancing light and on Draco’s CD Player The Slave Chorus surged towards its crescendo.

Then the music was gone, subsumed by an unearthly screeching – a sound unlike anything Draco had ever heard. The sound was painful, more than painful, it was agony. Draco’s hands flew to his ears desperate to pull the earphones away. Weasley was beside him shouting something, but Draco couldn’t hear what he said. All Draco knew was his own torture and somewhere deep inside him a sudden fear that everything had gone terribly wrong. Then there was a screeching cacophony and his world went completely black.

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Chapter 6: Midnight on the Janus Thickey Ward

Chapter six

He awoke to white and brightness and winced against the light, snapping his eyes shut. It was as silent as snow, wherever he was, and his head hurt. Carefully, very carefully, he moved his head. The light was flooding through a huge window and he was lying in a bed. Draco blinked and turned his head a little more. There was another bed, just beside his, and someone was lying in it – someone with a messy shock of dark hair.

Draco slept again.

He woke once more to semi-darkness but the silence remained. The other bed was still occupied, the dark head turned towards him now, and Draco could see Harry’s face, draped in shadows. His eyes were closed and his cheeks a little flushed. Draco could see the rise and fall of his chest as he breathed with

the even rhythm of sleep.

Draco slept once more.

It was morning again, or at least full daylight. This time Draco fought his unconsciousness for longer. He could move his head more easily, and while the pain had abated somewhat, it was still there, a dull throb that thrummed behind his eyes. In the next bed, Harry didn't seem to have stirred.

This time Draco didn't feel sleepy. He turned his head to the right and saw a door paned with glass and long windows looking onto another room. He was in a two-bedded room in a ward in St. Mungo's, but obviously not in Janus Thickey anymore. He knew those windows well, he had cleaned them often enough. This ward with its semi private rooms was usually reserved for very important people, people who needed extra privacy. Idly he wondered for a moment why Harry hadn't been put in here in the first place. This was Clitheroe Rossiter, the ward named after a long dead Minister of Magic… and Fanthorpe's domain. Draco's breathing began to quicken; he didn't want to see Fanthorpe. The man would have him ejected, removed. He could feel his breath huffing a little as he grew more agitated, but he couldn't hear it. Everything was still.

The door flew open and Constance was running towards him but while Draco could see her moving, see her lips moving, saying something, he heard nothing at all. His breath quickened again as he started to panic and then the world went dark once more.

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The next time he awoke it felt like he was swimming towards consciousness. He'd been deeply asleep and there were fragments of dreams to wade through in the shallows of his mind. The fragments all contained images of Fanthorpe. Draco's breathing began to quicken again. He hadn't realised the depths of his issues with Fanthorpe until the other man had been removed from his presence for a time. It had been so pleasant to not have to worry about what was said, to not have to school himself to ignore comments about his mother and father, and Draco had grown to be complacent. It took him several seconds to realise someone was holding his hand.

Slowly and carefully, because his head still felt tender, he opened his eyes. Narcissa was sitting beside

him. He felt his jaw move and he knew his tongue formed the word mother, but he couldn't hear his voice. His breathing grew rapid and a little panicked.

"I can't hear you," he said, not hearing those words either. "What's happening?" Lips moved again, his jaw, a muscle in his cheek.

His mother was talking, her gaze sympathetic, and she was stroking his hair, but he couldn't hear her. He was surrounded by total silence.

The next few hours were full of tests. There was no sign of Fanthorpe but Constance was in and out of the ward, executing a series of complex wand movements over Draco's head. Drucilla bustled about, arranging a bewildering selection of gemstones, and Granger popped in and out brandishing her large Muggle notebook. One thing they all had in common: they refused pointblank to answer his questions. Narcissa sat beside his bed and alternated between holding his hand, feeding him water, and gently brushing his fringe away from his forehead. She kept talking to him, they all did come to that, and occasionally Draco could read their lips. His mother was the easiest to read (she'd always had exquisite diction) but he missed far more words than he understood. Through it all, Harry slept on.

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Finally, Granger hurried into the room, still clutching her notebook, but looking like she had news. She sat beside his bed, the opposite side to his mother. Narcissa smiled at the girl, her smile somewhat vulnerable and shy. Draco squeezed her hand offering as much comfort as he could. But Hermione's returning smile was sweet and she spoke to Narcissa, though he couldn't see what she said. Narcissa nodded and then, after brushing his hair from his face one more time and a quick kiss to his forehead, she stood up and left the room.

Don't worry, the deafness is only temporary. Hermione wrote in large loopy handwriting.

"Well, you could have told me earlier!" Draco felt affronted. Hermione was writing something else.

Sorry, Draco. We've only just found that out for certain. But there is no need to shout."

"How the fuck am I meant to know when I'm shouting?" bellowed an aggrieved Draco.

Hermione raised an eyebrow at him, looking strangely reminiscent of Snape.

"Sorry," he said feeling somewhat subdued.

Hermione sighed and even though he couldn't hear her, he could see her. It was surprisingly easy to read body language. "No, I'm sorry," she said, moving her lips slowly and carefully. She bent her head and began to write again, the writing far less neat this time.

Do you remember how I told you about electricity? Draco nodded. We think that the magic, or rather the surge of magic through the stones, caused an electrical problem known as feedback through the CD players. That's what the noise was. It was so loud and so sharp, we think it damaged your eardrums.

"O-kaay," Draco said, having absolutely no idea what she was talking about.

Perforated eardrums are not uncommon amongst Muggles, Granger wrote.

"Um..." Draco didn't know what to say about that. Anything derogatory to Muggles probably wasn't a good idea, not now that he and Hermione were getting on relatively well. Besides, he didn't really feel the way he used to about Muggles and Muggleborns. Wasn't there some saying about glasshouses and throwing stones? Draco's glasshouse was particularly fragile.

They usually get better quite quickly. Six to eight weeks... Hermione wrote, then, in a barely legible scribble, But it's okay, don't worry, because we think that with magical treatment you'll be okay in just a few days, certainly no more than a week.

It’s my fault. she wrote, her eyes were covered with a veil of tears. I should have guessed about feedback. I should have known.

“You can’t know everything,” Draco said, “give yourself a break, Hermione. You did your best.”

Hermione shrugged and looked away, and Draco wondered if the girl was less confident than he’d always thought she was. Maybe she put on a front like Draco always did and wasn’t that a revelation.

“What about Harry?” he asked, thinking to change the subject.

Hermione wouldn’t look at him. She looked down at her notebook instead, playing with the Muggle pen she held in her hand.

“Hermione?”

“Hermione!” he repeated her name, unsure how loudly he was speaking, but he was the one who was deaf and he knew she could hear him, even if everything was still totally silent to him.

Hermione looked up, her eyes were full of tears, she bit her lip.

“What?” he grabbed her wrist. “Please, what?”

She bent her head again and began to write. This time he could barely read her writing. It was badly scrawled and the paper puckered with tears.

Harry won’t wake up.

Draco shivered, despite the fact that he was still safely tucked in his bed; in a very overheated ward, he suddenly felt very cold.

“But I didn’t wake up either.” He must have spoken very softly because Hermione looked puzzled.

“What?” her lips said.

“I was unconscious, too.” He wasn’t sure if that was louder or not, but Hermione obviously heard him because her head was bent again and she was writing once more.

But you moved, Harry hasn’t. You muttered in your sleep. You’ve woken up a few times...

“Oh, I see.”

Then Draco was holding Hermione Granger whilst she sobbed all over the blue-cotton pyjamas someone had dressed him in at some point in the last day or so.

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It was three days later and Harry still hadn’t woken up and Draco still couldn’t hear a thing, even though he dutifully took the prescribed potion, several times a day. They gave Harry the same doses as him. Apparently it wouldn’t harm him, but was deemed necessary as Harry had suffered from feedback in exactly the same way as Draco had. Harry’s dose of potion had to be magically administered as he still hadn’t moved an inch.

His mother came by every day and sat with him. They would hold the most peculiar conversations with a mixture of lip reading and notes, though Narcissa wrote in a beautiful hand on the most exquisite parchment. It was strange and peculiar and yet Draco felt closer to his mother than he had for as long as he could remember. She wrote him silly little things, rhymes and stories, and she showed him letters to Constance and Drucilla from her school days. They talked, well wrote, about Lucius: how she felt about

him and what he'd done, how trapped she felt at The Manor, all alone with her defeated husband and a handful of house-elves, how many regrets she had. Draco felt much the same, but he talked and Narcissa listened. It was strange and bizarre, but it was also nice.

Quite often he saw his mother with Constance and once or twice with Drucilla, too. She looked happy then, happier than she had in a very long time. Draco quickly fell into a routine: he woke early, ate bland hospital food spiced up with the occasional handmade chocolate (provided by his mother), then prepared himself for the days visitors, mostly for Harry but occasionally for him.

Once Kingsley came to visit. He sat beside Harry's bed for ages and looked sad and old.

Ron and Hermione came by every day and sat with Harry, too. Ron ignored him most of the time apart from the occasional nod or tight smile. They were no-longer enemies, but he suspected they would never be friends either. Hermione brought him little gifts such as books and magazines, paper and pens and she sat with him sometimes, when Ron was with Harry. But she looked so sad that he found himself comforting her far more often than she comforted him.

Sometimes the ward was full of Weasleys, though the girl didn't come. Ron's mother visited frequently and once she brought Draco some fruit, a gift that nearly made him cry, for some strange reason that he couldn't define. Her son had been killed after all, hadn't he? One of the twins, he couldn't remember which one, but the fruit felt like absolution.

Most perplexing to Draco was the fact that in all the time he'd been in Clitheroe Rossiter, Fanthorpe had been and continued to be nowhere in evidence. Draco found this very curious indeed, but didn't want to jinx his good fortune by enquiring about the Healer's whereabouts. Much later he was to find out the man's fate.

Healer Fanthorpe had apparently broken some ethical code or other with his treatment of Draco. All Healers had to take the an oath based on the Hippocratic Corpus, which stated, First do no harm, apparently, his treatment of Draco had violated that oath, a very serious breach of ethics for a Healer. He'd therefore been brought up before a tribunal of St. Mungo's Quality of Care Internal Affairs Department, and between the testimony of Healer Nightingale and the Minister of Magic, he had been summarily removed as head of Clitheroe Rossiter and stripped of his Healer privileges for the period of three months, during which time he would be assigned to the midnight shift on the Janus Thickey Ward

– to carry out each and every chore and demeaning task he had assigned to Draco during his year of Community Service. Upon completion of the restrictions, he would be re-evaluated for reinstatement as a Healer in one of St. Mungo's outlying foreign branches – if he so desired. He was also forbidden, on pain of Azkaban, from approaching or harassing or defiling Draco Malfoy by any form of communication or action on his part, whatsoever.

Drucilla told him about it, she also told him that Constance had pressed for the tribunal and championed Draco as a potential Healer. He couldn't help but feel overwhelmed. Somehow, without even trying, he had gained the respect of so many people that he admired and he was forever free of the man who had made his life such a misery, he couldn't help but be pleased. Although when he thought of some of the tasks he'd been assigned, he could almost be sorry for Fanthorpe.

When there was no one else around Draco sat with Harry. Hermione had been right, he didn't move. Twice a day Healers would come in and turn him, change his position, to avoid pressure sores and Harry lay as limp as a ragdoll and didn't stir at all.

One night the Healers accidentally left Harry's hand lying on top of the covers. Draco told them, the Healers and others, and they smiled at him and patted his hand and totally ignored what he was saying. Draco wondered if he was the deaf one after all. But he worried about that hand. It looked so very pale and small lying on the pillow all alone. So as soon as the lights were dimmed Draco scooted over to where the hand lay. He took it in his own. He'd been right, it was cold, so very cold and Draco couldn't let it go. It was as if, somehow, by holding onto that hand he was holding onto Harry.

He sat for ages until his back began to feel sore, his chair a hard wooden one not meant for long bedside vigils. He didn't want to move, however, because that would have necessitated letting go of Harry's hand, something he was determined not to do. Normally he'd have transformed the chair with a simple spell but he hadn't tried to use any magic since he'd become deaf and he didn't try now. Instead, he leaned forward so his head was resting on the bed beside Harry's shoulder. He lay there for some time enjoying the stillness, feeling warm and strangely comfortable. After a while his eyes felt heavy and before he knew it he was asleep.

Draco woke when someone squeezed his fingers. He opened his eyes slowly blinking away sleep. The room was still quite dim but, like the other wards, it was never totally dark and he could see the shapes of the furniture and shadows in the doorways. His hand was squeezed again. He sat up, ignoring the twinge in his lower back, and stared – Harry was watching him.

“Hi,” Harry’s lips said, then his forehead creased in puzzlement and his next words were indecipherable to Draco. “Draco?” That was easy enough to understand.

“It’s okay,” Draco told him, but Harry continued to look puzzled. He looked at Draco’s lips moving and then tried to sit up. But if his head felt anything like Draco’s had when he’d awoken, he wouldn’t want to move. Harry winced and then lay back breathing hard.

Draco put one hand on Harry’s forehead, comfortingly, and squeezed Harry’s hand until the other man looked at him again. “Wait,” he said, enunciating carefully, holding his hand up to emphasise the word. Harry gazed at him steadily, trustingly.

Draco rushed over to his own bed and grabbed the notebook Hermione had left there for him, then went back and grabbed a pen.

Hermione said it was the eckletricty, he wrote, struggling with the spelling of the Muggle word. There was something called feedback which made a horrible noise and knocked us out. Do you remember? It made us deaf for a while. But the Healers say it won’t be forever, they’re giving us potions to make us better.

Harry frowned and nodded slowly. For a second or two he stared into the distant shadows and then he met Draco’s gaze, licked his lips. “Thirsty.”

Draco was quite pleased that he could read Harry’s words so easily. He was getting quite practiced at understanding what people were saying without actually having to hear it. Draco fetched some water and helped Harry sit up to drink it, Harry leaned against him, wincing a little from the pain. If Harry felt anything like Draco had when he’d first woken up, then he’d be very sore indeed. Harry’s hands shook a little when he held the cup, so Draco found himself helping to steady the other man as he gulped down the liquid before falling back against Draco’s shoulder, exhausted. He might have said something, but Draco couldn’t see his mouth. Nevertheless, he welcomed the other man into his embrace as Harry leaned against him, limp and pliant.

He felt Harry yawn and then grow heavy as he sank back into sleep and Draco felt a little frisson of happiness that Harry trusted him so much. The pose felt so natural and familiar now, so often had Harry fallen asleep in his arms over the last weeks. He really wished they could talk, he and Harry, because whilst it was obvious Harry trusted him now, Draco still had no idea just exactly how that had come to be or how Harry felt about it. They had fought for years, hated each other with a passion… and yet now, here in the dark and silent ward, it was Draco that Harry turned to, Draco who made him feel safe. He was glad the ward was empty, that it was the wee small hours of the night, because there was simply no way he could suppress the somewhat smug grin that curved his lips. Just for now, Harry was his. He laid his cheek against Harry's hair. He continued to smile to himself as he registered how soft and silky it was and how good it smelled. Someone must have been caring for it while Harry was comatose. A snort escaped Draco as he realized that never once, in all the years they had spent fighting and hating each other, had he ever contemplated the state of Potter's hair or imagined he would get close enough to touch it, or that Harry would have allowed it if he had.

Draco woke with a start; someone was shaking him. "Draco?"

Draco gazed up blurrily at whoever had woken him. It turned out to be Constance. She was saying something, but Draco was far too tired and far too comfortable to be able to read her lips. He shrugged, causing Harry to sigh in his sleep and snuggle closer. Constance looked stunned and said something which might have been, "Oh, he's woken up!" but equally might have been something else entirely, and then scuttled off, presumably planning to return soon afterwards. Draco snuggled back. It was rather nice just lying here, somewhat squashed under the weight of the Hero-of-the-Wizarding-world. He had rarely been hugged as a child. His mother had held her distance and her dignity and his father simply didn't do hugging. He wondered if they had realised what they had missed, once all the fighting was over and they'd sat and held each other in the aftermath of the final battle.

Harry sighed and wriggled a little. Draco suspected he was waking up, which wouldn't really be such a bad thing, except that he liked being here, warm and comfortable and blanketed by silence. It was strange how losing a sense really did seem to heighten other senses. He felt Harry shift, stirring from the depths of sleep. He felt him seem to grow lighter as he came to himself and he felt Harry lift his head so he looked down to meet the other man's gaze.

"Hello," he smiled and Harry smiled back.

That was the last moment they shared alone for the rest of the day. Harry became public property once more and suffered all the tests that Draco had undertaken and what seemed to be a couple of hundred

more. For the first time Draco was grateful for his hearing loss as he rather suspected the noise created by a constant stream of Weasleys would have given him a headache. Eventually his mother arrived and carted Draco off to Constance's office so they could have some time together unfettered by the throng. They spent the afternoon in pleasant solitude, with only the occasional visit from Constance to interrupt them.

And Draco sat in the office and smiled at his mother and wished he were back in the ward and all alone with Harry.

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Chapter 7: Midnight on the Janus Thickey Ward

Um, this chapter contains a scene of explicit m/m sex. Just saying, k?

Chapter seven

Finally it was night again and Harry was left alone. When Draco returned to the ward all he could see of the other man was a mound beneath the covers. He couldn't blame Harry for wanting some peace and quiet, some time alone, but he did feel a pang. They had seemed to become so close in recent weeks, but it had all been artificial, not real. He didn't really belong in Harry's life.

Slowly he prepared for bed. He didn't really need to be here any longer and his mother was pushing for him to return to the Manor to be cared for there. But Draco didn't want to go yet. For all he knew, this was his only chance to be with Harry. They might never see each other again after he left, after Harry left to take up his life again. He sighed and headed to the bathroom. When he returned, newly clad in pyjamas, Harry was sitting up in bed waiting for him. "Hi," his lips said and his hand sketched out a repeat of the word.

“Hi,” Draco returned. “How are you feeling?” Harry looked puzzled and Draco realised with a start that he’d become used to the fact that although he couldn’t hear other people, they could hear and understand him; Harry couldn’t. How the fuck were they going to communicate?

Harry didn’t seem to have that problem. The frown had been replaced with a somewhat dopey grin and he patted the bed beside him and tilted his head asking Draco to join him. Draco strolled closer, at least he attempted to. He suspected, however, that his journey resembled indecent haste more closely than dignified perambulation, but he couldn’t help it. Considering the rather smug grin the other man affected, Draco surmised that Harry was quite aware of the fact also. He scowled at his one-time-adversary and mouthed the words ‘smug git’. Harry just grinned more widely and gave him the two fingered salute, before wincing a little, presumably at another headache. Draco put a hand on Harry’s forehead again, concerned once more with the other man’s pain. Harry leaned into the touch and then his smile gentled as his hand cupped Draco’s cheek. They were so close, so unbelievably close, he could see the brown flecks in Harry’s emerald eyes, even in the dim evening light of the ward. He could see the lighter shades of green too, green like new spring leaves and summer lawns, drenched in sunshine.

“Hi,” Harry’s lips said, his sweet breath huffing on Draco’s cheek.

“Hi, yourself,” Draco whispered in awe.

And then they were kissing. Harry was flavoured with the custard they’d had for dinner, but on his lips the taste was sublime. The custard itself had been rather watery and had pooled with the rhubarb in a sludgy mess, although he’d hardly noticed. Draco had long become inured to St. Mungo’s culinary offerings and often wondered if the house-elves who produced it were ruined for service elsewhere. He was certain hospital management wanted patients to return home as rapidly as possible and had decided on serving crap food as the most expedient way of achieving their goals.

But on Harry, on Harry’s mouth the confection tasted divine. Harry must have agreed because he deepened his kiss, grew more demanding, and slipped his hands around Draco’s waist. Draco, in his turn, cupped Harry’s head and pulled him closer. Harry’s kisses were more than he’d ever dreamt them to be. Again, Harry obviously agreed because he didn’t seem to want to stop anytime soon. But Draco wanted more: he wanted to taste Harry’s skin and see if the flavour was different along his jaw line or behind his ear; he wanted to explore further, see how the other man reacted to having his nipples kissed or his cock

sucked.

Finally, Harry broke away. He was panting a little and there were tiny creases at the corners of his eyes, most likely indicating that Harry was in pain, hurting. Draco brushed his lips over the small wrinkles and then over the lids of Harry's eyes when he closed them momentarily.

For a second, Draco hesitated. He'd wanted this for so long, he'd desired this man for so long, but he could he do it? Could he make love to Harry, wouldn't that be taking advantage? Harry grabbed his hand and held it to his cheek, his eyes pleading with Draco, filled with desire, Draco wasn't a Healer in this situation, he was a patient too and Harry wanted him, he knew that he did.

Harry put Draco's hand to his mouth and he kissed the backs of Draco's fingers then he leaned back against his pillows until his body was prone, pulling Draco with him. If that wasn't an invitation, he didn't know what would be. Finally making a decision, Draco swung a leg over the delectable body beneath him and sat astride Harry, still laying kisses here and there, sticking out his tongue making little kitten-licks and tasting the soft flesh wherever it could be reached. Harry tilted his head back in invitation, allowing Draco complete access to his neck and jaw, and slowly, carefully, still trailing little kisses as he went, Draco slide down Harry's body until he was straddling Harry's thighs. He undid the buttons on Harry's pyjama top revealing the tempting flesh underneath the fabric. Harry's nipples were peaked, just as he'd thought they might be. He licked around the aureole and then sucked one of the hard little nubs into his mouth.

Harry moaned and tried to arch against him, but Draco was still straddling him and Harry couldn't quite manage to move, at least not without dislodging him. So the most he managed was a canting of his hips, a silent plea to Draco to do something with the hard, needy cock that was clearly outlined against his cotton pyjama bottoms.

Thrill after thrill coursed through Draco as he realized Harry was letting him take charge. The Gryffindor hero could have easily switched their positions if he'd wanted to, despite his weakened state. But it was obvious Harry did not want to change things, his efforts were feeble, a token struggle at best. He was letting Draco lead, letting him do as he wished. Draco felt ridiculously powerful, his Harry was beneath him surrendering to his wishes.

He slid down Harry's body a little further, wiggling his hips as he went, causing Harry to cant his hips

again, to undulate beneath him. The man swallowed hard and arched his neck further, allowing Draco to see the beautiful line of his throat, to trace his Adam's apple along the skin. Harry reached up and grabbed the metal bars of his hospital bed, completing his surrender. Draco could do anything… that's what the body language said… he could do anything and Harry would let him. Draco, Slytherin that he was, didn't need telling twice.

He leaned down and licked and kissed a trail from Harry's collar bone to his cock whilst Harry squirmed and panted and begged beneath him. Draco couldn't hear what the other man was saying, but he could see his lips moving and without even looking he knew what Harry wanted, what he desired.

Draco hadn't done any magic since his deafness, but then he hadn't wanted anything as much as he wanted Harry right then, thus a quick, wandless Accio brought him a little pot of lube from his bedside table drawer. He placed his hand, spread wide, on Harry's superheated skin and Harry looked at him, trying to focus eyes fogged with lust.

"Do you want this?" Draco silently asked. Harry took a breath and then another, sudden and quick, as his heart beat a rapid timpani beneath Draco's palm. He almost held Harry's heart in his hand; he would treasure the gift, always.

Carefully he pushed Harry's legs apart and Harry bent his knees so that his thick, blood-filled cock was fully exposed. Draco ran a hand along it, covered in lube as his fingers were, he could still felt the velvet softness of the skin. He caught a droplet of pre-come with his thumb and then brought it to his mouth and sucked it. Harry gasped, Draco could see the rise and fall of his chest, the green eyes widen in surprise.

Draco caressed the other man's balls, they were heavy and perfectly formed and then he let his fingers seek out Harry's perineum and stroked it gently. Harry bucked his hips and panted rapidly for a second or two, his cock twitched and, if possible, hardened even more. He must be aching with need by now, he was, if the pleading expression in his eyes was anything to go by.

"Can I have you, Harry?" Draco asked him, he knew Harry couldn't read lips yet, at least not as well as Draco could, but he seemed to understand. He nodded, frantically as if Draco had offered to save his life.

Draco took his time, preparing his lover, gently, tenderly. He teased and caressed Harry, stretched his anus, pushed his lube-slicked fingers inside him, ever deeper, until Harry was as prepared as he could make him. This was Harry's first time and he was sharing it with Draco, they might never have another time together, Harry might move on, find someone else, and forget about this. But Draco would always have been his first and that was an enormous responsibility. For a brief moment he was almost overwhelmed. He took a steadying breath, then he met Harry's eyes. In that instant he knew Harry was ready and he needn't wait any longer. His cock was hard and weeping and he lined it up against the slick entrance of Harry's arse and slowly, slowly began to push.

Harry was heat and tightness and yet he yielded to Draco, his breaths coming tightly against the intrusion. "Shhh," Draco murmured tenderly, yet soundlessly, placing his finger against Harry's lips in a time-honoured yet possessive gesture. "Hush, Harry."

Everything was totally silent and part of him felt a pang at that. He would have loved to hear Harry beg him, plead with him, and yet there was something quite magical about the silence. The room was dim, lit with just a handful of candles and Harry was lying back with those glorious eyes closed. Draco brushed his lover's cheek with the back of his fingers and Harry's eyes opened again; he smiled, reassuring Draco that everything was fine. After that, everything was about touch.

Their world narrowed and there was nothing but themselves, what they could see, taste, touch feel everything seemed heightened, intensified. Harry's legs were spread wide, Draco danced his fingers along his lover's long, smooth thighs and Harry shivered deliciously. Draco chuckled and then traced his fingers up past Harry's hip bones and along his abdomen until he was caressing his nipples. Harry's lips were moving and Draco knew, even if he couldn't hear, that Harry was begging, pleading. Draco pulled out carefully and then pushed back inside his lover's arse, once, twice, again and again, harder, faster, more urgently and Harry's body yielded, softened, expanded to allow him in. Harry's hands let go of the metal bars and lay there on his pillow, curled in upon themselves with the intricacy of shells. There was something so incredibly vulnerable about those hands, making Draco ache with tenderness.

"Oh, Harry!" Harry's cheeks were wet with tears and Draco leaned forward and kissed him, pouring all of his love into the kiss, communicating to him how much he cared, how deep his love was. He took Harry's cock in his hand. It was warm and smooth and slicked with pre-come, Harry moaned into his mouth and Draco smothered him with more kisses, deep, claiming, demanding. The sensations were overwhelming and Draco felt like he was going to explode. His ears were pounding, he could hear nothing but that, and in time with the pounding in his ears was his pounding into Harry and his stroking of Harry's blood-filled penis. Then Harry was shuddering clenching tight against Draco's own cock, his channel squeezing Draco tightly until he could hold his orgasm no more. Draco came, explosively, screaming Harry's name before

collapsing satiated into his lover's embrace.

Afterwards, the silence was comforting and he felt ridiculously tender towards his lover. Harry was strong, immensely strong and brave and determined, but Draco had seen him at his most vulnerable, his most fragile, and he felt strong and protective instead. Being smaller than he was, Harry fit so well in Draco's arms. Draco marvelled at the knowledge that he had just taken Harry's virginity, been as close to Harry as he'd ever been to anyone. He felt like Harry belonged to him now and he wanted to protect him, love him, take care of him. He placed his hand on Harry's chest, where he could once again feel Harry's heart, thumping steadily against his ribcage, soothing them both. Harry's head was tucked underneath Draco's chin, his breath warm against Draco's chest. Draco felt happier and more content than he'd ever felt in his life and he gazed contentedly into the darkness whilst he and Harry drifted off to sleep in one another's arms.

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Since loosing his hearing, Draco had felt somewhat isolated and lonely. He knew he'd always liked talking, conversing with other people, yet he'd never realised to what extent he both liked it and did it, until it became so difficult to communicate because of the deafness. But with Harry he had no such worries; he didn't need his voice or his hearing to communicate with Harry. He understood Harry, in fact he spoke fluent Potter. He had maintained a watch on the Gryffindor since they had first met in Diagon Alley all those years ago. Since that inauspicious beginning, he followed him, obsessed over him, learned every nuance of his body language. Harry spoke to him without ever saying a word and the silent days following Harry's return to consciousness were the best of Draco's life. He and Harry became a unit, protected in their mutual regard and understanding.

For the most part they were left alone by the hospital staff and they spent their time touching and holding each other as if their rightful place was in each other's arms. Hermione and Ron came by, also Lovegood and Longbottom, Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan and a coterie of Weasleys, most of whom Draco could hardly tell apart. Once Greg came to see him, clad in robes that were far too tight and shiny. Greg looked rather shiny himself and very apprehensive. The towering boy from his childhood looked diminished somehow. He shuffled into the ward, peering anxiously at Harry from the door as if worried that he was about to be hexed.

Harry got out of bed and went to lead the big awkward man into the room. Greg stared down at Harry's hand on his arm as if he was not certain what the heck it was, as if he couldn't quite believe what was happening to him. He didn't stay long and he perched on the edge of the hard wooden chair as if it

would bite him, as if Harry would. Draco wasn't quite sure what Greg said to them as his lips were hard to read and he couldn't write terribly clearly, his hand was shaking too much, but Harry's calm acceptance of him seemed to give Greg new hope. It gave Draco new hope, too.

Pansy's visit was harder to deal with, much harder. She seemed as hard as nails and terribly brittle. But being Pansy, she slapped on some lipstick and wrapped a white-knuckled hand tightly round Blaise's arm. She teetered into the ward wearing six-inch killer heels and a cast iron scowl. Draco knew her too well though. Pansy had escaped community service because she hadn't done anything illegal. After all, simply offering to turn the saviour of the wizarding world over to be killed didn't break any laws. It hadn't made her very popular with anyone, though. This was the first time Draco had seen her since the trials; and again, Harry handled her easily, too.

I'm glad you survived, Potter, she wrote.

Harry had grinned at her. "Yeah, me too."

Draco wondered whether there were any other couples who had to deal with the fact that the friends of one partner had tried to kill the other. But in the end, the visit went quite well… in that nobody tried to kill anyone or even throw any hexes. Of course, they were limited as to how much communication it was actually possible to exchange. But Harry had been calm and seemingly relaxed, though Draco had no difficulty sensing a certain agitation about his lover. Blaise and Pansy didn't know him well enough to notice, but Draco did and he felt deeply grateful that Harry had stayed, had tried to be accepting of Draco's friends without ever having to be asked.

Later, when Pansy tottered away looking far more comfortable than she had when she came in, Draco held Harry close and thanked him with his lips and his tongue and his hands. With all the bad things that had happened to Harry it was, in Draco's opinion anyway, something of a small miracle that the man had not turned Dark. It would have been so easy, but Harry determinedly tried to see the best in everyone and forgave so many sins against him. It was one of the reasons Draco loved him so much.

Slowly the days passed and the visitors grew fewer and farther between. Still, they never really found themselves alone for any length of time except at night. Draco pushed their beds together, daring anyone to keep them apart – and nobody did, nobody even tried. By the end of a week, it was as if Draco could read Harry's thoughts. He couldn't, of course, or rather he didn't. Oh, he was a skilled enough

Legilimens, thanks to the tutoring of his mad aunt Bella, but he wasn't about to force anything like that on Harry. He could read him, though, as easily as if they were joined together somehow: every quirk of his eyebrow, every tilt of his head. Harry seemed to read him just as easily.

Every night they made love and it was unlike anything Draco had ever known. He was not inexperienced, but he had never realised how different it was to make love with someone you cared about, as he cared for Harry. On the other hand, Harry was so inexperienced, naive in so many ways, that Draco loved to shock him, often causing him to blush a gorgeous shade of scarlet. But then everything about Harry was gorgeous as far as Draco was concerned and he rejoiced in the time they had left together.

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Chapter 8: Midnight on the Janus Thickey Ward

Chapter eight

Draco awoke to the sound of someone singing. The room was lit with a cool, early morning light and he lay there for some time, listening to the melodic humming, watching the light grow brighter as the sun began to rise. He was warm and comfortable; Harry had wrapped himself around Draco's torso, a leg draped over Draco's leg, his arm around Draco's waist, his head on Draco's shoulder. He sighed in his sleep a strange whickering sound and then Draco realised that he could hear.

"Wha?" Harry grumbled as Draco shook him awake.

"Harry, Harry, I can hear!" Draco felt like a twelve-year-old. He strongly suspected that he sounded like one, too.

Harry opened blurry eyes and gazed up at Draco, quizzically. "Draco?" Draco thought that he'd never

heard anything as beautiful as Harry's husky, sexy voice.

"Can you hear music?" Harry asked.

"Well, I don't know if I'd call it music." Draco said dryly. It wasn't after all, very tuneful singing.

Suddenly a huge grin appeared on Harry's face. "Draco, I can hear you." He said. Then the grin faded and he sat for a moment, head cocked on one side.

"But that's all, that's all I can hear. You, and the singing, there are no voices, they've gone Draco, I really think they've gone."

There were, of course, more tests, lots of them, and bustling Healers and delighted visits from assorted friends and Weasleys. But Harry could speak for himself now, when he'd had enough, when he needed a rest, he simply said so and Draco rejoiced. Or rather part of him rejoiced, a big part of him, right enough, but there was still a little bit of Draco that couldn't help feeling as if he'd lost something precious. Harry had needed him and he didn't anymore, that part of their life was over, forever.

Hermione and Ron came in together, hand-in-hand, they didn't talk much to Draco. Even though he and Ron had reached a new accord, he suspected that the truce was still too new for more than stilted conversation and Hermione seemed to be more intent on begging Harry for forgiveness than talking to Draco.

"It's just all the books seemed to indicate that it was PTSD," the girl said, her eyes filled with tears. "I'm so sorry that we didn't help you before, that we didn't believe you."

"Don't get so upset, Hermione." Ron said, "Harry understands, don't you, mate? You know we're sorry and that we couldn't have done anything about it?"

Harry smiled at them, and made soothing noises and assured his friends that it was all right, he

understood, that no-one could have known. But his eyes met Draco's and they said far more, they said that Draco had believed him, that Draco had understood, that he hadn't given up, they shone with gratitude.

Sometime later, Narcissa along with Constance and Drucilla, dropped by to see them and celebrate the return of their hearing. It was the first time Draco had seen his mother with her old friends. They were so comfortable with each other and he could see why the three had once been so close, despite their disparate personalities. Draco was instantly aware of the affect this reunion was having on his mother. She was relaxed and contented, almost joyful. Draco felt profoundly glad for her obvious happiness, though he also felt sad that she had given it up and that it had taken her so long to find it again.

Drucilla interrupted Draco's reverie by presenting Harry and him pendants she had brought along for each of them. She explained their properties, muttered a blessing, and then placed one each around their necks. Draco's was an emerald, the exact colour of Harry's eyes. Drucilla told him that emeralds were very effective in love and friendship rituals; they brought success and progress. It felt to Draco like the perfect stone for him. It was warm against his skin and settled in its place like it had always belonged. Harry's stone was a fire opal, rare and expensive, set in gold and swinging from a gold chain, whilst Draco's was surrounded by silver. Fire Opals attracted active people, helped positivity, filled the wearer with joy. Draco thought Harry could use a little joy. He deserved a lot more than that. But it was a start.

Draco smiled as he watched Harry playing with the pendant, his green eyes sparkling as he watched the play of light and fire from within the stone.

At this point the ladies took their leave, pressing hugs and kisses on them and saying they would see them again soon, they were like three giggling school-girls heading for a sleepover. Draco was surprised, he'd been expecting his mother to insist he come home with her now that he appeared healed.

"I thought you wanted me to return home with you, Mother," he commented casually, not letting his surprise show. "Have you changed your mind, then?" Part of him was glad she didn't want him to leave right then because he wanted to stay with Harry, but he was also caught off guard at her apparent, sudden change of plans.

Narcissa turned to him with a warm smile and said, "Oh, yes, didn't I mention it? I'm going to stay with Drucilla for the time being. She has plenty of room and we have so much to catch up on. And you seem

so comfortable and content here, I didn't think you'd mind, dear." At this point she glanced pointedly at Harry.

"But what about, Father?" Draco asked

"I think your father will be fine on his own for a week or so, Draco." His mother said, her lips had thinned to a tight line, "I want to spend some time with my friends. She almost sounded petulant, like a child being denied a treat

Draco blinked and nodded, returning her smile rather mechanically. He did not want to go home with her to Malfoy Manor, yet, he felt an oh, so momentary twinge of jealousy and sense of abandonment. It passed in an instant, however, and he walked over to her and hugged her tight, whispering in her ear, "I'm so glad for you, Mother. Have a lovely time."

Narcissa hugged her son and smiled at him once more, "I'll see you tomorrow, darling." she said and then turned and followed her friends out of the ward.

For a second Draco stood motionless, rather stunned at the turn of events. She'd been so adamant about him convalescing with her at The Manor but instead she was taking a room at Drucilla's. His father would be bereft, Draco felt quite bereft himself. He didn't want to be in the way and he suspected he just might be, as his mother caught up with her friends once more. He had no doubt that she would go home when she was ready and Lucius would undoubtedly welcome her, cowed and repentant. But in the meantime there was no way that Draco was going back. He'd end up killing Lucius in less than a week, a family reunion would have to wait. He hadn't even seen his father for months, the man certainly wasn't allowed to visit him, he wasn't allowed out of the boundaries of Malfoy Manor. Oh, he wrote often enough, letters as full of recrimination as they'd always been, but they didn't bother Draco in the way that they once had. He would go back to visit, he'd decided that long ago, but there was no way that he could live at The Manor right now. Now that he was well again he was sure St. Mungo's would not allow him to stay, he probably had to be out by morning or something, he knew from experience how keen Healers were for people to go home.

Granger and Weasley would probably be here first thing for Harry and they would take him away for good. Which would be fine with him, Draco told himself, tilting his chin a little, steeling himself to not be upset. But he couldn't help thinking, that now that he was able to go where he wished he wasn't sure

that he had anywhere to go.

In somewhat of a daze he returned to Harry and sat next to him, Harry didn't say a word, he just held Draco's hand and they listened together to the quiet, newly familiar noises of the afternoon.

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Making love that night was completely different from the way it had been and yet it was totally familiar. In the last week or so, he had come to know every inch of Harry's body, by touch and taste and sight. He knew how his collar bone had a perfect hollow just where he needed it to be and how Harry's hip was sharp, almost too boney… in fact, all of Harry was almost too boney, come to that. He was still far too thin. Lack of food and lack of rest did that to a person and it was ridiculously easy to count every one of Harry's ribs. But at the same time Harry was beautiful. His skin felt like satin beneath Draco's finger-tips a perfect smattering of hair covered his legs and his arms and made a dark trail from his navel to his groin. His jaw was usually darkened by stubble and provided a roughness beneath Draco's tongue and lips, such a contrast to the velvety softness elsewhere on his well mapped body, especially those lips which had addicted Draco from the very first kiss.

Harry had his sensitive places. If Draco kissed along his hip bone, his whole body would cant and writhe. Laving his navel and following the trail down to the long, heavy cock would cause him to undulate with need. But it was his inner thighs that were the most sensitive. Just running short, blunt nails along the peachy soft skin would cause a reaction that was instinctive and unstoppable.

Draco did all off those things, as he had done so often before. Tenderly he prepared Harry and entered him, pounding into him until they were both hot and sweaty and satiated. But this time was different, too. This time he could hear.

He heard Harry's breathy little moans, the sighs, the whimpers. The way Harry gasped and struggled to breathe for a moment when Draco breached him, the hushed keening that Harry couldn't seem to quite suppress. Fleetingly, he thought of erecting shields but quickly dismissed the idea. They had been making love every night for more than a week and had undoubtedly been loud enough that anyone in the vicinity would know what they were doing. It was then that he understood the strange embarrassed looks he had been given from time to time and the way some people wouldn't meet his gaze. He'd put it down to his past, not to his nocturnal activities.

Afterwards was different, too. They were still cocooned in their own little world, lying in each other's arms protected by the semi-darkness and isolated from the rest of the ward. But this time he could hear Harry as well as feel his every movement. Harry's deep, even breathing spoke of his contentment and his sighs were satisfied, not sad. Draco lay still, listening, appreciating for the first time all the things he could hear. He heard the rustle of bedding as one or the other of them moved. He heard his fingers as they carded Harry's hair. Somewhere in the hospital, he heard the dull echo of footsteps, the baritone murmur of a man's voice. Outside, rain spattered the windows and in the far, far distance, not completely blanketed by wards, he could hear the sounds of Muggle London, far too unfamiliar to comprehend.

"I can hear your heart beating," Harry said softly. His head was resting on Draco's chest, his fingers tracing idle circles around his navel.

"I can hear you breathing," replied Draco.

"It's wonderful. For so long there was too much noise. I preferred the silence to that, but this is so much better."

Draco didn't answer. He totally agreed, but couldn't think what to say.

He settled for, "Hmm."

That was all Harry seemed to need to be able to carry on. "I thought it was so quiet here at night, that there was no-one about. Do you think everyone heard us... erm... you know?"

Draco chuckled, dark and treacley, a much deeper tone than his usual.

"I rather think they might have done."

Draco wondered if it were possible to hear someone blushing because he was sure Harry was doing just that.

“I never thought of that.”

Draco laughed again. “Neither did I. But it gets boring round here, they probably enjoyed the show. All the shows we gave them.”

Harry pushed up, resting a hand on his cheek, and propped himself up on an elbow. He looked down at Draco, his green eyes glittering as fiercely as the jewels that Drucilla had distributed liberally around the room.

“You sounded just like the old Draco then, the one I knew at school.”

“Ah, but I wasn’t Draco then, was I? I was Malfoy at school.”

“Yeah, and isn’t that weird? I could never call you that now; you’re Draco now. You’ll always be Draco to me now.”

Draco smiled, he lay back against Harry and just luxuriated in his presence. He might not have much longer in his company after all and times like this would end all too soon.

“I’ve been thinking about the voices.” Harry said after a long while, “Drucilla said that they were malevolent spirits, she told me about their connection to the Resurrection Stone. I didn’t know, I didn’t know there was such a risk, nobody told me.”

Draco’s heart skipped a beat; they were talking, finally talking. He turned over so that he could see Harry’s face, he learned he’d loved to look at the other man whenever he could. “I know,” he said, “it

wasn't your fault."

"There are lots of things I don't understand, that I should have known about." Harry continued, "Drucilla said that Dark spirits have always haunted the magical world, that they wait and prey on unsuspecting wizards and witches. They absorb the energy generated by misery; just like Dementors and that they especially loved suicides, that's what they tried to drive me to. If they'd succeeded I'd have been like the Grey Lady, trapped here forever.

"But they didn't get you, Harry, we saved you." Draco said, snuggling closer, holding him as tightly as he could.

"I know, and I'm thankful." Harry continued, "Um, what would you have done if the voices hadn't been external, what if I had…I don't know…what if I really had been going mad?"

Harry's voice was soft and tremulous and Draco suspected that he was desperate to hear his answer to this question and at the same time terrified of what Draco might say.

"I…I don't think it would have mattered." he finally said. "I saw you there, all lost and fragile and I wanted to help you."

Harry's eyes softened; all at once they were full of something Draco couldn't define. "That's why you'll be a great Healer, Draco. When I thought I was going crazy, people kept me at a distance, treated me as if I were less than before. I think that they're frightened of mental illness, far more than any other kind of illness or injury. I mean, look how we treat the Longbottoms, like some sort of dirty secret. You don't do that, Draco. I've seen you with people, you don't do that at all. You make people feel alive. You make me feel alive, Draco."

The ward was silent all around them, it was late now and much of the hospital had settled for the night, here on the Clitheroe Rossiter Ward they had been left in peace.

Draco couldn't speak. He didn't quite know what to say. He'd been so lonely, so frightened for such a

long time and Harry's words almost broke his heart.

"I was thinking." Harry continued, his voice still a little rusty, perhaps changed forever by the screams that had been torn from him during the ritual on the roof. "After I heard what your mother told you, about the fact that she is staying with Drucilla for a week or so, I wondered,...would... would you like to come and stay with me?" Harry asked tentatively, somehow seeming to know exactly what Draco thinking when his mother left.

"What?" Draco knew he sounded abrupt, but he hadn't been expecting that.

"S--sorry." Harry pulled his hand away, the hand that had been idly drawing circles on Draco's back only moments before.

Draco grabbed the hand and sat up, his movements as abrupt as his speech.

"No, I'm sorry, Harry. I wasn't expecting you to ask me that. I wasn't expecting you to say any of those things."

Harry was blushing again, at least Draco thought he was. It was hard to tell in the dim light of the hospital ward.

"But I meant them, and I'd like you come and stay with me. If you want to that is. It's not much, my house. Not like your home, I know. It was my godfather's house… he left it to me. I thought we could spend some time together, away from here on sort of neutral ground. And Sirius, being who he was, as well as my godfather and your cousin, well, I think he would approve. The house has been cleansed. Bill Weasley did it for me." Harry gave a bitter laugh. "Pity he didn't do me at the same time, eh?"

Draco lifted Harry's hand to his lips and placed a kiss on his palm. "You're going to be okay now, Harry."

“I know.” Harry’s eyes glittered brightly. “I don’t think I’ve thanked you yet.”

“Yeah, you have. You so have.”

Harry ducked his head. “It’s just that… I don’t really know what to do anymore. All my life, ever since I could remember, I’ve been fighting, struggling to survive. And now, thanks to you, I don’t have to do that anymore.”

Harry’s eyes were blurred with tears and the sight of it made something ache inside Draco. He made a comforting sort of noise and Harry continued.

“Bef… before I came here, I didn’t want to live anymore. I’d had enough. I tried to kill myself, you know I did. But you when you came you gave me a future, Draco. When you were there at first it was as if the voice quieted, you didn’t blame me you see, not for anything, you didn’t look at me with pity. It seemed like you wanted to be with me, that I didn’t owe you anything or that you weren’t waiting for me to ‘pull myself together. And you believed me. Despite what I said to Ron and Hermione I do still feel a little fed-up with them. They tried but they were so convinced that I was going bonkers, and maybe I was, but that didn’t stop the voices from being real.”

Draco’s heart sank. Harry was grateful, that’s what this was all about, because Draco had helped him.

“It’s all right, Harry.” he said, “You don’t have to do all of this just because you think you owe me, you don’t you know, you don’t owe me anything, I was glad to do it.”

“Don’t be bloody stupid, Malfoy!” Harry said crossly, “It’s not just gratitude. I like, you, maybe more than like you. We’re good together, I like you, I like the sex, a lot. and... and I want to be with you, from now on.

“Oh, Harry!” Draco’s eyes were full of tears in his turn. “It might not work. We hardly know each other, really. I’m a Slytherin and you’re a Gryffindor and we hated one another in school.” He could have bitten his tongue then, because he shouldn’t be saying such stupid things, but it was too important not to get

this right, not to be sure. And he so wanted to say 'Yes'!

Harry sighed and Draco rejoiced in it, because it was real. It was Harry's sigh and he could hear it. Draco was still so new to the restoration of his hearing not to be thrilled at the sound of Harry's sigh.

"We're not at school anymore, Draco, and it just might, we could try at least, just while your mum's at Drucilla's. Let her have her fun with her friends and…" he grinned, "well. We could have a little fun too.

Harry's voice was soft yet clear. He sounded so earnest, so determined, and then Draco knew he was lost. He would give this gorgeous, wonderful boy anything he asked for and give it happily. Harry was everything he wanted, the only thing he wanted.

Harry worried his lower lip with neat, white teeth, before continuing, "I don't think I've ever known anyone as well as I've come to know you. What we've had for the past few weeks, this has been the best time of my life and I want it to carry on, to continue, to become permanent. What about you?"

Harry's look said more than any amount of words could say, at least to Draco it did.

"I think we should do this, try this," Harry said, seemingly giving up on waiting for an answer. "I want to be with you – maybe even have a normal life for a change." A very rough attempt at a roguish smile followed this speech.

Draco didn't know what to say to that, to any of it. Until recently he hadn't had any choices; there had been no decisions open to him. He'd just had to get through each day, that was all. But then Harry hadn't had many choices either, had he? Draco sighed, neither of them had ever known anything like normality in their short lives, lives that had never really ever been their own. Yet Harry had never quite given up, not completely. And now Harry had said it, told Draco in no uncertain terms that he wanted to be with him, to live together, to have a future they chose for themselves – and here Draco smirked to himself, even if that future together was absolutely nothing like normal… and never would be.

"I'm okay with it if you are. I don't think I'm busy for a week or two." Draco was as cool as he could manage, though his voice trembled and there was nothing he could do to stop that. How else could he

reply to Harry? Harry who wore his heart on his sleeve, who could say such things and mean them, who could lay himself open to rejection, Draco couldn't do that, not yet at least. But Harry didn't seem to care.

"Good," Harry replied firmly, his face breaking into a foolish grin. Just as if Draco's acceptance had been as long and loving as Harry's asking had been.

"Well, we'd better get a good night's sleep," Harry continued, "Because we're going home tomorrow. It'll probably be a long day."

He leaned over to place a kiss on Draco's lips, an endearingly clumsy, Harryish kiss, just catching him on the corner of his mouth.

Draco couldn't help the fact that he broke into a grin too, which he tried to tell himself was not as goofy as one of Harry's own. All at once, he felt a surge of emotion course through him… could this possibly be hope? He didn't think it would be easy, but at least he now knew it was possible. A new start, for everything. He had the offer of a place to learn to be a Healer. He had respect, from people he respected in turn and the possibility of acceptance, if not friendship from Harry's friends. His restrictions were lifted, his mother was living her own life and he would go and see his father soon, start re-building their relationship. Most important of all, he had somewhere to live and someone he really wanted to live with. It was everything that he'd ever wanted.

Draco didn't resist when Harry took his hand and pulled him into a close embrace. In fact, he kissed Harry gently in encouragement and settled in next to the Gryffindor. Soon his eyes closed, finally giving into sleep, and he dreamed of the morning, when he would take Harry's hand again and together they would walk through the double doors that led to the outside world and to whatever future might await them.

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This story is now complete. Thank you so much for all your kind and supportive comments.

Coming soon, Midnight at Grimmauld Place.

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