I. The Lovers' Circle

♥

"Let's play a different kind of game tonight."

Mischief sparkles in Pansy Parkinson's eyes like Bonfire Night fireworks as she transfigures the rectangular table into a round one and sets an ornate wooden box down on it. Her gaze meets mine and I look away, faking disinterest. Having shared a common room with the other Houses since the beginning of eighth year, I've learned that some Slytherin schemes have a certain... appeal. A part of me is dying to know exactly what she's got up her sleeve.

As if reading my mind, Dean speaks up. "What kind of different game?"

I glance over at Malfoy and Zabini, who are occupying two armchairs near the fireplace. They know what Parkinson's up to, if the look they just shared over the tops of their newspapers is anything to go by. Daphne Greengrass, giggling as she slides from her seat to join Parkinson at the table, seems similarly well-informed.

"Just a naughty little Tarot game," Parkinson answers, looking not at Dean but at her two friends by the hearth.

"Pansy – " There's a warning tone in Zabini's voice.

"No one's forcing you to play, Blaise. You can stay there, sip your Firewhisky, and sulk while the rest of us have fun. And I daresay the results of this game are always satisfying." She smirks. "Right, Draco?"

A rosy blush creeps over Malfoy's pale cheeks; I suspect the cause is something other than the warmth of the fire. Oddly, the thought gives me butterflies. I swallow hard, willing my stomach to settle.

"It can be an entertaining game," Malfoy admits, "when played in the right company." He gives his issue of the Prophet a rough shake to straighten it and resumes reading.

Parkinson turns her attention to Dean for the first time since he spoke. "The game is called The Lovers' Circle. It's a matchmaking game."

A few people who haven't been paying attention perk up at this. Lavender Brown leans forward to listen.

"How do you play?" Ernie Macmillan asks.

Parkinson's lips quirk. "The first step is getting matched. Everyone who wants to play is dealt a single card. Some cards form pairs. If someone else gets a card that is your card's counterpart, then that person is your match for the rest of the game." Her smile widens. "Or longer."

Zacharias Smith draws his brows together. "But that means not everyone will get a match."

"No, unfortunately not," says Parkinson. "The idea – if you believe in this sort of thing – is that the cards match you with the person present who is most suitable for you. If no one is a good match, then you won't get one. Still, the rest of the game can fun to watch."

"What happens once you're matched?" This from Ernie again.

Seeing Parkinson's gleeful smile, Malfoy sighs and tosses the Prophet onto the small table between his and Zabini's chairs.

"You take turns choosing cards and following their instructions to get better… acquainted with your partner." Parkinson pulls a small booklet out of the Tarot box. "Here, see for yourself," she says, and tosses the booklet to Ernie and Zacharias.

Lavender cranes her neck to read over the two boys' shoulders. I look at Ron, who's rubbing his thumb over the back of Hermione's hand and pretending he's not interested. Hermione has Hogwarts: A History open in her lap, but it's clear she's listening to the conversation. I poke her arm to get her attention.

"Have you heard of this game?"

"I have," she says, without looking up. "The mystical aspects are nonsense, of course, but it has been known to bring people together. You should play."

I want to protest, but my heart has already latched onto the hope that I'll be matched with a bloke. Ron and Hermione have assured me that witches and wizards are more accepting of same-sex relationships than are Muggles, and I've had seen the evidence for myself – Dean and Seamus don't get bothered about it – but that hasn't made the process of actually finding a boyfriend any easier. Exactly how am I supposed to flirt with a bloke? And how will I know know if he's interested? He won't giggle and bat his eyelashes – I hope. If a party game can spare me these worries, then I'm willing to play. Even with Slytherins.

"So, who's in?" Parkinson asks.

Lavender and the Patil twins, who have gained possession of the instruction booklet, volunteer with squeals of delight. Ernie and Zacharias are next, followed by Hannah Abbot, Terry Boot, Susan, and Neville. To my surprise, Malfoy and Zabini also get up and begin making their way towards the round table, though not without a great deal of muttering under their breaths – something about foolish girls and Slytherin exclusivity. I gather they're hoping to save their Housemates from being matched with Gryffindors – or worse, Hufflepuffs.

Ron, Hermione, Seamus, Dean, and I are the only ones who haven't moved to sit on cushions around the table. Of the five of us, I'm the only person who isn't dating anyone, so naturally they're all waiting for me.

"Won't you join us, Harry?" Daphne asks.

If Pansy had asked, I would have said no. But Daphne’s all right; I get on better with her than any of the other Slytherins.

"Er… sure," I say.

Ron's expression turns incredulous as I put down my Potions book and stand up. "You can't be serious," he says, but Hermione elbows him in the side and he shuts up.

Malfoy sneers at me as I seat myself on one of the cushions. “Fame couldn’t buy you love, eh Potter?”

“Looks like money didn’t buy you any, either,” I tell him. The hostile glint in his eyes sparks a heat inside me that I doubt even the contents of the bottle of Ogden's on the table could rival.

“Be nice, boys,” says Parkinson as she takes the Tarot cards out of their box and sets them down in front of her. Zabini Accios his and Malfoy's liquour glasses, along with new ones for the rest of us, and fills them up with Firewhisky.

I glance back at Ron and Hermione, and am relieved to see that Hermione has got her hands on the instruction booklet. As long as she’s involved, there’s a decent chance of a fair game.

“Before we start,” says Parkinson, “we must all swear that we will play until the last card is drawn, even if we do not like who we’ve been matched with.” She passes the deck to Daphne. “Daphne, you start. We’ll go clockwise.”

“What?” There’s an edge to Hermione’s tone that means she doesn’t approve of Parkinson's instructions.

Parkinson’s eyebrows rise a little. “Problem, Granger?”

“Yes – that's not fair!”

“It’s fair,” Daphne says. “If everyone who isn’t immediately happy with their partner could just quit, there would be few people left to play, wouldn't there? The point of the game is – “

Parkinson cuts her off mid-sentence. “No one will die if they should decide to break the oath. The jinx cast on these cards won't cause permanent damage to anyone who chickens out – just a lot of discomfort and embarrassment.”

Hermione looks at me, and I shrug. It isn’t as if I can’t handle being paired with someone I'm not attracted to for an hour, which is the worst-case scenario. I give Daphne a nod to indicate that she should start. She places her right hand over the deck and says, “I solemnly swear to play this game until its conclusion, and to carry out all the instructions given by the cards my partner and I draw.”

Once we’ve all sworn the same oath, Parkinson points her wand at the deck and whispers a spell. The cards float up into the air, shuffle themselves for about twenty seconds, and then land in a haphazard stack in front of her.

“Granger, would you like to deal the cards?” she asks.

Hermione considers the offer. Then, to my surprise, she shakes her head. Smiling, Parkinson picks up the deck and deals the cards.

Again, Daphne is the first to start. She turns over her card and shows it to everyone. “Queen of Cups.” Her tone is playful. “Who will be my king, I wonder?”

She looks hopefully at Malfoy, and his expression hardens. To my inexplicable satisfaction it’s Zacharias, not Malfoy, who turns over the King of Cups and becomes her partner.

Turning over The Sun and The Moon, Hannah and Neville also become a couple. Lavender, the Patil twins, and Susan are the next to turn over their cards. Lavender, after getting matched with Parvati, gives a shriek of dismay and Parvati twists her face in disgust. But they stay in their seats, determined to keep their oaths.

When my turn comes, I realise that my mouth has gone dry. I try my best to keep my fingers steady as I turn over my card.

A hideous horned figure holding a whip stares back at me. Before him stand a naked man and woman, shackled and chained to each other. The card reads XV at the top and The Devil at the bottom.

I don't remember any of what I learned about the Tarot in Divination, and I've no idea whether or not The Devil has a match in The Lovers' Circle, but I'm pretty sure it's not a card people usually want. Parkinson's smirk confirms my suspicion.

"The Chosen One doesn't do anything halfway, does he?" she asks.

I narrow my eyes at her. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Parkinson opens her mouth to respond, but Hermione has already begun to read the answer from the instruction booklet.

"'The Devil/Lovers combination is the strongest in the game. It describes a passionate, though often volatile and obsessive relationship. In its most positive aspect, this card pair points to the potential for a true and enduring love. Most commonly, however, relationships begun under this combination end as quickly and violently as they began.'" She looks up at me and then back down at the book, continuing. "A popular superstition states that a curse will befall any two people who draw this pair and fail to consummate their relationship within a fortnight."

Once she’s finished reading, she shakes her head and closes the booklet. “This is nonsense.”

She’s right, of course; there's no sense in worrying. The Tarot, like any tool of divination, is unreliable. The cards are dealt purely by chance, and it's likely that I won’t get a match anyway.

Terry Boot is next. His card is The Emperor, and he gets paired with Susan. Then it’s Malfoy’s turn. He touches the back of his card lightly with his fingertips, as if he's afraid to see what's on the other side. Finally, he turns it over. Parkinson covers her mouth with her hand and gasps. I read the name of his card and choke on my Firewhisky: Malfoy has turned over The Lovers.

“Ever the brave Gryffindor – ” Malfoy drawls as I struggle to collect myself. “Choosing death by Firewhisky over a jinx or a few kisses with his enemy.”

He’s sneering at me, but I see a flicker of something else in his expression. My eyes are drawn to his lips, thinner than usual now they are pressed together, and my stomach flips again at the realisation that I might be snogging him tonight. That is, if he doesn't decide he'd rather get jinxed. I wouldn’t. There’s no contest between an angry kiss from Malfoy and a case of toad pox in my book.

“Don’t flatter yourself, Malfoy. I don’t spare you enough thought to call you my enemy.”

Malfoy glares at me but stays in his seat. Zabini and Parkinson are the last to turn over their cards, and they become a match. Big surprise there.

Those who weren’t matched – Padma and Ernie – stand up, disgruntled, and return to their former seats. Left to play are Daphne and Zacharias, Hannah and Neville, Lavender and Parvati, Terry and Susan, Zabini and Parkinson, and, of course, me. And Malfoy.

Those of us who aren’t sitting next to our partner have to switch seats. Terry and I trade places so that he's next to Susan and I'm next to Malfoy, who doesn't look pleased with the new seating arrangement. He stares straight ahead, ignoring my presence as if I were the Bloody Baron.

Parkinson gathers up the cards and reshuffles them. Then she spreads them out at the centre of the table. Daphne draws the first one. “Ace of Cups. Everyone drinks.”

I can hear the shuffling of pages behind me as Hermione verifies the instructions. All of us gulp down as much Firewhisky as we can in one go – except Zabini and Parkinson. They each take a delicate sip, as if they're enjoying wine at a posh French restaurant.

Next, Smith draws the Page of Wands. He doesn’t seem to know the meaning of the card, and looks to Hermione for help. She turns a couple pages and reads, “Pages represent communication. Whisper a promise, a secret, or a compliment in your partner’s ear.”

Smith grins and, without a moment’s hesitation, leans over and whispers something to Daphne. She blushes scarlet and smacks him on the arm.

The game continues in a similar fashion. It’s rather tame to start, really – mostly drinking – but my heart is trying to pound its way out of my chest because within the next couple minutes I might have to say or do something to Malfoy. It doesn’t come to that, though. I draw Temperance on my first turn, which means Malfoy and I must drink from the same vessel. I take a generous sip, and then hand him my glass. His grey eyes pierce like daggers as he takes it from me. My heart seems to stop for a couple seconds as our fingers touch on the glass. He takes a handkerchief out of his pocket and wipes the rim before taking a sip, then sets the glass down on the table in front of me and picks a card from the table. Page of Swords.

Malfoy is only a second longer than Smith in thinking of something to say. The warmth of his body sends tingles through me as he leans in, his breath tickling my ear.

“You better be careful which cards you draw, Potter, because if you lay a single finger on me tonight, I’m going to hex your balls off and feed them to the Thestrals."

He gives me a sweet smile as he sits back, and I return it with one of my own.

“That’s very nice,” I say with mock politeness. I wonder if that kind promise even counts for the purposes of the game, but it must or he'd be jinxed by now.

My thoughts are interrupted by the sight of Zabini unbuttoning Parkinson’s blouse, lifting one of her breasts from her bra, and drawing the nipple between his teeth. I don't know which card he drew, but I’m sure glad he picked it before I had the misfortune to. (I would like to keep my balls, thanks.)

Parkinson, who doesn’t seem at all embarrassed about what just happened, eyes the cards on the table. Once she completes her turn, we will have finished the first round. We have twelve players and seventy-two cards, which means there will be five more rounds. It doesn't sound like much, but a lot can happen in that time. And knowing my luck, it probably will.

The Firewhisky is starting to take the edge off a little. I savour the burn in my chest because it's better than listening to Neville reveal his most fervent sexual desires or watching Lavender and Parvati stick their tongues down each other's throats. And yet, despite all that's happening, and the fact that I've angled myself away from Malfoy to the furthest extent possible, I remain aware of his every breath. I doubt there's a single nerve in my body that isn't attuned to his presence.

My second turn comes much too soon. I pull another card from the deck. The High Priestess. The woman on the card looks cold and impassive; she's definitely not going to show me any mercy.

Hermione flips a page, then reads: “'In divination, The High Priestess sometimes foretells the revelation of a secret. If you have known your partner before sitting down for the game, divulge the most intimate thought you've had about him or her, prior to today. If not...' Well, you know each other, so the rest doesn’t apply."

The sudden urge to hang my head and give up is overwhelming. What am I supposed to say? I've never thought about Malfoy intimately before. Except maybe...

“Well, let's have it," Malfoy says.

It's probably best to just get this over with.

"I've wondered if you have any scarring from... you know," I tell him. Perhaps that's not what most people would consider an intimate thought, but it does make me imagine what's underneath that crisp white shirt.

Once again, I see a flicker of some unidentifiable emotion on his face, but then he snorts and it's gone. My eyes travel down the line of his neck as he chooses a card. The Sectumsempra curse hit him on the neck as well as his chest, but there's no sign of it there. Snape probably managed to prevent it. I feel sort of horrible for being disappointed about that. It's as if some small part of me wished I'd left my mark on Malfoy.

The lucky bastard draws an Ace, and we all drink. I finish what's left in my glass and refill it. It's best to be prepared. Who knows what's next?

My limbs are starting to feel heavy; it’s getting easier to watch and listen to the others carry out the cards’ instructions. Right now, Susan’s giving Boot a strip tease. It doesn’t do anything for me – I guess I’m just not much of a voyeur – but at least I’ve stopped blushing.

I entertain myself by imagining what would happen if Malfoy had picked that card. It’s meant to be an amusing thought, but it turns out to be more arousing than it is funny. I banish the picture from my mind before my cock has a chance to respond – I’m wearing thin cotton pyjama trousers, for Godric’s sake.

“Potter, it’s your turn.” The sound of Malfoy’s voice brings my attention back to the game.

“Oh, right.”

This time I turn over the Eight of Swords. On the card, a bound and blindfolded woman stands within a circle of swords. Malfoy smirks gleefully.

It doesn’t take me long to put two and two together.

“Let me guess,” I say as Hermione locates the instructions for the Eight of Swords. “I’m supposed to let Malfoy tie me up and blindfold me.”

“For the rest of the game,” Hermione adds with a sympathetic smile.

"Not bloody likely," says Ron.

Malfoy, however, seems to think it is likely because he has just taken out his wand.

Ron springs upright. "You put that wand down! Harry, you're not gonna to let him do it, are you?"

The colour drains from Ron's face when I shrug and hold my wrists out for Malfoy.

"Behind your back," Malfoy says. His sneer grows as I reposition my hands behind my back. My hate for him bubbles inside me like an overheated caustic potion, but I clench my jaw and wait.

"Incarecerous!" There's a sadistic undertone to Malfoy's softly-spoken spell.

He puts his wand away and reaches up to his neck to undo his green-and-silver tie. The sight makes my breath catch; I turn away to hide any visible reaction. Out of the corner of my eye, I see him rise onto his knees and lean towards me. His fingers brush my hair as the warm silk covers my eyes. I'm not sure which of these sensations is responsible for the unwelcome shiver that runs down my back.

Life, it seems, is full of surprises. Twenty minutes ago, I thought this was going to be a typical Saturday

night. Now Draco Malfoy is blindfolding me with his tie. I can honestly say I never saw this coming.

"You look stunning, Potter." Something about the way he says that makes me swallow hard. I wish I could see his expression.

Daphne giggles. "Choose a card, Draco."

I hear the sound of a card being turned over.

"Eight of Wands," he says.

Hermione flips through a few pages in the booklet. "'This is a card of communication. If your partner is someone you've known prior to beginning the game, tell him or her something you've not yet had the chance – or the courage – to say. Your partner should do the same.'"

Malfoy gives a dramatic sigh. The git. He's not the one who has to sit bound and blindfolded for the rest of the game.

I expect some sort of witty insult, like in the first round, but instead he says, "Thank you." His tone is solemn, the words thick with layers of meaning. I don't ask for an elaboration; I don't need one.

I give a small nod and scramble to think of something meaningful to say.

"Potter?" Zabini prods.

"I'm sorry."

The words, directed at Malfoy, escape my mouth before I've even had the chance to consider what I'm sorry about. That I refused to be his friend when we were eleven? That his father was sent to Azkaban at the end of fifth year? That I pulled those wands out of his hand before escaping Malfoy Manor? I'm not sorry for any of those things. And yet, on some level, I am.

His response is little more than a whisper. "So am I."

After a short pause the game continues. Zabini's card instructs us to drink, and I'm glad for it; the buzz has started to wear off. Malfoy raises my glass to my lips; I take a long sip, then try my best to block everything out until it's my turn again.

"Oh, by the way, Harry," Hermione says, while Terry carries out his task of kissing Susan in nine places, "you're exempt from choosing cards for the rest of the game."

"Excellent," I reply, but I'm not sure if I mean it.

Now it's Malfoy's turn again. The room goes silent after he chooses his card.

Hermione is the first to speak, and she sounds embarrassed for me. "Well, I think we all know by now what the twos mean."

I do. Lavender and Parvati chose a two in the second round – right before they started swapping spit. Ron mutters something under his breath, and Zabini sniggers, but otherwise nothing happens. I close my eyes against the thin slivers of light that Malfoy's tie is letting in. I expected that if it came to this, Malfoy would take the jinx rather than follow through with the task. I didn't care before, but now that he's about to do it I feel a wave of disappointment rush through me.

"Kiss the boy, Draco!" Parkinson's definitely enjoying herself more than I am.

I take in a breath, seconds away from asking if I can take this bloody blindfold off since Malfoy obviously

wants out, but then I hear him move. I expect his mouth to crash against mine, angry and eager to get this kiss over with. But instead I feel just a light, hesitant brush of his lips against mine.

The sound of our shuddering breaths fills my ears as he leans in further. My tongue acts without my permission, pushing past his teeth and into the warmth and wetness of his mouth. The sensation causes a tightening low in my belly. Malfoy, however, stiffens.

Embarrassed, I start to pull back, but he raises his hand to the back of my head and returns the kiss. I can't help but wonder if his stomach is aflutter, like mine is.

The gentleness doesn't last long; his lips press harder and harder against mine, his tongue delving deeper into my mouth. I want to put my hands on him and pull him down on top of me, but I can't, so I pour all my frustration into the kiss.

By the time his mouth leaves mine, I'm more aroused than I've ever been in my life – which puts me in a humiliating position, considering that my arms are tied behind my back and I'm wearing thin pyjama trousers. I can't see myself, of course, but I imagine I'm quite the spectacle.

It's hard to hear anything over the pounding in my ears as the others continue the game. I still don't think the cards we're playing with have any power, but the tasks do seem to be getting kinkier. My intoxicated mind produces images of Malfoy wanking for me. I wouldn't be able to see him if he did, but I'd love to hear the changes in his breathing, the sound of his hand stroking his cock, maybe an occasional suppressed moan. Merlin, what has this game done to me?

When it's Malfoy's turn again, I find myself holding my breath. There's a slight tremor in his voice as he announces his card: Strength. Daphne and Parkinson giggle as we wait for Hermione to read the instructions.

"'Strength speaks of our ability to control our passions, to tame the beast within. In sexual terms, this means practicing self-control and allowing ourselves to enjoy the journey rather than rushing towards the destination.'" She pauses before continuing. "'Without removing your partner's clothing, bring him or her to the brink of orgasm, then stop.'"

My jaw drops. Malfoy probably will do this one, just to watch me suffer.

Ron yawns loudly. "Wow, it's really late. I better get to bed if I'm to keep the Quaffle out of our hoops tomorrow. Goodnight!" A moment later his footsteps can be heard going up the stairs.

Malfoy laughs, and I'm startled to hear his voice coming from in front of me – I never noticed him move. Next thing I know, his hand is on my thigh, sliding upward. My breath catches.

"You can pull out of the game if you want," he says. "Then the jinx will fall on you." His voice sounds hopeful, but I'd have to be an idiot to choose a jinx over being brought to the brink of orgasm – even if the latter promises to be just as painful.

"I think I prefer you to do what the card instructs," I tell him, grinning.

His hand starts travelling in the wrong direction on my thigh: it should be moving towards my cock, not my knee. And definitely not down my shin.

As his fingers slide down to my ankle, I feel his teeth press into my knee. It isn't exactly a bite; he's just resting his mouth on my raised leg. After a moment of non-motion, he begins to slowly bite down on the fabric of my trousers. Once there's a bit caught in between his teeth, he pulls back roughly, giving the cotton a tug. My heart picks up speed: Malfoy wants to play dirty.

It's funny how, without the sense of sight, it's even more difficult than usual to focus on anything but my cock – when I'm turned on, that is. And right now I'm definitely turned on.

I'm seconds away from shouting at him to do something when his tongue swipes the tented fabric over my cock. My head starts to spin. Maybe it's been spinning all along, from the alcohol, but I've been too preoccupied with my thoughts to notice until now. Malfoy's tongue on my prick is a lot to take in. Given the card's instructions, I assumed he'd touch me there, but not with his mouth.

He wraps his arms around my thighs for leverage, then takes my shaft gently in between his teeth and drags his tongue back and forth a few times. When he lets go, I exhale, unsure of how long I held my breath. A moment later he takes the head of my cock into his mouth, licking and sucking until the cotton is thoroughly soaked and clings to my dick. His hands never leave my thighs as he goes through all the motions of a blowjob as best he can with my pyjamas on.

I'm finding it hard to breathe. But what do I expect? Draco Malfoy is, to all intents and purposes, giving me head in front of over a dozen people.

His hold on my thighs tightens. The movements of his tongue are getting more insistent by the second. I tilt my head back, mouth open around a suppressed moan. The pressure in my groin has built almost to a peak. I wonder what would happen if I reacted as little as possible and fooled him into thinking I wasn't quite there yet. Would we get jinxed if I came?

Unfortunately my ragged breathing gives me away. His mouth and hands are gone in an instant, and I'm left wanting. Fuck this game.

"Wow, that was intense." Daphne sounds as if she might be fanning herself with her cards.

If my hands weren't tied behind my back I'd collapse right now, but I have to settle for taking a series of slow, deep breaths to calm down. It's a good thing I'm blindfolded – I'd surely die if I saw Malfoy's face right now.

Zabini's card gives him and Parkinson five minutes to do whatever they please. The silence that follows suggests that they're putting on a good show. I give a start when, out of nowhere, someone straddles me. I can only assume it's Malfoy. His cock is hard against mine; I can't help but jerk my hips as he presses his lips against my ear.

"Do you want to get this over with tonight?"

That was the last question I expected. Our card combination did say we are supposed to 'consummate' our relationship within a fortnight, but I've never put much stock in what cards say, and I didn't think he did either. My jaw drops because I honestly don't know what my answer is. Of course I want to get shagged, but with Malfoy? I get nervous just thinking about it. With him, I'd definitely be performing under pressure. And if I didn't please, he wouldn't be shy about letting me know.

This moment of hesitation determines my decision. I've shown weakness, and with Malfoy that's something I can't allow. Even now, with our cocks pressed together and aching to be taken out of our trousers, we're at war. I can't let him win.

"It's just a game, Malfoy. A superstition."

I can feel him tense. His response, when it comes, is acerbic. "Right, what was I thinking?"

He springs from my lap as if burned. The rest of the game goes by without another word exchanged between us. His last card instructs us to drink, which I'm sure he's happy about, but I can't honestly say I am.

There's an emptiness in my chest when I finally take off my blindfold and catch only a glimpse of his back as he leaves the common room. The Slytherins are all glaring at me; everyone else is oddly silent. Hermione casts her eyes downward when I look at her.

They must all be crazy. Malfoy and I could never get on.

II. The Lovers' Curse

♥

It's the day before we break for the holidays, and I'm starting to fret. At around midnight it will have been two weeks since I got partnered with Malfoy in The Lovers' Circle. I don't really believe that we'll be

cursed if we don't shag – that's just ridiculous.

Except, what if it isn't?

I'm willing to bet my own safety and well-being that these Tarot superstitions are rubbish, but am I willing to bet Malfoy's? It's true that I can't stand the prat – at least not when his mouth isn't on my cock – but I'd never forgive myself if something were to happen to him because I refused a shag.

Hermione isn't being helpful; she's determined to finish the scarf she's knitting for her mum before we leave tomorrow.

"I told you," she says, furrowing her brow at the loops of yarn on the needles, "stop worrying about it. There is no curse. And if history has shown otherwise, it's because a person cast it and then blamed it on the cards."

"Well, what if someone did cast it this time?"

She gives me a resigned look. "Why would anyone do that?"

"Oh, I don't know... for amusement?"

A smile tugs on the corners of her lips. "Then it probably won't be anything irreversible. But if you've got doubts, then just shag him, already."

"What?!"

Her smile widens. "Oh, come on, Harry. You've had stars in your eyes ever since that night."

"I do not have stars in my eyes."

Looking more closely at Hermione's latest project, I see that her knitting has improved a lot. The scarf is green, her mum's favourite colour. I can't help but think it would look great against Malfoy's pale skin.

"Whatever you say, Harry."

I hate it when she takes on that disbelieving tone. Contrary to what she may think, she doesn't always see right through me. Sure, I've wanked to memories of Malfoy licking me through my pyjamas – but 'stars in my eyes'? That's a slight exaggeration.

"Besides, I don't think he'd want to," I tell her. There's no way Malfoy would agree to a shag now, after I rejected him in front of everyone.

"You're probably right," says Hermione. "You screwed up."

I can still feel Malfoy's breath on my ear as he whispered his offer. He smelled only of fresh laundry, Firewhisky, and warm skin – a pleasant surprise, as I always assumed he'd be drenched in expensive cologne. A surge of desire goes through me at the memory; I could have had him that very night, could have held him and moved inside him. Who knows what other surprises I might have discovered?

But, as Hermione so subtly put it, I screwed up.

♥

Malfoy doesn't even glance in my direction as we wait to board the Hogwarts Express. He looks angry; he's just turned away from Parkinson and Zabini after a heated conversation. I watch him as discreetly as I can, but I'm having a hard time making out the lines of his face. I've cleaned my glasses twice already,

hoping that might fix the issue, but still my vision's a blur. It must be my right eye – it's been itchy all morning.

"C'mon, Harry," says Ron, as the crowd begins to move.

"Let's go, Io." I lift my owl's cage and follow Ron and Hermione onto the carriage. My light trunk rolls easily behind me as we search for an available compartment. We find one near the back of the train. Ron slides the door shut while I load Io's cage onto the luggage rack. There's an emptiness in my chest, a hollow feeling that comes from knowing I'll be spending the holidays surrounded by friends, and yet, alone.

Hermione picks up on my mood; I can see it in the way her mouth tightens at the sight of me, as if it my loneliness were my own fault. What I don't understand is how she thinks shagging a boy I could never get along with, just for the sake of preventing a possible curse, would solve the problem.

Ron seats himself across from me and squints at my face. "What's wrong with your eye, mate?"

"I don't know." I take my glasses off and use my sleeve to wipe the wetness off my lashes. "It's been itching since this morning."

"It's probably an allergic reaction to something," Hermione says. "Take a nap. It'll most likely heal on its own."

Ron looks at her like she's gone mental. "It's a what?"

"Never mind, Ronald."

Hermione's advice is probably sound, but I don't want to follow it. I'm afraid of what I might say in my sleep. But the constant swaying of the train as it rolls across the countryside makes me drowsier and

drowsier, until I can no longer keep my eyes open.

♥

“Harry wake up, mate. We’ll be at King’s Cross soon.”

I’m still asleep when Ron’s voice surfaces through my dreams, clearing fog-like images of Malfoy in a wintry garden of ice-sculptures and snow-covered evergreens. I force my eyes open with a groan, expecting to see Ron and Hermione sitting across from me, but instead I’m greeted with Parkinson and Zabini’s faces only inches from my own. And they’re staring at me as if I’m the most fascinating thing they’ve ever seen. Instinctively, I shrink back and whip out my wand.

“Harry, calm down!” The shrill voice is Hermione’s.

I blink, and just like that, Parkinson and Zabini are gone. In their places are Ron and Hermione, pale as ghosts.

“All right there, mate?” Ron asks.

I lower my wand and sag back into my seat. “Yeah, I’m fine. For a moment I thought – never mind.”

“How’s your eye feeling?” Ron’s expression is pained as he looks from Hermione to me. “What do you see?”

“It feels fine,” is all I say, afraid that if I were to tell them what I saw, they’d think I’ve finally gone off my trolley.

“Harry, don’t panic – " Hermione holds her hands out in front of her as if to restrain me. "But your left

eye is grey."

"What?" My hand automatically flies up to remove my glasses.

They share a concerned look while I rub my eye.

"Are you joking? It doesn't itch anymore – "

Ron turns to Hermione again. "Don't you have a mirror?"

"No." She actually looks offended.

My mind is already racing. A vision of Parkinson and Zabini examining my face, a grey eye in place of my green one…

"Does – does it look like Malfoy's eyes?" I ask, and watch their jaws drop.

Before they can reply, I'm out of my seat and opening the compartment door. There's a mirror in the loo – one look in it and I'll know the answer. I'd recognise one of those cold grey eyes the moment I saw it.

The corridor is empty; everyone is getting their things together so that they can rush out of the train as soon as it comes to a stop. I make it about halfway to the toilet when someone grabs my arm and drags me into one of the compartments.

"Hey, what're you – ?" I whirl around, and then it feels as if the ground has disappeared from beneath my feet.

Grey and green. The sight is so shocking that it takes me a moment to notice the furious glint in Malfoy's mismatched eyes.

"What did you and your underlings do, Potter?"

Malfoy's fingers are still curled around the sleeve of my jumper. I pull it out of his grasp with a rough jerk of my arm.

"I could ask you the same thing, Malfoy. We didn't do anything."

He points angrily at his green eye. "Then how do you explain this?"

Parkinson and Zabini are in the compartment with us. They have the look of two chihuahuas ready to pounce on me if I so much as look at Malfoy the wrong way.

I shrug. "Apparently I was wrong. It seems we're cursed."

Malfoy's laugh is sardonic. "Cards don't have powers. They don't curse people."

"But –"

Suddenly I feel like I'm missing something. Just two weeks ago, Malfoy straddled me and proposed that we "get this over with tonight". If he didn't believe that failing to shag would bring a curse upon us, then why would he have proposed such a thing – unless it was just an excuse to do it?

Malfoy seems to recognise the exact moment I draw that conclusion, and the look he gives me is not a pleasant one. "Someone who was in the common room that night cursed us, Potter, and when I find out who it was, they're going to be sorry. But first, I want my eye back."

"And I want mine," I tell him. "Should we just pop them right out, then?"

One of the more amusing things about Malfoy is how little he appreciates sarcasm when it's directed at him. I raise an eyebrow to further aggravate him.

For a moment, I see myself through his eye. His gaze darts down to my lips and lingers there longer than necessary. The vision is gone in a flash, and once more I see Malfoy glaring at me with my own eye, which looks more threatening than I would have imagined.

"Why don't you two just visit St Mungo's when we arrive, and get yourselves sorted out?" Pansy suggests from her seat. Malfoy shoots her a glare, but she's busy examining her nails.

"I'm not going anywhere with him."

"Is that right?" I ask. "Because I can think of at least one place you were willing to go with me not too long ago."

A muscle on Malfoy's face twitches. Zabini sniggers.

"Well, if you don't want to try and get this fixed, then I guess I'll just be going." As I turn to leave, Malfoy grabs my wrist.

"All right," he says, "since we're already here, let's go and get this fixed."

♥

The rhythmic, angry flipping of magazine pages is driving me insane. I've already got a headache and

dizziness from seeing different things out of each eye almost constantly now – the flashes of Malfoy's vision have been increasing in frequency and duration since we got off the Hogwarts Express – the last thing I need to deal with right now is a childish fit of jealousy.

"Would you rather have waited out there?" I ask Malfoy.

He's been making a long face since the Welcome Witch ushered us into the Healer's office. On account of my identity, we were allowed to proceed straight into the office, rather than have to wait in the crowded reception area like everyone else. I don't usually accept special treatment, but in this case it was better than being ogled and approached for autographs by the other patients for an hour.

Malfoy ignores me and continues flipping through an outdated issue of Witch Weekly, glancing at the pictures and headlines but never stopping to read a single sentence. I'm surprised he hasn't torn any of the pages yet.

At last the door opens and a short redheaded witch in a green robe enters the room.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," she says cheerfully as we rise from our chairs. "I'm Healer Selsbury."

Malfoy and I each shake her hand and introduce ourselves.

"Pleased to meet you." She pulls back her chair and sits down, hands folded on top of her desk, and takes a careful look at each of us. "Have you been experiencing shared vision?"

"I can see what he does through the grey eye, if that's what you mean," I tell her.

She looks satisfied with my response. "There's only one curse I'm aware of that could cause your symptoms. Would you mind if I cast a quick and painless diagnostic spell, just to be certain?"

"Not at all," Malfoy and I reply at the same time.

Healer Selsbury stands from her chair and comes to stand in front of me. Tilting my face up by my chin, she points her wand at me. There's a quick flash of light, as if a camera’s flashbulb had gone off, and then she examines my eyes.

She repeats the spell on Malfoy, and I see that the light causes no change to his grey eye, but makes the green one briefly glow like a cat's in the dark.

"Right, this is definitely the Lovers' Curse." She walks back to her desk and takes a seat. "I'm afraid I can't help you. There is an easy way to break the curse, but you will have to do it on your own."

I cast a glance at Malfoy. His Adam's apple bobs as he swallows hard, all the colour draining from his face. "How exactly do we do that?" he asks.

Healer Selsbury's eyes twinkle. "Sexual intercourse leading to climax for both of you."

The instant she says the words, I wish the ground would open up and swallow me whole.

♥

"So you're certain there's no other way to fix your eye?" Ron asks for the third time since I arrived at the Burrow. We're in the kitchen, peeling potatoes for dinner.

"I told you, Ron, I'm not certain about anything. All I know is what the Healer told – " I trail off. Malfoy's in the shower – he has been for the last few minutes – but he just looked down for a second, and I caught a glimpse of his erection.

"You all right, mate?" Ron looks worried.

"Look, I'm fine. Can we just not talk about it for a while?"

I don't mean to lose my temper, but I've only been here for a couple hours, and between Ron and Ginny I've already answered the same question at least five times. We've managed to keep it from Mrs Weasley for the time being, but with her keen skills of motherly observation, it won't be long before she realises there's something we're not telling her and forces it out of us.

"OK," says Ron. "But we'll have to owl Hermione tonight. She's asked that we keep her informed so that she can do some research. Maybe she'll figure something out by the time she comes over for Christmas."

"I hope so."

I try my best not to sound distracted when Mrs Weasley returns to the kitchen and sets about making dinner. My Malfoy eye keeps showing me images of a green tiled ceiling. I can't say for certain because I can't feel what Malfoy's feeling or hear what he's hearing, but based on what I see my best guess is he's tilting his head back while rubbing one off in the shower. The heat rises in my cheeks when I remember the glimpse I got of his prick: long, pale, and jutting out from a base of golden curls. My own cock begins to perk up, and I end up having to excuse myself to the loo as soon as I'm finished peeling the potato in my hand.

I have a wank with my eyes closed so that Malfoy won't see what I'm doing. If I'm lucky, he'll mistake the lack of vision for one of those moments when the connection between us is weak. If not, well – I saw more of him than he saw of me.

♥

"What if you wore an eye patch?" Ron asks, stirring the embers in the fireplace with a poker. "It'd be annoying, but at least you wouldn't have to see what Malfoy does all the time. Mum could make you one."

"It doesn't work; I see what he sees, so it doesn't matter if my – Malfoy's – eye is closed." I take a sip of my butterbeer and wipe off the foam left on my upper lip with my sleeve. "He and I tried it before we left St Mungo's. The only thing that works is when we both cover up our own eyes – but then we don't see anything. "

Ron and I have just received Hermione's response to our letter. There's only so much research she can do without access to the Hogwarts Library, but so far her findings support what Healer Selsbury's said: A shag is the only cure the Lovers' Curse. Or the death of one of its victims.

"And it can't be reversed by the person who cast it?" Ron asks.

"That's what Hermione says." I nod at the letter lying open on the arm of my chair. "Besides, we don't now who did it."

Ron's looks thoughtfully into the flames. "It must have been someone who's got an issue with you or Malfoy."

I slip down from the armchair to sit closer to Ron. Mrs Weasley's in the kitchen, and I don't want anyone to overhear what I'm about to say.

"Ron, I'm going to go to Malfoy Manor tomorrow."

He blanches. "Harry you're not thinking of – "

"Shagging him? No. But maybe together he and I can find a solution. I'm sure the Malfoys have a well-stocked library. Maybe we can find an answer – a potion we can brew, or something."

I wonder if it sounds as crazy to Ron's ears as it does to mine: Malfoy and I working together for a

common cause. It's enough to make me laugh.

"I suppose you could try." Ron hesitates for a moment, then adds, "But is it really bad enough you'd rather go there than wait until we get back to Hogwarts?"

That's something I've been thinking about since early in the afternoon, when I caught a glimpse of something I'd really rather not have.

Malfoy had a visitor for lunch. Marcus Flint. It was difficult to make out what was happening without being able to hear their conversation, but from what I saw, I can only conclude that they'd been intimate with each other before, and that Flint was eager for a repeat. He took Malfoy's hand and whispered something in his ear. Malfoy refused him, but not as decisively as I hoped.

I don't want to imagine how I would've felt if they'd shagged. Would Malfoy have agreed to it if not for our shared vision? And what other private moments might I be forced to witness before we returned to Hogwarts?

Ron raises his brows at me, waiting for an answer.

"There are things I'd rather not have to see," I say simply.

Just then Ginny walks in carrying two steaming mugs. She hands me one of them –hot apple cider – and curls up on the corner of the sofa with hers. "What would you rather not see?"

I guess owling Malfoy will have to wait until later.

III. The Lovers' Cure

♥

My heart is pounding as I move towards the wrought-iron gates. Malfoy never responded to my owl, but I've come anyway in hopes that I'll be allowed to pass. I doubt he really wants to keep me out. If we don't work together to find some sort of solution, we could be walking around with switched eyeballs and shared vision for the rest of our lives. I doubt he wants that; I certainly don't

Eyes closed, I take a deep breath and step forwards. When I open them again I find myself on the other side of the gates. So, I'm not entirely unwelcome – that's comforting.

My legs feel heavy as I walk the length of the driveway up to the manor. This place doesn't hold the best of memories. But Malfoy and I have work to do, so I take a few fortifying breaths and lift the heavy knocker. I expect to be greeted by a house-elf announcing that Malfoy isn't at home, or isn't taking visitors, but with Malfoy's eye I can see him get up and leave the room he's in – the family library – and move through the house. Less than a minute later, the door swings open.

"It's about time, Potter" he says, and turns to lead me inside.

♥

We spend the first couple days cooped up in the library, flipping through old books late into the night until the words begin to swim before our eyes. The fire crackling in the hearth keeps us warm, and an endless supply of food and sweets ensures we stay fed.

We've gone through most of the relevant books by now, and have found only brief passages about the Lovers' Curse. The only known way to break it, according to every source we've looked at so far, is to have sex. To be honest, I've reached the point where I'm ready to just give in. I've wanted to shag him all along – what difference would it make if doing it would also end the curse?

Malfoy wants me, too. I've seen, with my own eyes and his, the way he looks at me when he thinks I'm engrossed in a book. His eyes travel from the tips of my hair to the hollow of my throat. Sometimes they pause at my mouth for a while, especially if I happen to be sucking on one of those oversized candy

canes he's got, before continuing their downward path. I've also caught him drawing his lip in between his teeth during those moments when we sit in silence, sipping from steaming cups of hot chocolate and, in my case, at least, thinking about things that make us feel warm and fuzzy inside.

"It wouldn't exactly be a punishment, you know," I tell him on our third afternoon together in the library. It's Christmas Eve, and we're too tired and distracted to see straight.

Malfoy stiffens, but doesn't look up from his book. He's been staring at the same page for nearly an hour. "No, I suppose it wouldn't."

My stomach does a little flip at the awkward silence that follows. One would think we've just made progress, but I've no idea how to proceed.

Malfoy shuts the book and puts it down on the table. "I still need to buy a gift for my parents. Will you go to Diagon Alley with me?"

The question catches me by surprise. Malfoy electing to be seen in public with me is far from an everyday occurrence. "Er… sure."

I follow him downstairs to the wardrobe, where he puts on his cloak and I my coat. It's not very cold outside, so we don't bother with hats or gloves, but we do put on scarves. I notice that his is black, and although it's more finely-knitted than the one Hermione made for her mum, it doesn't look brand new.

Once we're dressed, we Apparate to Diagon Alley. In the seconds it takes us to arrive, I make one of the craziest decisions of my life: I'm going to buy a Christmas present for Malfoy. It would wrong not to, having spent the last three days at his house, regardless of whether or not we decide to shag. I doubt I'll be getting anything in return, but it doesn't matter.

We're not far from Twilfitt and Tatting's, which works out great. As long as he's not planning on going there, I can probably manage to buy his gift and a second one for Hermione to fool him, should he be paying attention to what I'm seeing at that particular moment. I've already done my shopping last Hogsmeade weekend – except for Ron's present, which I ordered back in September to be delivered by

owl tomorrow morning. (A broom would be difficult to hide from one's best mate.)

"Have you done all your shopping, Potter? If not, we should probably split up so it doesn't take as long."

I feign nonchalance so that he doesn't get suspicious. "Sure, I still haven't got anything for Hermione. Meet you back here when I'm done?"

"All right. I'll be back in about half an hour," he says.

I wait until he's crossed the street, then turn in the other direction. I've never actually been to Twilfitt and Tatting's before. The shop looks very similar to Madam Malkin's, except that there are fewer items, and the numbers on the price tags are much higher. I head for the outerwear section to look at scarves. My eyes are drawn immediately to a vivid green cashmere specimen that's soft to the touch and costs more than the highest quality Snitch, but it's the red one next that I let Malfoy see me pick up. As I turn away, I surreptitiously grab the green one without looking at it and head to the register with both.

I walk out of the shop with two scarves: the green one for Draco – it's difficult not to think of someone you buy gifts for by his first name – and a thicker red one for Hermione. I've only few Galleons left in my pocket once I'm out the door, and probably won't be able to buy much at Sugarplum's without making a stop at Gringotts, which I'm not keen on doing.

"Twilfitt and Tatting's?" says Draco, when we meet up again. "What'd you get there?"

"A scarf for Hermione."

His lips quirk. "Careful you don't get her accustomed to things Weasley won't be able to afford."

I add this statement to the growing list of ways in which Draco hasn't changed, and have to resist the urge to kick him in the shin as we head off toward Sugarplum's.

Sweet shops never fail to make me feel like a kid again. I spend the rest of my money on Cauldron Cakes and Chocolate Frogs, while Draco stocks up on Belgian truffles, chocolate-covered peppermint sticks, and oversized candy canes. He must really love the holidays – or maybe he just wants to watch me suck on more of those minty canes. I wouldn't mind, as long as he'd let me suck on something else afterwards.

My thoughts leave me with a smirk on my face and a knot in my stomach as we stop out of the shop and Apparate back to the Manor.

♥

Draco and I have eaten alone these few days, so I attend Christmas Eve dinner with a fair amount of trepidation. Lucius and Narcissa are already seated at the table when Draco and I arrive. The entire way to the table, I can think of nothing else but whether or not I will know which utensils to use and when.

Needless to say, dinner turns out to be a silent and awkward affair. Narcissa spends most of her time swirling her wine goblet and making sure to smile politely whenever I so much as look in her direction, which I quickly learn to avoid doing. Every few minutes, Lucius clears his throat, at which Draco and Narcissa arch their brows in anticipation of a conversation that never comes.

It's Narcissa who breaks the ice at last. "Will you be having dinner with us again tomorrow, Mr Potter?"

"No, I won't." My response comes out a bit more enthusiastically than I intended. "I promised the Weasley family I'd join them for dinner tomorrow."

She nods in understanding. "It's a shame you won't be able to join us. Our house-elf claims to have an unrivalled recipe for Christmas pudding. He's been working on it for months."

"I wish I could try it," I say, truthfully. Everything I've eaten so far – gammon, leeks and herby boiled potatoes – was delicious. (Though I wouldn't touch the peacock.)

"I say, let's have the pudding now," Draco says brightly. "I'm anxious to see which charms Potter will receive. He always got the most fascinating predictions in Divination."

For someone who wants to shag me, he's awfully sadistic.

"I see no reason why we can't have the pudding tonight." Lucius snaps his fingers, and an elf appears out of thin air. "Titchy, send up the pudding."

"Yes, Master!" The elf says in a squeaky voice.

When she Disapparates, I lean in towards Draco. "Titchy?"

Narcissa overhears the question and answers before Draco has a chance to open his mouth.

"When Draco was five years old, we permitted him to name the new house-elf."

Draco glares at me, cheeks flushed, when I give him an amused look.

"Needless to say, Draco's elf-naming privileges were immediately revoked," adds Lucius.

Draco is spared any further humiliation when the lights suddenly go out and a large flaming pudding appears on a plate in the centre of the table, lighting up the room. Narcissa cuts portions for each of us and serves them with brandy butter.

"Bon appétit, Potter," Draco says, before we dive into dessert.

"Thanks, and the same."

The pudding really is delicious. As I'm chewing away dreamily, wondering whether or not Draco has made up his mind about shagging, I suddenly hear a cracking sound, accompanied a sharp pain that shoots up into my head.

One would think that, considering Draco just mentioned the charms in the pudding, I would have remembered to watch out for them. But no, I've gone and broken my tooth on one.

"I can heal that for you, dear." Narcissa rises from her chair and comes over to my side of the table; the pain is so strong I don't even think to stop her as she tilts my chin upward. "Which one is it?"

I point to the cracked tooth, and before I can have second thoughts she casts Episkey. The pain disappears.

"How does it feel?" Narcissa asks, as I'm running my fingertip over the surface of the tooth.

"Excellent – the pain's gone. Thank you, Mrs Malfoy."

"You're very welcome."

As she returns to her seat, I look down at the small silver wishbone still clenched in my hand. A shudder goes through me at the memory of biting down on it.

"Careful what you wish for, Potter." There's amusement, but also a warning in Draco's bright eyes and curved mouth.

"I'm a Gryffindor," I tell him, "I can handle anything. What'd you get?"

It takes me a moment to put meaning to the tiny golden ring in between his thumb and forefinger: it's a wedding ring.

I grin, and tell him in a voice low enough for just the two of us to hear. "Well, I hope you and Flint will be very happy together."

He narrows his eyes. It's always unnerving to see my own green eye glaring back at me.

♥

After dinner, Draco tells me he wants to show me something. It must be outside, because he leads me to the wardrobe and starts putting on his cloak. He waits until I've got my coat on, and then offers me his arm. Taking it, I'm surprised how strong he feels. I can feel his body heat through the sleeve of his jumper, and it gives me tingles.

"Hold on tight, Potter."

The first thing I see when we Apparate is a large fir tree, decorated with hundreds of candles and crystal ornaments. It stands in the centre of an axial garden, surrounded by ice sculptures and potted topiaries shaped like globes and spires.

The sun set hours ago; the only light in the garden is that coming from the candles on the Christmas tree and the low flambeaus lining walkways. A light snow is falling; there's already a centimetre-thick layer on the ground. I haven't seen anything this beautiful in a long time.

Through Draco's eye I can see that he's watching me while I take in the scene. Being under his scrutiny makes me nervous. It only lasts a moment, though. Then he takes mercy on me and looks back at the tree.

"When I was little, I loved to play in the snow, so my parents thought I would enjoy a winter garden like this," he says, scraping snow off the walkway with his shoe. "We've been putting a tree here every winter since. Well, with the exception of last year."

Something in the tone of his voice makes me want to reach out and take his hand. Thankfully it's hidden beneath his cloak, which he has wrapped around himself.

I admire the scene for a moment longer, wondering if he even realises how lucky he is to have had this, and a real family, as part of his childhood. "It's beautiful."

"Thank you. "

He's turned around and begun walking towards a stone bench nestled against a hedge of holly. I follow and sit down beside him, a little closer than I need to. He doesn't move away when our thighs brush.

Draco draws his lower lip in between his teeth. He's looking down at his fingers, which are worrying the hem of his cloak. He must be very nervous, to let his guard down like this.

"Did you mean what you said earlier in the library?" he asks.

"You know I did."

His eyes shoot up at my answer. "No, I don't. I thought you were enjoying yourself during the game, but then you rejected my proposition."

My face flushes at the memory. "I was enjoying myself… a lot. I thought that was obvious."

"Then why'd you say no?" There's hurt and accusation in his voice, as if he were a spoiled child who'd been denied something for the first time in his life. I doubt I'd find it so endearing if it weren't about us not having shagged.

"Because I didn't think you really wanted to… and I was nervous."

He smirks. "The Great Harry Potter, Gryffindor extraordinaire, lost his courage over a shag with me?"

"So it would seem."

The snow is falling thicker now, in great powdery flakes that break apart where they land. When one of them hits Draco's cheek, I can't help but reach out and brush it away. My thumb lingers too long, but rather than pull away Draco leans into the touch. Our eyes lock, and find myself wishing both of his were grey.

"So, let's fix it," he says, as if he read my mind.

We lean in together, our exhaled breaths mingling as white puffs of condensed air. Then at last our lips touch. His tongue sliding into my mouth again is like returning to Hogwarts at the end of summer--perfect— and so much more satisfying than a memory could ever be.

A pleasant chill runs through me as Draco wraps his arm around my waist. Snow is falling on my nose and cheeks and melting into prickling drops of ice water, but Draco's mouth is hot and he tastes like treacle, so it's all right.

He reaches between us with his free hand to untie my scarf, and then moves his mouth to my neck. As I tilt my head back to give him better access, a snowflake falls between my parted lips and melts on my tongue.

I'm amazed at how easy it is to submit to him. This is Draco, for Godric's sake. Last time I was at his

mercy, he stomped on my nose left me under my Invisibility Cloak on an empty train.

"Want to go back to my room?" he asks, offering his elbow.

I nod and take it. Seconds later, we Apparate in front of a fireplace. I'm glad for it; my hair and clothes are covered in snow, and my face is numb.

White powder sprinkles onto the sheepskin rug and the floor as we hastily remove our outerwear. Draco brushes it away from our immediate space and kisses me again. A cold, damp hand slides underneath my shirt. I shiver but let it stay, and delight in feeling it warm up from my body heat. In this moment I want nothing but to get lost in his mouth forever, but he starts lifting my jumper, so I break the kiss and help him get it over my head. Once both our jumpers are off, I lie back on the rug, pulling Draco on top of me by his tie. Something twists in my belly when I remember the night of the game and warm silk sliding over my eyes.

My hands tremble as I undo his tie and the first few buttons of his shirt. He watches my reaction as I spot the faint scar cutting diagonally across his chest. I trace the length of it, feeling my heart swell in my chest. The discovery that I have left my mark on him is bittersweet.

Eager for a distraction, I reach down in between our bodies, and pull down his zip. He pauses for a moment, eyes fluttering shut when I slip my hand inside his underpants and grab his cock. Then his lips crash against mine, the kiss desperate and pleading. Part of me wants to fight him, to push him back because his tongue is so deep inside my mouth that I can't deny I'm being claimed; but another part – the one I feel more strongly – wants me to let go, to let someone else take charge for once.

"Please," I pant, when he breaks away to breathe. I give his cock a gentle squeeze on the upstroke, then smear his precome over the head.

He thrusts into my hand. "Please, what? I've no idea what you're asking for."

"You know what I want."

His eyes glitter with amusement. "No, I don't. I require directions."

Great. I should've known he wouldn't make this easy for me.

"I want your mouth on my cock –" I say with as much confidence and authority as I can muster, " – no barriers this time. And then I want you to fuck me. I want to get it so good I'll forget my own name."

He presses his lips to mine. "No pressure, then."

It's utter torture as he makes his way down towards my cock. He unbuttons my shirt slowly, stopping to dip his tongue into the hollow of my throat, to suck on the skin over my collarbones and tug on my nipples with fingers and teeth. When at last he makes it to my belly button, I lose patience and push his head down the rest of the way.

I unbuckle my belt while he pulls down my zip, then lift my hips to help him get my trousers down. Once they're off he Accios a bottle of lube.

"Er... Draco?"

"Don't worry, I'll be gentle."

I roll my eyes at him. "I'm not a girl. I just wanted to ask you not look there while you're... you know. I'd rather not have to see."

His lips twitch. "I hope you don't mean your dick."

"You can look at my dick all you want, just not the other place."

"All right, then. I won’t look," he says, eyes glued to mine as he lowers his head.

My head tilts back and I gasp as he dips his tongue in to the tip of my cock. The pleasure courses through me with such intensity I can feel it in the tips of my toes. When he wraps his lips around me, I can't help but grab his hair and push forwards into the heat. I hold his head still and begin to thrust, quickly losing myself in the heat and the wet sounds of my cock moving in and out of his mouth. Next thing I know his lubed finger is pushing inside me; it feels odd and fucking brilliant at the same time.

I know I won't be able to last long. His mouth is too wet, his tongue too wicked for my sanity; I'm torn between pushing down onto his fingers and up into his mouth. Draco, however, solves my dilemma by releasing my cock and pulling his fingers out of me.

He ignores my groan of frustration and reaches for the lube again. "I'm going to fuck you now, Harry Potter. Any objections?"

"Not one," I say, and I pull him down by his unbuttoned collar.

As we kiss, he lifts one of my legs over his shoulder and positions his cock against my arse. I haven’t been this nervous in ages, but I do my best to relax as he presses down. At first it feels as if he's going to tear me in two, but once he's in, the pain subsides to a slight burn and he slides in easily the rest of the way.

"Harry…" Draco's whisper is so soft I have to wonder if I actually heard it.

A moment later his lips cover mine, and he reaches in between us to grab my cock. His first thrusts are short, tentative, and a bit awkward because he keeps changing the angle. Only when he hits a wonderful spot, sending a jolt of pleasure through me, do I realise what he was trying to do.

I grab his arse cheeks and give them a squeeze through his trousers. "Right there."

He pulls back and thrusts forward again, grinning at my unsuccessful attempt to suppress a shout.

"More," I gasp, curling my fingers a fistful of his shirt.

Our breaths grow ragged as he picks up the pace. The strokes of his hand on my dick are half-hearted and uneven – but they're enough. The pressure in between my legs is building rapidly.

He raises himself on his arms for better leverage, and I take a moment to admire the sight: his shirt crumpled and unbuttoned halfway down his torso, his cheeks flushed with exertion and lips still swollen from sucking me off. For the first time in my life, I realise just how stupid we've been; we should have done this long ago.

Draco tightens his grip on my cock. "Harry, I'm –"

"Yeah, me too."

His breath hitches then, and he slams into me a few more times before he shudders and stills. The last thrust pushes me over the edge; I come silently, my cock pulsing in his hand while I drink in the sound of his suppressed moans.

My leg aches like hell when I finally slide it off his shoulders, and it doesn't help that he all but collapses on top of me.

"We should have… done this… long ago," he says, panting.

I slide my hand under his shirt to caress his shoulder. "Agreed."

He looks down at me, and I see that both his eyes are grey. (Post-orgasm, I didn't even notice the lack of our shared vision.)

"We could make up for lost time," he suggests tentatively.

"Yeah, I suppose we could."

His eyes widen at my response, and I take advantage of the moment to roll us over. I'm not surprised to see that he looks just as stunning on his back as he did on top of me. "If you don't mind, we can start now," I say.

♥

Christmas Morning finds us sore and exhausted after an entire night spent shagging and talking and shagging. After only a couple hours sleep, we go downstairs to break our fast and open Christmas presents, then come back to Draco's room and shag again. Afterwards, we lie naked in his bed, wearing only the gifts we received from each other: mine a silver thumb ring, and Draco's the green scarf I bought at Twilfitt and Tatting's.

"What are you so happy about?" Draco asks, noticing the smile on my face as we lie sprawled in post-coital bliss.

"Nothing – I just remembered your parents' faces when they saw that our eyes are back to normal."

At first Draco looks like he's going to be mad, but then gives a snorting laugh. "I'm surprised my father was able to force down his breakfast." He reaches for my hand and laces our fingers together. "But at least we can be sure they won't be a bother until dinner."

I draw my lip in between my teeth at the mention of dinner. "Draco, I told the Weasleys I'd join them for Christmas dinner."

The instant I say that, his face falls. "Oh, right."

"I'm sorry." I give his hand a squeeze. "I'd love it if you came –"

He starts shaking his head before I even finish the sentence. "No."

"Are you sure? I could send an owl – I'm certain you'd be welcome."

"No," he repeats firmly.

My heart constricts at the sudden prospect of having to divide my time between Draco and the people I've come to consider my family. It's probably too soon to be worrying about such things, but I can't help the thoughts that cross my mind.

He sighs and strokes the back of my hand with his thumb. "Harry, I'm willing to do whatever it takes to make this thing between us work. But I need time. Please, don't push me."

"All right."

He looks away for a moment while playing idly with his scarf. The green is so vibrant against his porcelain skin.

"Will you come and visit me again before is the holidays are over?" he asks, still looking at the scarf.

His tendency to feign nonchalance at times like this is strangely endearing. I can't stop myself from planting a quick but deep kiss on his lips. "Of course."

♥

The knowing stares are killing me. I expected as much from George, possibly Hermione, and maybe even Ginny – but never from Mrs Weasley. And I've no idea how Fleur found out, but she must have, the way she barely hides a smirk every time she looks at me.

I've kept my eyes on my plate throughout dinner, and am now pretending to be fully absorbed in chewing my last bite of mince pie. My ears, however, are attuned to Ginny and Hermione's conversation; they've been acting unusually hostile towards one another since I arrived.

"… unethical," says Ginny. "You've gone too far this time."

To my surprise, Ron, who seems to have been ignoring the conversations around the table in favour of wolfing down his dinner, joins in on the conversation. "Hermione's right, Ginny. They wouldn't have given in so easily if they hadn't wanted to."

"Thank you, Ron," says Hermione.

I can't take it any longer. "Would you guys mind telling me what's going on?" I ask.

Everyone turns to look at me as if they'd forgotten I was there.

"Later, Harry," Hermione says, ignoring Ginny's glare.

We sit in silence until dinner's finished, and the four of us remain behind while everyone else gathers

around the wireless. Once we're alone, I turn to Hermione and give her an expectant look.

She takes a deep breath and braces herself. "I cast the curse."

It takes me a moment to process what she said. Next to me, Ron is staring at the ceiling and quietly humming a Christmas tune.

"You cast the curse?" I ask, when I can find my voice again. "Hermione, that's – "

"Exactly!" says Ginny. "She left you and Malfoy with no choice but to have sex against your will. That's as good as rape."

She's genuinely upset; I put a hand on her arm to calm her.

"It is not!" says Hermione. "You know I modified the curse so that I could reverse it if necessary."

Ginny snorts.

The world starts to spin around me. "You could have reversed it? When were you thinking of telling me?"

Hermione's eyes are apologetic when she turns to me. "I would have told you today if you and Malfoy hadn't resolved it on your own."

"But you told me there was no way to reverse it other than shagging Malfoy." I'm surprised to find that I'm not as angry with her as I should be.

Hermione sighs. "Harry, it's you and Malfoy we're talking about. Are you honestly telling me you two

would have given in before exhausting every other possibility? We haven't even looked in the Hogwarts library or consulted any of the professors – "

I have to admit she's right; Draco and I both wanted to shag the night we played Anneau de L'amour, and most of our time in the Manor's library was spent casting discreet glances at one another.

"Malfoy spent his entire sixth year trying to repair that cabinet," Hermione says. "Do you really think he would have shagged someone he didn't want to after only a week of shared eyesight? Would you have?"

"No, I guess we wouldn't have," I admit. "But why did you do that, Hermione?"

"'Cause you fancy the pants off each other, that's why," says Ron, finally joining the conversation.

I give him a quizzical look, and we both start laughing. Even Hermione and Ginny stop scowling at each other and join in.

"So you're happy, then?" Ginny asks.

The question catches me off guard. Ginny's concern is genuine, her expression hopeful. Looking at her I realise that yes, I am happy – happier than I've been in a long time. Even though Draco isn't beside me, I no longer feel alone. I've got someone to look forward to seeing again, someone who makes my stomach flip and my heart flutter.

I smile at them all. "Yes, I am."

The End.

Don't forget to go back to H/D Holidays on LJ and leave feedback!