Precious Gem by dracoredeemed

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Chapter 1: Precious Gem

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A/N: This story was written for Naesy, who inspires and challenges me, and is my beta! This is a reworked version of what was originally a long one-shot.

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Precious Gem

Chapter 1

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” Draco slammed his fist down on the hard oak desk, scattering papers to the floor. “I won’t do it!” He stood back and crossed his arms, glaring angrily. “What about Weasley or Thomas?”

“Weasley is still in St. Mungo’s recovering from the potion explosion and Thomas has been assigned to Dover.” Kingsley Shacklebolt sat back in his chair, lips pursed. “It’s got to be you. Besides, you’re our best Auror.” Draco rolled his eyes at that, and flopped into the chair in front of the desk, arms still folded.

“Merlin, Malfoy! Get over yourself! This is a highly dangerous assignment and we need someone who has the skill and nerve to bring it off.” Shacklebolt sat forward then, dark brown eyes peering intently into the grey ones across from him. “We need you, Malfoy.”

Draco blinked wearily and rubbed his eyes. He sat for a few moments in contemplation, and the other man eyed him warily. Finally, he dropped his shoulders in resignation and slouched down further in the chair. “Fine. I’ll do it. But I’m not bloody staying there.”

“You will stay there, and you will be courteous and professional.” Shacklebolt shifted some papers around before locating the one he was looking for. Sliding it across the desk, he looked at Draco intently. “Do I make myself clear? Here is the brief. Now get going.”

Draco clenched his teeth and stood up, grabbing the paper from the desk. “Yes, sir. Whatever you say.” Turning abruptly, he strode for the door, yanking it open with the force of his anger and slamming it sharply behind him.

Silently fuming as he strode down the third floor hallway to his office, Draco scanned the paper quickly as he walked. Bloody Potter! Fucking wonder boy! Why the bleeding hell couldn’t he keep out of trouble? Reading down the page, he noted that the origin of the death threats had been traced to Bath, but to date they had no leads on any Death Eater activity in that area. He was to be Potter’s bodyguard for Merlin knew how long, cramped up with the bloody git in the ratty old Order headquarters, waiting for some crazed, maniacal killer to swoop in and attack them. Great. Just Great. Scanning down further he suddenly stopped abruptly in his tracks. Fuck. They suspected Noceoipsem may be the weapon of choice.

Closing his eyes, Draco wearily carded his hand through his hair and frowned. That would mean he would have to stay by Potter’s side twenty-four/seven. He wouldn’t be able to let the git out of his sight. Bloody shit on a stick! What had he ever done to deserve this? What manner of heinous bloody crimes had he committed that were now exacting unholy retribution on him? Not only would he have to live at Grimmauld Place and protect the one person in the world he hated most, but he’d have to follow him around like his bloody shadow.

Noceoipsem was an insidious poison that was difficult to detect in food or drink and which slowly drove the recipient into deep depression until they eventually tried to kill themselves. The process could take weeks, and there was only one antidote, but it had to be administered before the poison took a strong hold on the victim, before the depression set in. Once that happened, there was nothing anyone could do except watch and intervene before the victim could harm themselves. Most victims ended up in St. Mungo’s under heavy sedation for the rest of their lives.

Draco threw himself into his chair and sighed heavily. Potter could have already been dosed with the poison. Anyone could have tampered with his food and he’d never know until the depression hit him. They’d have to test every bit of food that came into the house, but it may already be too late. Draco sighed again as he thought about living in such close proximity to his nemesis. Watching Potter sleep would be just so, so wonderful, not to mention watching him bloody pee, for Merlin’s sake. Wearily, he

gathered some papers and books into a bag and headed to the lobby so he could Floo to his flat to pack.

Grimmauld Place was still under the Fidelius charm put in place by Dumbledore so many years ago, though Lupin was now the Secret Keeper. Potter had been living there for four years, ever since the War ended and the Order had disbanded. Draco had no idea what Potter did, apart from some vague recollection to do with Wizard-Muggle relations. Whatever it was, his photo was still in the Prophet often enough to keep him in the public eye. He grimaced as he remembered the most recent front-page story about some award or other Potter had added to his collection. He hadn't bothered to read it, merely sneering at the strangely formal-looking man in the photo before throwing the paper into the rubbish.

It was already dark when Draco warded his flat and Apparated from the hall to the park across from twelve Grimmauld Place. The façade of the building suddenly appeared as he strode quickly across the street. He stopped and stared for a moment, before forcing himself to walk up the stairs and rap on the door.

Potter, of course, looked as unkempt as usual. "Malfoy," he said evenly, stepping aside to allow the other man to enter.

"Potter," Draco sneered back as he brushed past him and made his way into the downstairs living room, where he dropped his bags before turning to regard his host. "Let's get this straight. I go where you go. You do not move an inch without my permission. I won't have the bloody Boy Who Lived die on my watch." He crossed his arms and glared at Potter, who had dropped onto the couch.

"I didn't know you cared, Malfoy. How sweet. Would you like to hold my hand as well?" His green eyes glinted with amusement, as if the very presence of Draco in his house was the universe's idea of a joke.

Draco's nostrils flared. "Fuck you." He picked up his bags then. "Where are we sleeping? I need to unpack." Potter stood up and led the way out of the room and up the stairs, stopping at the second floor landing to make sure Draco was following him.

"My room is down the hall here." He turned and walked down the hall, opening a heavy door at the end to reveal a huge bedroom with two double beds. "I've added a bed for you. You can put your things in that wardrobe. The bathroom is next door." He flicked his hand to indicate which bed was Draco's and

flopped down on the other bed to watch as Draco dumped his bags on the floor and started to unpack. “I don’t like this any more than you do, Malfoy.” He looked pointedly at Draco, who merely sneered at him again. Potter rolled his eyes, then got up and walked over to a desk that was situated under the only window in the room.

“So, what do you know about Noceoipsem?” He picked up a book off the desk and began leafing through it. “The only antidote I’ve been able to find is a bezoar, but it has to be taken before the depression sets in.” He looked up at Draco and furrowed his brows. “Which means I should take one just in case, I suppose. What do you think?”

Draco stopped hanging his trousers for a moment and looked back at Potter incredulously. “Are you insane? What if you haven’t ingested any yet? If you take a bezoar now and then ingest some later, you’ll be fucked!” Potter looked confused at that, and Draco sighed, a long-suffering look on his face. “Bezoars are very strong. You can’t take them too often. They are not preventive. They only work as an antidote.” He was pronouncing the words slowly, as if Potter was too stupid to understand. “If you take one now, you can’t have another one for at least two weeks. Overdosing on bezoars will put you into a coma, you moron.”

Potter narrowed his eyes and slowly walked over to stand in front of Draco, his mouth set in a thin line and his fists clenched at his side. When he spoke, his voice was low, but menacing. “Let’s get one thing straight, Malfoy. This is my house. You will be civil at all times or I will hex the fucking daylights out of you.” He poked a finger at Draco’s chest. “Are we clear?”

Draco stood impassively as Potter poked him, but his eyes were thunderous; smoky grey storms of hate and revulsion. “Get your hands off me,” he snapped, stepping back and turning swiftly to continue his unpacking. He heard Potter snarl something, then return to the desk. He closed his eyes and tried to force his anger to dissipate. If he had to live here --possibly for weeks-- he would need to get a hold of himself or he would fucking kill Potter himself. Momentarily, he pondered the possibility of a life without the dark-haired idiot, smiling slightly at the thought, before dismissing it with a frown and returning to his task.

Their evening meal was eaten in silence, save for the clinking of dishes in the kitchen. Kreacher had made a stew with dumplings and, after running a quick diagnostic spell over the food to make sure it was contaminant-free, Draco had tucked in with gusto, grudgingly admitting to himself that it wasn’t half bad. Potter had even opened a bottle of decent merlot to go with it, though Draco would never admit that, even to himself. Potters just have no clue when it comes to things such as choosing wines. Nevertheless

he savoured the last sips as he sat back in his seat, replete from their meal, and eyed Potter through half-closed lids.

“I assume you’ve been checking the food as it arrives?”

Potter looked up briefly and rolled his eyes. “I know you think I’m a moron but I do have enough common sense to protect myself.” He was concentrating on his wine, swirling the contents around in the glass. “And you,” he added almost inaudibly. Draco’s eyebrows rose at that and he stifled a retort with much difficulty.

“Nevertheless, I would like to run a diagnostic spell over you every couple of days, just to be sure. If you’re contaminated we have to get the bezoar into you in time to forestall the depression.” Draco sat back and rested his left ankle on his right knee, a smug look on his face.

Potter glared at him distastefully. “I hardly think that’s necessary. I can cast my own diagnostic spell, thank you very much!”

Draco languorously lifted his hands to clasp them behind his head and leered at the other man. “What? Afraid, Potter? Got something to hide?” The diagnostic spell had to be cast on bare skin over the entire body in order to elicit the colour of the person’s aura.

Potter blushed darkly and stood up, pushing his chair back roughly as he did so. “Of course not. Just don’t want the likes of you raking your filthy eyes over me.” He turned and headed for the bedroom, and Draco got up quickly to follow him, knocking his chair over as he lunged forward to grab Potter by the elbow.

“Trust me, I’d rather burn my eyes out than look at your skinny, pathetic excuse for a body.” Potter wrenched his arm out of Draco’s gasp and turned to leave the room. “You will let me do the spell or I will report you to Shacklebolt.”

Potter stopped in his tracks, then. “Fine,” he muttered before sweeping out of the room. Draco rolled his eyes in frustration and made to follow. This was going to be one long assignment. Leaping the stairs two

at a time, he stormed into their bedroom just as Potter was heading out again, and nearly collided with him.

“I’m going to take a shower.” Potter brushed past him and headed for the bathroom. Draco sighed deeply, and turned to follow him. “What are you doing? I think I can wash myself!” Potter pushed him away and went to close the bathroom door, but Draco caught it and shoved until he was able to force his way into the bathroom.

“How do I know you haven’t already been infected? I don’t trust your diagnostics. How do I know you’re not already depressed and have razor blades hidden under the soap?” He leaned back against the bathroom wall and crossed his arms. “Until I get to cast my own diagnostic spell, you are not leaving my sight.”

“Fine. Check the soap for knives then. But you’re not bloody getting in this shower with me!” Potter stripped off his t-shirt, then quickly slid out of the old track pants and boxers he’d been wearing and threw them in the laundry basket. When he looked up Draco was lounging against the sink, smirking.

“Well, well, well. You certainly don’t have anything to worry about. Pity your personality isn’t as fit.” Draco deliberately let his eyes rove over the slender naked form before him, raking his eyes over the taut muscles of his chest and abdomen, before moving down further to ogle the generous length below. Potter blushed again and quickly stepped into the shower, pulling the curtain closed with unnecessary force. Draco heard a faint “Fuck off” as the shower burst on, and smirked again to himself. Potter was so easy to bait.

Luckily, he didn’t take too long and Draco busied himself in the meanwhile by checking out his reflection in the unfoggable mirror over the sink. His skin, as usual, was flawless, and his white-blond hair, though softly styled to feather lightly over his eyes, was immaculate. How on earth Potter could tolerate that bird’s nest on his head, he’d never know.

It wasn’t long before the shower stopped and an arm reached out from behind the curtain in search of a towel. Draco picked up a towel off the chair and held it out just beyond arm’s reach, until Potter’s head appeared from behind the curtain, an exasperated look on his face.

“Want me to dry you off?” Draco sniggered as Potter grabbed the towel from him and shut the curtain sharply. Baiting Potter this way was proving almost to be more satisfying than insulting him. Draco smiled to himself as he made a mental note that this might be the perfect way to drive Potter completely insane.

Potter stepped out from behind the shower curtain with the towel wrapped around his lower half and his hair still dripping slightly. Without looking at Draco or saying anything, he brushed past to open the door. Draco followed him back to the bedroom, where Potter strode to the middle of the room and turned to face him. “Okay, let’s get this over with.”

Draco sauntered over to stand in front of the other man and drew his wand out of his sleeve. “Lose the towel,” he said with a smirk.

A/N: Noceoipsem is from the Latin meaning "harm to self".

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Draco sauntered over to stand in front of the other man and drew his wand out of his sleeve. “Lose the towel.” Potter rolled his eyes and dropped it to the floor, leaving him standing awkwardly naked in front of his erstwhile nemesis, who was obviously enjoying himself immensely. Potter looked away, pretending nonchalance as Draco began to run his wand over his bare skin. Diagnostic spells had to be cast along the lines of one’s skeletal structure, starting from the forehead. Draco aimed his wand just right of Potter’s scar, hovering it mere millimetres over the skin until it began to glow softly, then carefully began to draw it down the centre of his face, muttering incantations as he did so.

He stopped at the chin, noting a slight cerulean glow beginning to emanate from the tip of his wand. So far, so good. He continued down the soft skin of Potter’s neck, still a hair’s breadth from touching him, and Potter swallowed as the wand’s glowing tip left a trail of gooseflesh in its wake. When he reached

the dip in the centre of Potter's collarbone, Draco paused, before slowly ghosting the wand tip along the right collarbone and resting it on the swell of the muscle joining his shoulder to his arm. The wand tip was now glowing teal, and the light was stronger than before. Carefully, he drew the wand down Potter's arm and the latter held his arm out, palm up, slightly trembling, so that he could touch the point at the soft pale skin of the inside of his elbow before continuing down to his wrist, over the plump pads of his palm and on down to the tip of middle finger.

The wand tip glowed emerald, and several tiny sparks flew out as it hovered. Draco dragged the tip back up the path it had made until it reached Potter's shoulder again. He looked up at the other man then, trying to make out his expression. Potter was still looking away and his face was carefully blank, save for a small furrow between his brows and a slightly pinkish hue to his cheeks. Draco pursed his lips and continued the incantation.

Pulling the wand tip back across the collarbone, still hovering gently above the skin, he repeated its previous journey down Potter's left arm, pausing again at the tip of his middle left finger, where the wand tip once again glowed emerald. Moving the wand tip back up the arm and to the hollow at the base of his throat, Draco halted briefly before trailing the wand down his chest, rustling the slight dusting of dark hair that lay there. On down to Potter's navel, the wand again trailed a path of gooseflesh in its wake, continuing past that point until it nestled in the soft dark curls below.

Pausing his incantations for a moment, Draco noted with approval when a warm emerald glow spread out from the wand tip over Potter's abdomen, blinking brightly for several seconds before fading as he once again moved the wand, trailing it over the skin to Potter's right hip and following it down over the taut muscles of his thigh, which twitched as the wand tip brushed the soft hairs covering it, making them stand on end.

Draco glanced up at Potter and nodded, and the latter spread his legs apart so that Draco could run the wand tip over his inner thigh and down the inside of his knee and calf muscles before coming to rest briefly at his ankle. Draco knelt then, and Potter steadied himself by holding Draco's shoulder so that he could lift his foot, presenting its soft underside, which Draco grasped lightly as he drew the wand tip from the heel to the top of the middle toe, where it glowed jade. His face brushed the air close to Potter's groin, and Draco could smell his damp, still musky perfume. Swallowing hard, he averted his eyes and tried to concentrate.

Following the same path back while continuing to whisper the elements of the spell, he stopped when he reach the top of Potter's inner thigh. The latter man held his breath as Draco then ghosted the wand

lightly across the air below his perineum and down the inside of the other leg, repeating what he had done with the right one. Potter shuddered and his length twitched as the wand moved back up to his inner thigh and when Draco looked up, he started at the look on Potter's face. The man's head was thrown back and he was panting slightly, eyes shut tightly in concentration and his teeth worrying his bottom lip. His cheeks were flushed and his lips swollen.

As he slowly stood up again he couldn't tear his eyes from that face, which mirrored the sheer power of a will bent on conquering something – what? Fear? Draco was entranced. His long-time enemy was vulnerable before him, flushed and trembling. He could hex him into oblivion right then, could drive his wand into that hollow of collarbone and slice open the skin across his pale throat, spilling the essence of his life onto that pale chest. Or he could sneer and insult in words that would destroy Potter's confidence in a split second, given his current position. He could, at this point, make Potter a laughing stock with a swift word and a quick push. Potter was at his mercy, but as he looked down to resume the wand's path, his breath hitched at the sight of Potter's now straining erection just inches from where the point of the wand glowed softly at his hip.

He looked back sharply at Potter's face, but the other man's eyes were still closed. He opened his mouth to comment, but the words stuck in his throat, constricting his airway as his chest caved and his ears buzzed with his own unsteady breath. Shakily, Draco traced the path back to the dark curls at his groin and slowly up past the navel until the wand came to rest at Potter's heart.

"Aperio," he whispered, so softly it was more like a breath. The wand tip glowed gold, then emerald, and the glow began to spread out over Potter's chest, to his shoulders and down to his abdomen, spreading slowly but inexorably to every inch of the trembling form before him, until finally leaping out to surround Potter in an aura of the deepest sapphire, edged in absinthe green, pulsing and vibrating like a ghostly heartbeat. Draco held his breath. He'd never seen anything so beautiful.

He was still standing like that, his mouth slightly open in awe, when Potter finally opened his eyes. As the aura began to fade around him, the colour seemed to relocate to the depths of Potter's eyes in pools of deepest blue-green, turning slowly to jade and then to emerald as Draco looked up to gaze into their depths. Time stood still, breath seeped away, and the rest of the world faded from view as those deep green eyes enveloped him in their endless ocean's depth. He was drowning… drowning… sucked into those pools, and it was exquisite.

"Malfoy?" Draco jerked back to reality with a start. "What's wrong? What's the matter?" Potter sounded panicky as he surveyed Draco's shocked, pale face, his lips parted slightly as his breath lightly gasped in

and out. It was a moment before he could collect himself, but suddenly he blinked and focussed and there was Potter looking at him questioningly.

“Nothing. You’re fine.” His voice was hoarse as he turned quickly and walked over to the bed to pick up the spell book he had been perusing earlier. His breath was coming in soft rasps now as he tried to gain some semblance of control, not to mention the erection that was now straining at his trousers.

Potter stood for a moment, then followed him and put a hand on his shoulder. “Are you okay?” Draco shrugged him off and walked over to the lamp on the desk, ostensibly to cast a better light on what he was reading, but in reality, to escape the searing touch of Potter’s hand.

“Of course. The spell was a bit draining, is all. It takes a lot of energy.” Pulling himself together, he turned finally to watch as Potter pulled on some pyjama bottoms and a t-shirt. “Your aura is flawless. There’s definitely no contamination there.” Potter’s pants were still slightly tenting out in front, so, calling in all his bravado, he forced a smirk. “Unless you count the raging hard-on.”

Potter flushed beet red at that and turned on him. “What the fuck do you expect? I’m young and single! The giant bloody squid could give me a hard-on with that wand action!” Pushing past Draco he stalked over to his bed and, yanking back the covers, he slid into bed and pulled them roughly over himself. “Hurry up and turn the bloody light out, will you?”

“What? The Weaselette not doing it for you these days? My condolences, I’m sure,” Draco drawled as he began removing his own shirt and trousers to get ready for bed, his erection thankfully well and truly subsided. He ducked just in time to avoid the pillow Potter threw at him as he pulled off his trousers and donned a soft white t-shirt to make his back silk boxers into makeshift pyjamas. He usually slept naked, but under the circumstances thought that extremely unwise. Clicking off the light, he slipped into the cool sheets and snuggled down into the pillows, pulling the downy comforter up to his neck with a sigh. At least the bed was comfortable.

“Ginny and I split up ages ago.” Potter’s voice was faint, sleepy, but still had an edge. “So fuck off.”

Draco sighed and rolled onto his back. Fighting the desire to sneer an insult against the red-headed bint, he stretched lazily and congratulated himself on his self-control. “I am so sorry to hear that,” he said with

exaggerated courtesy, smirking when Potter's "God, I hate you" drifted across the room, barely audible as they settled down to sleep.

Drifting in and out of drowsiness, he recalled his earlier revelation. The sapphire-absinthe aura was rare indeed, but what was Potter doing with an aura like that? That clumsy oaf could barely dress himself, let alone emit beauty and light. He had to have been dreaming – or mistaken. Either that or Potter was taking some magic-enhancing potion. Draco'd had a bloody hard-on for Merlin's sake! A hard-on like steel. Fuck! But no, he smirked sleepily to himself… that's really not an option. One does not fuck one's enemy, regardless of how gorgeous their aura turns out to be. It must have been an illusion -- of course… an illusion, a figment of his imagination.

With that thought, Draco rolled onto his side and sank further into the blankets, drifting off to sleep as his mind glided on a cloud of colours, gold morphing into azure, then cerulean, sapphire, teal, jade, and finally emerald. Deepest emerald, the emerald of those deep, dark eyes. Sleep was the colour of an uncut gem that glinted in the moonlight and promised peace and something else…. something unreachable, but there, beckoning, elusive… calling him in dulcet tones like the tinkling of harp strings…. Love. It was love. But Draco had drifted off and the dream of love dissipated in an ethereal waft of smoke into the cool night air, to be whisked away on the night breeze. The breeze sighed at its loss, and Draco sighed in unison as he drifted into dreamless sleep.

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Chapter 3

Draco awoke to keening. Darkness still enveloped the bedroom he shared with Potter and, although the curtains at the window were thin, it was a moonless night, so he couldn't make out immediately where exactly the sound was coming from. It was an eerie sound, halfway between a whimper and a cry, soft but distinct. Reluctantly, Draco threw back the covers and swung his legs over the side of the bed.

“Potter, what is that noise?” He reached across the space between the beds to nudge the other man awake, but his hand fell on empty sheets. He blinked a few times, then rubbed his eyes, trying to make sense of the situation through his grogginess. Looking around the room, he realised that Potter was nowhere to be seen.

Grabbing his wand from the nightstand, he ran for the door in a panic. It was already open slightly and, as he moved through to the hallway, he heard a slow wail echoing eerily from the direction of the bathroom. His heart pounded as he raced for the bathroom door and yanked it open. The room was dark and Draco found it difficult to make out any shapes in the windowless blackness. The wailing had stopped when the door had opened and, as he stood with his hand on the doorknob, he listened intently, trying to discern the sounds of weeping or even breathing. But the room was still. Afraid to cast a Lumos in case he scared Potter, he moved forward into the darkness, feeling his way along the sink until he reached the edge of the bathtub.

“Potter?” he called softly, listening again for the sounds of breathing, but there was no reply. “Is that you?” He tried again. “Where are you?” Finally, he pulled the shower curtain aside and cast a Lumos over the tub. It was empty. A shuffling sound jerked his attention back to the darkness. Holding his wand aloft, he scanned the room carefully, before spotting a dark form huddled in the corner behind the clothes hamper.

“Potter? What are you doing?” He moved to kneel down, holding the lit wand over his head, the better to see the other man, in case he was hurt. Potter was huddled with his legs pulled up to his chest, his head dropped forward on the crossed arms that rested on his knees. Draco reached out gingerly to touch his arm and Potter finally looked up. His eyes were puffy and his cheeks tear-stained, and he peered at Draco blearily through wet lashes, his expression slightly dazed.

“What the fuck? What’s wrong? Are you hurt?” Draco sat back on his haunches and surveyed the other man, frowning. Potter didn’t say anything and dropped his head back onto his knees. “Come on, you idiot! What’s the problem?” He stood up in exasperation and waited, but Potter remained unmoving, save for the occasional hitch in his breathing. Frustrated, he moved back and sat on the edge of the tub. If he didn’t know better, he’d say this was a Noceoipsem-induced depression. But he had cast the diagnostic spell himself, so it couldn’t be. Which meant that Potter was either going crazy or sleepwalking.

Much as he'd always thought of Potter as slightly crazy, he decided that he was probably sleepwalking. Must be having a nightmare of some kind. He knew Potter had been subject to terrible nightmares during the war, so maybe this was just a flashback. Fuck, what a pain in the arse! Bloody Potter couldn't be normal for once, could he? No, he had to drag Draco out of bed at bloody two in the morning to baby sit one of his bloody nightmares. Sighing heavily, Draco reached over and gingerly pulled at Potter's arm until the other man lifted his head and opened his eyes.

"Come on. You can't sleep here all night." Draco cursed his bodyguard role and pulled gently on the arm until Potter stood up, swaying slightly. Keeping hold of his arm, he moved towards the door and Potter obediently fell into step behind him. When they reached the bedroom, Draco pulled back the covers of Potter's bed and helped lower him onto the sheets, before pulling up the covers and moving back to his own bed.

"They killed him." Draco turned sharply at the sound of Potter's voice. The other man's eyes were open, staring at the ceiling, and Draco moved back over to look at him. His eyes were still glazed over and Draco thought he was probably still dreaming.

"Go to sleep, Potter. It's late." He tucked in the corner of the coverlet, but nearly jumped out of his skin when Potter's arm flew out to grab his wrist.

"They're going to kill me!" Potter's eyes were wide with terror and his grip was like a vice on Draco's arm. "He's coming and he's got an army. They're coming for me!" He sat up then and began sobbing as he clutched at Draco's arm, yanking him suddenly until their faces were an inch apart. "Help me!" Potter began wailing in earnest and Draco stiffened as the other man's forehead dropped to rest on his shoulder, his hands clutching the fabric of Draco's t-shirt. Potter continued to sob uncontrollably, and Draco eventually sighed in resignation and put his arms around the other man, pulling him close.

"It's okay, I'm here." He rolled his eyes at the inanity of his words. "I'll protect you. They can't get you, I promise." Honestly, the things he did for his job! This was its own nightmare, he thought ruefully. Potter was really going to cop it tomorrow, that was for sure!

Potter looked up at Draco through his wet lashes, his sobs subsiding into small, needy whimpers. "Promise?" Draco nodded, rolling his eyes again. "Stay with me?" Potter lifted his arm up and around Draco's neck, his eyes pleading, and Draco thought he'd never been in such a bizarre situation before. By

all the gods that ever existed, who'd have thought he would be sitting on the edge of the Golden Boy's bed, cuddling and consoling him? What peculiar twist of fate had conjured up this odd scenario?

"Fine. Move over." Draco silently cursed every deity that had ever existed as he crawled into bed beside the person he hated most in the world, and pulled the covers over them both with a sigh. No one, but no one, would ever find out about this! As he lay back into the pillow, Potter snuggled up to him and lay his head in the crook of Draco's shoulder, draping an arm across his chest and a leg over his thigh. Draco stiffened for a minute, then suddenly smirked to himself and relaxed. Oh yes, Potter was really going to hear about this tomorrow. Warmed by the thought of the Boy Wonder's imminent mortification, he snuggled down into the covers and drifted off to sleep.

What the fuck are you doing in my bed, you pervert?" Draco jerked into consciousness at the sudden trill of Potter's voice in his ear. Slowly stretching his arms up, he opened his eyes and brought them in to focus on his irate bed partner.

"Morning, honey. How did you sleep?" Draco rolled over onto his side and rested his head on his hand as Potter shoved back the covers and jumped out of bed.

"I said. What. The. Fuck. Are. You. Doing?" Potter was panting with fury by this stage and looked ready to pop a vein.

Draco just chuckled and flopped back onto the pillow, pulling the covers back over himself as he did so. "Don't get your knickers in a knot, Potter." The other man continued to glare at him. "You had a nightmare. You begged me to sleep with you." Potter's horrified face was almost worth the loss of sleep. "You snuggled up to me." He smirked then and Potter did pop a vein.

"Bullshit. You were trying to seduce me! You're bloody insane!" Draco sighed and sat up, rubbing his eyes. Leaning back on his arms, he surveyed Potter with detachment. Still angry, Potter was pacing up and down beside the bed. "Come on, I want answers!"

“Nightmare? Remember? As in, ‘They killed him. They’re coming to kill me?’” Draco sat up again and nonchalantly brushed non-existent fluff off his t-shirt. When he looked up, realisation had started to dawn on Potter’s face, as the other man recalled his bad dream of the night before. Draco raised his eyebrows and waited.

Finally, Potter collapsed on the edge of the bed and threw his head down into his hands. “Oh, Merlin. Kill me now.”

Draco laughed shortly and got out of bed. “Come on, it wasn’t all that bad, was it?” He smirked as he pulled on his trousers and shirt. “I think you actually liked it. In fact, you were downright snugly in the end.” Potter shot him a venomous look, which he ignored, as he continued dressing. “Do you get those nightmares often?” He sat back down on the bed to pull his socks and shoes on, peering at Potter over his shoulder.

Potter stood up and started to dress himself. “Sometimes. Not often.” He was scowling now as he viciously pulled on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. They continued to dress in silence for some time, but when Draco stood up and turned, he found Potter staring at him sombrely. “Er. I suppose I should thank you,” he murmured awkwardly. “For, you know… helping me. Those nightmares are pretty awful.” He looked away then, and Draco grinned.

“Actually, I found it quite enjoyable. You were… ” He cast about for the right words, grinning broadly as they came to him. “…quite the responsive bed partner.” He ducked as Potter lunged toward him, narrowly missing a right hook to the jaw. Judging this to be a good time to make his exit, he ducked out of the bedroom and quickly locked himself in the bathroom. Leaning back against the door, he laughed silently. Oh Merlin, that was worth it. The look on Potter’s face had been priceless!

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Potter had refused to talk to him for the rest of the morning, which suited Draco just fine. They'd eaten a quiet breakfast, then adjourned to the library to study the Noceoipsem potion. After several hours of poring over old texts and parchments, Kreacher had brought them some sandwiches, so that they could continue to work whilst eating. Draco had made several snide remarks about the previous night, but Potter had refused to take the bait, choosing to ignore him as he continued with his study.

They hadn't found much of interest so far. It seemed that the bezoar was indeed the only antidote, and had to be given no more than four days after contamination. After that, the depression set in and by that stage the bezoar was not guaranteed to work. Their research suggested that only very rare cases had responded to the antidote once the full effects of the poison were felt.

"It doesn't matter. As long as we continue to cast the diagnostic spell every couple of days, you'll be covered." Draco sat back on the couch and rubbed his eyes. "If you can handle it, that is." He smirked when Potter looked up sharply and glared at him.

"I can handle it," was all he said before turning back to his book.

Draco looked up at one point, tapping his quill thoughtfully. "You know, maybe we're looking in the wrong place." He furrowed his brow, trying to remember where he'd seen a similar effect. Suddenly, he recalled an ancient text his father had shown him and sat up excitedly. "This potion has many of the same traits as some Dark maiming spells my father showed me once." Potter looked up then, eyebrows raised curiously. "They were in an old book, a book of ancient Dark spells."

"Where is the book now?" Potter sat up in interest.

"Probably in the Manor library, I'd imagine." Draco shrugged. "Possibly in my father's personal library." Lucius was still in Azkaban paying his dues for his war crimes, but Narcissa still lived at the Manor with Draco. It would be fairly easy to track the book down, he thought.

“Let’s go get it, then.” Potter stood up and dropped the book he was reading onto the table.

Draco frowned. “You’re not allowed to leave this house until they find the Death Eater who threatened you.” Potter sighed in exasperation and crossed his arms. “And I am not supposed to leave you here alone.”

Potter thought for a moment. “Could your mother find it? How hard is it to access?”

“I’ll Owl her right now.” Draco stood up and went to the desk to search of a piece of parchment. Locating parchment and quill, he quickly penned his mother a note and raced up to the Owlery to send it off. By the time he walked back into the library, Potter was sitting back in one of the squishy armchairs, sipping thoughtfully from a tea cup.

He looked up when Draco entered. “So what similarities do you see between the Noceoipsem and these Dark spells?”

Draco poured himself a cup of tea from the tray, then sank into the couch thoughtfully. He sipped for several moments before replying. “Well, there are one or two Dark spells that cause a person to harm themselves. The effect isn’t as delayed as the Noceoipsem, but the results are similar.”

Potter put his cup down on the table and picked up an oatcake from the tray. “So, it sends the recipient into a depression, which just gets worse and worse until they end up taking their own life?”

“Yes, but these spells are much more insidious and harder to detect with a diagnostic spell. The advantage, however, is that they can be reversed.”

Potter sat up at this, his curiosity peaked. “What? A counter-spell?”

“More like a ritual.” Draco absently continued to sip his tea as he tried to recall what he had learned

about the ancient spelsl.

“Not a bonding ritual, surely?” Potter’s eyebrows were raised in question.

“No, more like a sacrificial ritual.” Draco smirked at the look of horror on the other’s face. “Not necessarily a blood sacrifice, although that would work too. An agape sacrifice.”

Potter’s eye bows shot up into his hair at that point and he choked on his tea. “A sacrifice of love?” At Draco’s nod he nearly dropped the entire cup and saucer onto the floor, just grabbing them in time to prevent them smashing and spilling hot tea all over the leg of his trousers in the process.

“Precisely. Someone must make a sacrifice out of love for the victim. It’s the only way to reverse the spell.” Draco looked amused as Potter scrambled to mop up the spilt tea from the leg of his jeans. “Honestly Potter, one would think you’d almost prefer the blood sacrifice,” he jeered. “What? Afraid you’ve got no one who loves you enough?”

Potter glanced away for a moment, then looked back, catching Draco’s gaze and locking it in his own. “Actually, that’s exactly what I’m afraid of.” His voice was barely more than a whisper and Draco momentarily felt a pang of sympathy, before dredging up his wits again.

“You don’t mean to tell me that the Boy Who Lived isn’t loved? That’s crazy! Everyone loves you!” Draco rolled his eyes and lounged back against the couch, stretching his legs out and crossing them at the ankle.

“Whatever, Malfoy.” Potter got up from the couch and moved over to the window, pulling the curtain aside to contemplate the bustling street below. After several moments, he turned around to face the other man. “It’s one thing to have admirers, but quite another to have someone who’d make a sacrifice on your behalf. Agape is selfless love, isn’t it? I don’t know anyone who loves me that way.”

“Merlin, don’t get so maudlin! It’s not like you’re going to get contaminated anyway. Not if I have any say in it.” Draco looked at the other man seriously. “Trust me. You’re safe. We’re just doing this research in the event of a worst case scenario.” Potter sighed and looked away out of the window again, but didn’t

say anything.

They spent the rest of the afternoon perusing whatever spell books they had managed to find in the library, barely stopping to wolf down the dinner that Kreacher brought them. By the time the clock struck eleven, they still hadn't come up with anything. Yawning, Draco rose from the couch, stretching his arms above his head languidly. "I'm off to bed."

"Me too, I'm wrecked." Potter also stood up and made for the door. Draco decided that he needed a shower first, and slipped into the bathroom while Potter made himself ready for bed. When he returned to the bedroom Potter was already under the covers and fast asleep, so he crossed to his own bed and thankfully slid into the delicious warmth of the blankets, drawing the covers up to his chin. It wasn't long before he, too, drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

Draco awoke with a start and peered out into the darkness, frowning. Something had woken him again and, as he struggled into full consciousness, he sat up and looked cautiously around. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he could make out the shapes of the furniture -- the dresser, the desk, Potter's bed, although it was still too dark to discern details. Maybe Potter was having another nightmare. He strained to listen for Potter's breathing but the room was still.

Swinging his legs out from beneath the covers, he padded over to check on the other man and was unsurprised to see that his bed was yet again empty. He stood up and listened, but couldn't hear anything. Maybe Potter had just gotten up for a glass of milk or something. He certainly couldn't hear any evidence of any wailing or sobbing. In fact, the house was eerily quiet. Sighing to himself, he decided he'd better check to make sure Potter was okay. Grabbing his wand and slipping on a sweater to ward off the chill autumn air, he silently padded to the door and down the hall, stopping at the bathroom to check.

A quick Lumos showed the bathroom to be empty, so he moved on down the hall, deciding to head for the kitchen, which seemed the most likely place for a midnight jaunt. He quickly made his way down the stairs and lit his wand again as he opened the kitchen door. Draco frowned when he saw that that room, too, was empty. Surely he wouldn't go outside—wouldn't sleepwalk outside? This last thought caused a

flicker of panic and he turned abruptly and began to make his way back down the hall toward the front door.

As he passed by the entrance to the living room, something caught his eye and he stopped and peered into the semi-darkness. The door was open and the room was lit up by a sliver of light cast by a street light outside the main window, which was covered only by a sheer lace curtain. The light shone in patterns across the carpet and as Draco stepped into the room he felt strangely fearful. Moving closer to the couch, which sat in the middle of the room with its back to him, he glanced around warily, trying to decipher the shapes around him. When he reached the couch he stopped and looked up to where the light was glinting in the reflection of an ornate mirror on that left wall. Casting his gaze back to the other wall, he frowned again. Nothing.

Confused and somewhat worried, he leant forward to rest his arms on the back of the couch, dropping his head down as he tried to think of where the next logical place to look would be. When he looked up again, he caught sight of a dark mass at the foot of the couch. It was unmoving, but Draco knew what it was.

Slowly, he moved around and crouched down next to the form. Potter was curled up like a foetus, ostensibly fast asleep. Draco leant over and gently brushed his arm. “Potter,” he whispered. There was no movement, so he tapped a bit harder and leaned closer so the other man could hear him. “Potter. Wake up.” He was contemplating shaking the man when suddenly Potter sat up and recoiled from him, pushing him away.

“No! Get away from me! I won’t go!” He started pummelling Draco with his fists, so that Draco had to grab both his hands to make him stop.

“It’s okay! It’s me. I’m not going to hurt you.” He pushed his weight against the other man to try to still his struggling. “Wake up, Potter. It’s just me! You’ve been sleepwalking again.”

Potter suddenly stilled and Draco looked up into his face, which was slowly losing its dazed appearance. “Draco?”

Draco blinked at the use of his given name and frowned. Was he still asleep? Potter was looking him

directly in the eye and appeared to be fully awake. However, he had never heard the other man call him by his given name before, and that was enough to make him suspect that Potter was, indeed, still dreaming, in spite of appearances. Deciding after a few moments that a quiet Potter was better than a struggling one, whether awake or asleep, he decided to go along with it. “Yes, it’s me.”

Potter continued to gaze into his eyes, and Draco searched his face worriedly. “Draco, I’m afraid,” Potter said as he moved forward and dropped his forehead on Draco’s shoulder.

Draco sighed and frowned. God, not again, he thought, rolling his eyes. Nevertheless, he instinctively put his arms around the trembling man. Potter’s nightmares were obviously very real to him and, in spite of his annoyance, Draco was starting to feel slightly remorseful for having chided him about them. Potter’s distress was palpable, his fear very real, but he wasn’t sure what to do about it. He needed to reassure the dreaming man that he was in no imminent danger, but how?

Moving up to the couch to sit down next to him, Draco drew the other man close and gingerly embraced him. “Don’t be afraid. I’m here to protect you, remember?” It felt strange to be sitting there with his arms wrapped around the Potter, but what else could he do?

To his surprise, Potter melted against him with a sigh, and nuzzled into his neck. “Never leave me,” he whispered, causing Draco to shiver as warm breath huffed against his throat. His heart pounded as he tightened the embrace, and he felt his chest constrict with something he didn’t recognise at once. Never leave me. Potter must be dreaming. But the words touched him anyway, and as he tightened his arms around the other man he struggled to make sense of what he was feeling.

Closing his eyes, he mentally reached inside himself. Pity? Was it just that he felt sorry for Potter? Frowning still, he inwardly shook his head. No, it definitely wasn’t pity, though there was definitely empathy there—he had known enough fear during the war to appreciate how awful that was. No, it was something else, something richer. Tilting his head slightly, he laid his cheek upon the soft dark hair, breathing in the slightly fruity scent with a sigh. Potter had certainly been through a lot in his life. He suddenly wondered how one man could possibly endure so much pain.

Looking down at the man who was clinging so fearfully to him, he couldn’t help but think that perhaps he had been wrong about Potter all these years. His chest was tight as he leaned back against the couch, pulling the other man in closer. He definitely felt a stirring of something—some emotion he couldn’t put

his finger on. All he knew was that it hurt—it clutched at his chest like a vice. It was almost as if Potter's emotional pain had rebounded onto him and was consuming him. He closed his eyes and they sat like that for long minutes, just breathing and embracing, and Draco thought his chest would burst.

Finally, his body began to relax and his chest felt lighter, so he opened his eyes and looked down at the man in his arms. Slowly, he moved to sit them both up, gently grasping Potter's arm as he made to stand. "Come on. Let's go to bed." Potter nodded and stood up, and, with Draco's help, was able to stumble across the room and up the stairs. Draco managed to slide both himself and the other man into the bed without waking him, and it wasn't long before a warm dark head was once again nestled under his chin, limbs draped across him affectionately.

This time, Draco managed to wake in time to slip quietly out of Potter's bed and into his own. As he snuggled down into his covers he wondered wryly why he didn't bother to take advantage of what was certain to have been a repeat of Potter's discomfort from yesterday morning. But the fearful green eyes swam across his mind's eye and he knew that even he couldn't kick a man when he was down. Potter was suffering and the suffering was tearing him apart, and Draco felt no satisfaction at that thought. He had lost a lot of people in the war himself, had been hurt and afraid, and it broke his heart to witness it again, even in the person whom he'd always considered his rival. But this person in the next bed—this Potter—Draco realised, could no longer hold that title. He had seen inside Potter and it had changed everything.

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"You had another nightmare," Draco said as he sat down at the kitchen table next morning. Serving himself eggs, bacon and toast, and pouring a large mug of tea, he eyed Potter warily out of the corner of his eye.

Potter rubbed his brow for a moment, looking confused. “I did? I… I don’t remember.” He looked up at Draco searchingly. “What happened?”

“I woke and found you gone, so I went looking for you. You were curled up on the couch in the living room, asleep. When I tried to wake you, you became very agitated. Seemed like the same dream from the night before.” Draco deliberately looked at his plate as he ate, keeping his face blank.

Potter sat staring at him—well, through him—as if trying to recall the events of the night before. After a few moments he replied, frowning. “Yes, I think you’re right. It was the same dream.” Draco shrugged as if to say it didn’t matter to him, but Potter persisted. “You… you helped me again, didn’t you?” When Draco didn’t say anything, the other man slid his hand across the table and gently touched his fingers. “Thanks. I, er, appreciate it.” Draco waved his hand in dismissal, a little embarrassed and uncertain of what to say.

They ate in silence for long minutes. Kreacher had supplied a delectable breakfast and it took them some time to demolish it. Finally, sitting back contentedly, Draco sipped his tea and pondered the previous night’s events. “You said you didn’t get those dreams often.” Potter nodded in response. “And yet, you’ve had them two nights in a row?”

Potter paused then and looked at him with a frown. “It’s very unusual. I haven’t had one of those dreams in about two years. I had them a lot during the war and for a couple of years after, but they eventually stopped—at least I thought they had.” He leaned his elbows on the table and rubbed his face distractedly. “What do you think it means?”

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say you’d been exposed to Noceoipsem.” Potter looked alarmed at that, so Draco quickly continued. “But the diagnostic spell clearly showed a clean aura, so it couldn’t be.” He wrinkled his brow in thought. “Not a lot is known about Noceoipsem, though. Maybe someone devised a masking element, making it impervious to diagnostics.”

“Then why don’t I feel depressed when I’m awake?” Potter countered.

“Good point,” Draco conceded. It didn’t make sense at all. But then, Dark magic rarely did, at least to the average wizard. Maybe it was time to think outside the box. Draco contemplated the problem carefully—Potter was an exceptionally strong wizard, who had defeated the most powerful Dark wizard of all time. What had saved him?

Draco looked up, comprehension suddenly dawning on his face. “If you were contaminated, it might not affect you as it would ordinary people.” Potter looked confused, but Draco continued. “Your mother’s love gave you protection from Voldemort’s Dark magic. Don’t you get it? Your mother sacrificed herself to save you—it was agape sacrifice! So, maybe the effects of the poison are partially countered by that love sacrifice.” Draco sat back and smacked the table, pleased with his sudden revelation. “Of course! That’s it! The nightmares! The Noceoipsem can’t manifest itself properly because you’re already protected by agape love. But when you’re asleep, you’re more vulnerable—that’s why it only attacks you at night! It can only get through to your subconscious.”

Potter’s expression was incredulous. “But… but, I feel fine!” He stopped dead then, and his face paled. “If I have the depression, then I’m done for! There’s no antidote!”

“Calm down! We don’t know how effective your mother’s sacrifice is in this case yet. Maybe it’s enough to keep the suicidal tendencies in check.” Moving his chair back, Draco stood up and began to pace the floor excitedly. “If it’s only manifesting in nightmares, then it’s possible that some potion like Dreamless Sleep will keep it at bay indefinitely.” He stopped and looked at Potter questioningly.

Potter was hesitant, though. “I suppose. But what does that mean? That I have to take Dreamless Sleep every night for the rest of my life?”

“I don’t know,” Draco admitted. “Let’s go to the library and do some more research. Maybe we’ll come up with a better solution.” Potter stood up then and followed Draco out of the kitchen as Kreacher appeared to clear the table.

They hadn’t been in the library long before there was a knock at the window. Potter walked over to let in an owl carrying a rather large package. It was the spell book Draco had requested from the Manor. Potter handed the book and accompanying note to Draco, who quickly read the note before placing the book on the table. It was obviously very old, it’s leather cover, which was marked with symbols of ancient runes, torn and tatty. When Draco opened the book, the brittle pages crackled under his fingers. Gingerly

turning the pages, he settled in to study the book in the hope of finding the spell he was looking for.

Eventually, they came across several old spells of the kind that Draco had remembered seeing, and spent the rest of the afternoon trying to decipher the finer points of the agape sacrifice ritual. They had agreed that if there was a solution, that was the place to start. Perhaps there was a way of strengthening his mother's sacrifice, so that it would provide more complete protection. They pored over the books all afternoon and evening, working again through dinner, until they finally came to some disturbing conclusions.

"Your mother has gone and her sacrifice can't be strengthened. But it can be augmented. You just need to find someone who can provide another agape sacrifice—it only needs to be symbolic, I think. Not an actual sacrifice." Draco tried to sound optimistic, but Potter was clearly ready to admit defeat.

"I don't have anyone like that. Ginny and I broke up and she is really pissed at me—trust me." Potter sat on the couch, defeated.

"What about the Weasel or Granger?" Draco countered. "They've stood by you over the years."

"Hermione is pregnant. I couldn't ask her to do that, even if I thought she had that kind of selfless love for me." He sighed. "Which she doesn't." Draco's eyebrows shot up at that. Potter shook his head. "They stood by me, but it was for the greater good. I had to defeat Voldemort to save the wizarding world. Other than that, they always think every decision I make is totally wrong." He buried his head in his hands. "Really, trust me. It's not that kind of love."

Draco sighed. God, how pathetic. Some friends they turned out to be. He moved forward and put his hand on Potter's leg. "Don't worry about them. We'll figure something out." Just when Potter's emotional welfare had come to matter to him, he wasn't quite sure, but he knew that it was all wrong, and something needed to be done. Potter looked up and smiled half-heartedly.

"Yeah, I guess." He flopped back into his chair, looking resigned. "I can take the Dreamless Sleep. It's no problem."

“Come on, it’s late. Why don’t you get some sleep. I’ve got some of the potion in my kit—you’re welcome to it. One dose and you’ll be right as rain. We’ll think about it some more tomorrow.” Draco stood up and reached for Potter’s arm, yanking him up to follow him up to their bedroom. Potter acquiesced easily. He looked tired and not a little stressed.

As it turned out, Potter continued to have the nightmares and sleepwalking for the rest of the week. Every night, Draco would wake up in the darkness to find him gone. He would slip downstairs and find him either in the living room or the kitchen, usually huddled up in a ball, sometimes weeping softly. Every night he would embrace him gently as he cried out his fears. He would reassure him, then lead him back to bed, where he would allow the other man to snuggle up against him until early morning light seeped in through the curtains. Then he would extricate himself and return to his own bed.

He had cast another diagnostic spell on the third night, but still there was no evidence of contamination of any kind. It puzzled Draco that Potter continued having the nightmares, even with the Dreamless Sleep, and they seemed to be getting worse, but he didn’t know what else to do. He still suspected that the other man had been contaminated, and that the Noceoipsem was masked in some way that prevented it showing up with the diagnostic spell. He was starting to get worried. Potter was becoming more and more agitated during his nightmares, although Draco managed to calm him down easily enough.

They continued to research the Dark maiming spells, but otherwise life at twelve Grimmauld Place was fairly quiet. Draco still stayed close to Potter, but had stopped antagonising him, and Potter seemed to appreciate it, even making an effort to be friendly. Draco found he was almost enjoying the relative peace of this assignment. It was certainly a lot less demanding than most of the others he had been sent on recently.

On the sixth night, however, something changed.

Draco had awoken as usual to find Potter’s bed empty. He’d padded downstairs to find the other man curled in the corner by the fireplace and had knelt down to gently soothe him with words and touch. But Potter had continued to weep and wail in spite of Draco’s efforts. The man had been in such a state that Draco had ended up sitting next to him on the floor, rocking him for over an hour as he moaned over and

over. Eventually, at his wit's end and stiff from sitting on the floor, Draco had stood up and pulled Potter towards the couch, settling him against its back, and lying down beside him, arms around his back. Potter's head nestled against his neck as Draco stroked his hair, his cheek, his arms, until eventually the weeping turned into soft, almost inaudible whisperings.

"Sorry…. I'm sorry." Potter seemed to have come back to himself, but Draco continued to hold him anyway.

They lay like that for some time, and Draco thought Potter had drifted off to sleep. He was afraid to move in case he disturbed the other man, who finally looked peaceful. He was drifting off to sleep himself when he felt Potter's head move slightly, the soft, dark hair tickling his throat. "Are you okay?" he asked tentatively, not certain of the other's wakefulness. In response he felt soft lips against his throat, then again against the soft skin under his ear. The hot breath tingled against his skin, leaving a trail of gooseflesh in its wake, and Draco almost unconsciously leaned his head back to expose more skin to that soft caress.

Then a hand was tentatively moving down towards his waist, gently stroking over the fabric of his sweater before dipping underneath and moving to caress his bare skin. Draco's breath hitched when Potter's hand began to brush lightly over the taut muscles of his stomach and ribs, leaving more trails of gooseflesh on its way up to his chest. Soothing fingers grazed the sparse hairs on his chest before lightly touching his nipples, a moment later moving back and down towards his waist in one long, soothing movement. The lips against his throat were sending shivers down Draco's spine and the hand at his waist, which was gently teasing the soft flesh above the elastic of his boxers, sent a tingling to his groin that was more arousing than anything he'd ever felt before.

Draco's breath was starting to deepen as the sensual caresses sought his sensitive spots, stroking and fondling with slow, graceful touches that seemed to connect directly with his groin. He was becoming more and more aroused, and nearly moaned aloud when Potter's lips parted and his tongue dipped out to lick gently across the edge of his jaw. Draco squirmed and turned his head slightly to glance down at Potter's face, which was dimly lit by the light filtering in from the street outside, but his eyes were closed as he continued his tender ministrations against the skin of Draco's neck. He felt like his entire body was alive with sensation and knew that if it didn't stop soon, there would be no going back. Except that he didn't want it to stop. Moving his arm up to stroke the soft dark hair that grazed his ear, Draco's eyes fluttered slightly, before closing in unconscious response to the bliss of Potter's touch.

The other man raised his head then, but before Draco could say anything, Potter's lips were on his own,

gently sucking at his bottom lip. Draco's heart began pounding and his first thought was to pull away, but Potter shifted up slightly and cupped his jaw before moving his lips to gently capture Draco's own. A bolt of desire shot like fire down Draco's chest to explode in his groin and he reluctantly moaned.

"Draco." Potter breathed against his lips before claiming them again, this time less gently. Draco gasped, and Potter took the opportunity to slide his tongue between his lips to lap at the inside of his mouth. It was an exploratory kiss, gently sucking and licking, tenderly entwining tongues and breath for long, long minutes until Draco pulled back, gasping for air. Potter looked at him then, his emerald eyes burning with want and Draco had no doubt that the other man was wide awake. His chest constricted as those dark eyes bored into him, and he felt himself drowning in a wave of sensation. Reaching up to clasp the back of Potter's head, he drew him back down again.

The other man responded with interest, pushing Draco back against the couch and pressing hard against him, at the same time continuing to caress his chest and abdomen with languid strokes, causing Draco's nipples to harden and his cock to throb painfully. He licked down Draco's jaw as he rubbed a thumb over the hardened nipples, then moved to suck at his throat, gently nipping and teasing until Draco whimpered with need.

Draco's own hands found the hem of Potter's shirt and swiftly moved under to stroke the bare skin of his back. The hard muscles, which rippled under his fingers, felt warm and inviting to his touch, and he revelled in the feel of the firmness of the body that moved so sensuously against his own. Needing to feel that skin against his, he moved his hands down to the hem of Potter's shirt and lifted it up over his head, the latter pausing for a moment to allow Draco to drag the shirt from his arms, before throwing it to the floor. Draco's sweater and t-shirt soon joined it and, as skin touched skin for the first time, he thought he might die from sheer pleasure.

He circled his hands over the sinewy muscles of Potter's back and down under the waistband of his pyjama bottoms to cup the firm round cheeks below. Potter groaned then and ground his hips hard into Draco, who thrust back and whimpered at the feel of the other's hardness against his own. Sliding his hands further along under the waistband, Draco finally brushed his fingers across the other man's erection and Potter groaned and thrust into him.

Dragging the tips of his fingers slowly up the underside from base to tip, he grasped the head lightly and brushed his thumb across the slit, spreading slick moisture across it. Potter moved slightly sideways and Draco quickly pushed his pyjamas down to his ankles and over his feet, before the other man grabbed his boxers and practically ripped them off. Draco pulled Potter back down into a fierce kiss, and they ground

against each other, Potter nipping, sucking and biting down Draco's neck. Draco grasped Potter's length again, stroking it rhythmically, and Potter returned the favour, grasping and pulling Draco's shaft until the latter almost cried out with the sheer ecstacy of it.

Their thrusting and pulling slowly became more and more urgent, until Draco did cry out as he came in long spurts over both their torsos. Draco's cry urged Potter to his own climax, arching back, unable to breathe as his hot come spurted out to join his lover's. Exhausted, they collapsed against each other and Potter buried his head in Draco's neck.

As his panting slowly eased and his heart slowed down again, Draco sighed and began running his hands gently up and down Potter's back, which was now slick with sweat despite the coolness of the night air. He felt completely drained, but relaxed, sated. After some time, Potter lifted his head and pressed his lips against Draco's jaw, then moved to whisper into his ear. "Draco…" he breathed, raising gooseflesh on his lover's neck. "I… I need you… so much." Draco wrapped his arms around him and squeezed tight in response. He had no words for how he felt. Potter continued, "I… I don't…"

"It's okay," Draco whispered back, clutching even tighter. "You don't have to say anything." And he didn't, because what had happened between them these past few days had developed into something that could only have ended in this way, as if some twist of destiny had led them along an inexorable path to this very moment. Potter sighed and kissed his ear, before settling back down to rest his head in the crook of his lover's neck.

Draco leaned over to pluck his wand from where it had fallen on the carpet and cast a quick cleaning spell, before conjuring a warm blanket, which he draped over them both. He drifted off to sleep with a contented sigh.

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Chapter 6: Precious Gem

Precious Gem

Chapter 6

When Draco awoke next morning he was alone but still warm, the blanket tucked in around his shoulders and under his feet. He could hear the clinking of dishes in the kitchen and as he slowly opened his eyes and stretched out his limbs, dislodging the blanket, Potter—Harry—moved to stand by the couch. “Good morning, sleepyhead.” He sat down on the edge of the couch and tentatively moved his hand up to rest on Draco’s chest. “Do you want some coffee or tea? Kreacher is making omelettes.”

Draco sat up slightly and leaned back on his elbows. “Tea would be good, actually.” Harry’s hand slid up to stroke his jaw and Draco put his own hand over it and leaned into the touch. “On second thoughts, you first, then tea.” He reached out and pulled his lover down and lightly touched their lips together.

After several moments, Harry pulled back slightly and gazed at him with lowered lids. “Gladly. Except we might want to find somewhere more private.” He nodded towards the kitchen where Kreacher was banging pots and singing.

“He’s a house-elf. You can make him punish himself if he interrupts.” Draco smirked. Harry rolled his eyes and sat back, shaking his head in amusement. “Okay, okay, I know. Elfish welfare and all that.” Draco grimaced and sat up properly, scanning the floor for his clothes. Harry reached over to pick up his t-shirt and boxers and handed them to him as Kreacher’s head appeared around the door.

“Mister Potter, sir, yous breakfasts is ready!” His head disappeared back into the kitchen and Potter stood up.

“Looks like a raincheck.” Harry held out his hand, and Draco grabbed it and hauled himself up and off the couch, before quickly donning his boxers, t-shirt and sweater. He moved to the kitchen door, but a hand reached out to grab his arm and he stopped to look back at his lover.

“Later.” Harry promised, as he pulled Draco into a warm embrace, and he thought that later couldn’t come soon enough.

They ate a leisurely breakfast, then shared a shower, where they quickly called in their raincheck, before dressing and moving to the library to continue their research. They were still working on devising an agape ritual to rid him of the Noceoipsem once and for all. It was ancient magic and very convoluted, and by the time they stopped for the day, Draco had a pounding headache.

Rubbing his temples, stood up from where he'd been sitting on the couch for the better part of the day, and yawned. "I think I'll take a headache potion and go to bed." Draco leant over and kissed Harry on the lips, then stood up and stretched wearily. "Wake me when you come up, okay?" He winked, and Harry smiled back at him affectionately.

"Okay, I won't be too long." He went back to the book he'd been reading and sipped on his glass of wine, as Draco slipped out of the door and headed for their bedroom.

Draco woke up some time later, still alone. Harry must have fallen asleep in the library. He debated whether to get up and look for him, but remembered last night's ordeal and thought he'd be better not to be left alone. The nights were getting cooler, so he slipped on some loose pants, a sweater and some socks before heading down the stairs.

The library was empty, but there were books scattered all over the floor, as if someone had thrown them down in a hurry. Draco frowned as he backed out of the room and turned towards the living room, which was down the hall. His heart was starting to pound and he'd broken into a slight sweat as he paused before the living room door, which was shut. A soft light shone from under the door and Draco held his breath as he turned the knob and slowly pushed the door open.

As he moved into the room he gasped, then cried, "No!" Harry was standing in front of the large mirror on the far wall, his wand aimed at his reflection.

Harry didn't look at him, but simply flicked his wand at his own reflection and cried out, "Sectumsempra!"

Without thinking, Draco bolted across the room and threw himself in front of Harry as red light shot out of the holly and phoenix wand and rebounded off the mirror. The reflected spell hit Draco squarely in the chest, slicing him open from collarbone to hip in jagged rips that slashed across his entire torso, splashing scarlet spurts of his blood across the room.

Draco staggered and reeled back, crashing against Harry, who was suddenly brought to his senses as he fell back onto the floor with Draco atop him. Pushing Draco off him, he scrambled to his knees and cried out in horror, “No, Draco! Oh, gods! Not Draco!” Scrambling for the blanket that still lay on the couch, he tried to stem the bleeding, but he couldn’t stop it, and a pool of dark crimson began to form on the floor at Harry’s knees. Frantically, he searched his mind for a healing spell, but could only recall the very simplest of those—he’d never been good at healing and now he began to despair as the life oozed out of his lover, staining the carpet and Harry’s clothes with sickening speed.

Draco’s face was deathly pale in contrast to the blood and his breathing was becoming laboured. Harry laid his hand over the other’s heart and could feel the beat slowing, thumping weakly against his fingers. Panicking, he bent over Draco and shook him. “Draco! Draco, wake up! Don’t leave me.” He was sobbing now, his entire body shaking with grief at what he’d done. He threw his head back and screamed to the heavens. “No! I won’t let him go!”

Finally, in desperation, he threw himself across his lover’s body and clung to him, closing his eyes and concentrating all his magic into a glowing ball inside him. He willed the ball to grow stronger and stronger, drawing magic literally out of the air around him, then let it flow out and over Draco in a wave of sapphire light. The light surrounded them both in an ethereal cocoon and sparks of gold shot out and around them, as the colour slowly changed from sapphire to teal and finally to emerald.

After long minutes Harry still lay there, whimpering and clutching at Draco, exhausted and heartbroken with grief. He would never forgive himself, he vowed. This man, whom he had despised for most of his life, had become more than life itself to him in a few short days, and now he was lying, breathless and broken, and it was all Harry’s fault. It was as it had always been, he thought bitterly—everything he ever loved was always taken from him. But this—this, was all the more poignant because he had brought it on himself. He was strong! Why hadn’t he resisted the damned curse. How could he have been so foolish as to have been drawn into that vapid hole of despair created by a thread of insecurity mixed with a miniscule amount of potion in his veins?

As he continued to lay across is lover's still body, he wept for all the love he had never known, the love he would never know, and cursed the fate that had caused him to be the but of its eternal, universal joke. He felt the Drak descending into his heart and wished with all his might that his spell had taken him before Draco had discovered him. Better that he die loved, than to remain alive and loveless, lost in the never ending torture of the thing that was his life.

Then he felt two hands gently stroke his back and he lifted his head in shock.

"Harry?" Draco drew in a ragged breath and opened his eyes, blinking up at the other man's stunned face.

It was a few seconds before Harry collected himself, and then he sat up and pulled Draco to him, wrapping his arms around his back and sobbing into his shoulder. "Oh, gods, you're all right! You're all right!"

Harry sat back then and ran his hands over Draco's chest. Tearing the shredded, blood-soaked sweater from him, Harry felt his way over the bloodied skin. The gashes that criss-crossed his chest were rapidly fading. "You're almost healed!" Harry looked into Draco's face incredulously, and Draco grabbed him into a rough embrace and pulled him back to lie on the blood-spattered floor.

Exhausted, Draco tried to slow his breathing and his racing heartbeat. As he reached up he could feel his hair was matted with blood and there was more dark crimson matter drying and crusting on his face and chest. Harry lay beside him and looked up at the ceiling, still panting, pushing his own congealed and matted hair out of his eyes. Finally, their breathing slowed to a soft huff and the room became quiet.

"The Noceopisem is gone." Harry looked sideways at Draco, who turned to face him. "I can feel it. I felt it as soon as you took the curse for me." He looked back up at the ceiling then, and his voice cracked. "I… I was going to end it. The pain... it was so bad. I couldn't stand it." After a moment, Harry sighed and rolled onto his side, leaning his head on his hand, and Draco reached over to gently stroke his cheek.

"I know. You scared the shit out of me." Draco's face was serious for a moment, then his face softened as he searched Harry's face. "You're sure it's gone?"

“The agape sacrifice…. You made a blood sacrifice. For me. You sacrificed yourself for me. You saved me. Y-you… could have died.” Harry’s eyes pricked with tears again, and Draco drew the other man on top of him and stroked his back gently.

“You saved me, Harry.” He nuzzled into Harry’s hair. “I would have died without your magic. I could feel you inside me, even as I was fading away. You were… glowing… inside me.” Green eyes looked down and met grey ones for long moments and then Harry leaned in and kissed his bloodied mouth. “So, I guess that makes us even,” Draco whispered against his lips, and Harry pulled him closer still as if he couldn’t get enough.

Eventually Harry pulled back. “Bed?” he said softly, his exhaustion showing clearly in his eyes.

Smiling softly, Draco kissed him again before whispering back, “I thought you’d never ask.”

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Chapter 7: Precious Gem

A/N: This Epilogue was originally written for C Dumbledore, who said “Ewwww” at the thought of them going to bed all bloody! :-)

Not sure where the photo came from, but I like it a LOT. :-)

Precious Gem

Epilogue

Harry pushed himself up onto his feet and reached down to help Draco do the same. “Shower first?” he said softly as he led the other man down the hall to the stairs.

“Mmmmm. Sounds good.” Draco looked down at himself and wrinkled his nose in distaste. Although his blood-soaked sweater had been removed, he was still smeared with caked blotches of crimson and his pants were almost stiff with dried blood. He looked over at Harry, who also had blood spattered from head to foot. Yes, a nice, steamy shower would do the trick.

Walking into the bathroom, Draco stripped off his pants and boxers as Harry leaned over the tub to turn on the water. It wasn’t long before the room was filled with steam and Harry was shedding his clothes and stepping under the shower. Draco joined him, savouring the feel of the hot spray splashing through his hair and trickling down his body. He felt a hand on the small of his back as Harry leaned forward to grab the shampoo bottle from the side of the tub. Squeezing some shampoo onto his hand, he turned Draco around and began to wash his hair, slowly raking his fingers through the wet, golden locks, stroking and caressing his scalp and weaving his fingers through the silky strands, until all traces of red had been removed.

Leaning into Draco, Harry’s lips grazed his throat as he leaned forward again to soap up his hands. The warm water was running in delicate rivulets down Draco’s face and neck as Harry’s lathered hands moved slowly up his arms, gently circling the muscles before progressing up to caress that long, pale throat, lathering the fragrant bubbles indulgently across his silky skin. His touch was reverent, almost worshipful, and Draco inclined his neck ever-so-slightly to expose even more skin to that delicious touch. Shivers ran down his spine as Harry continued to massage down over his shoulders, pausing at the dip in his collarbone to rub tiny circles there with his thumbs. Mmmmmm. Draco quivered under the subtle contact, arching slightly into it, silently begging for more.

Harry leaned forward then, his face so close to Draco’s that their cheeks were almost touching. Harry’s hot breath ghosted over Draco’s jaw in sensuous waves, misting against his ear and raising gooseflesh down his throat. Their bodies were mere millimetres apart and Draco could feel the fine hairs on his chest grazing gently against the coarser ones on his lover’s, as Harry’s hands continued down and over the muscles of his chest, gently massaging as they travelled delicately over his nipples and down to the soft skin of his stomach, stroking and kneading, until Draco felt his knees tremble from the sheer bliss of that touch.

Stopping for a brief moment to soap up his hands again, Harry encircled his arms around Draco to wash his back, slowly caressing his way over the subtly defined muscles in slow luxurious circles, inching down

with each movement to the small of his back, where his fingers kneaded the delicate pearls of Draco's spine, before moving down and over the curve of his arse. Harry leaned in and pressed himself against Draco, inclining his head to stroke his tongue slowly down his lover's neck. Kissing his way back up to his ear, he gently took the lobe between his teeth, nibbling, then sucking, before kissing along Draco's jaw and capturing his mouth.

Draco responded eagerly, pulling Harry to him tightly so that their hard bodies fitted against each other from chest to knee. The intimate contact was exquisite, made even more sensuous by the way Draco's soap-slicked skin glided against his lover's with every faint movement, causing his nerve endings to alight and shoot molten hot sparks directly to his groin.

Evidently Harry was having a similar reaction, for at that point he moaned and thrust into Draco, at the same time slipping his tongue between Draco's lips and gently exploring the roof of his mouth, tongues entwining, lips and bodies sliding sensuously against each other.

After long minutes, Harry pulled back slightly and began massaging soapy hands over the firm cheeks of Draco's arse, stroking the pale skin with maddeningly light touches. Draco groaned then and pulled Harry back into another kiss, this time more urgent, a burning hot assault that made the other man moan in return, and pull Draco even closer as he thrust against him. They rutted against each other, writhing under the hot spray of the shower, Harry kneading his hands over Draco's arse, all the while biting and licking his way down that silky, pale neck as he did so.

Draco threw his head back and shuddered when Harry reached down into his cleft and began massaging with soapy fingers, gently moving his cheeks apart as he sought the heat of Draco's entrance. Harry's fingers were hot and probing, and Draco pushed back against them, seeking that most intimate of penetrations, yearning for Harry to possess him fully.

Finally, Harry relented and, with excruciating care, slowly began pushing the slick tip of his soapy finger into the tight, warm depth, gently circling against the rigid muscles until they began to surrender. Needing more, Draco wantonly pushed back against it, writhing slightly in an effort to feel more of Harry inside him, needing to open himself up to Harry for all he was worth. Harry responded by crooking his finger, causing Draco to cry out and arch his back in bliss as Harry's digit grazed across the sensitive

mound inside him. The warmth of the shower spraying across their torsos, the sizzling heat of Harry's body sliding against his own, the feeling of being so sumptuously violated by his lover's touch, combined to create a shifting spiral of need inside him that was threatening to explode behind his eyelids.

Draco groaned when a second, then a third finger were pushed into him, tenderly massaging his opening, expanding and relaxing the surrounding muscles with gentle movement, until Draco started to tremble with need and his knees threatened to give out.

"Harry," he whispered in his lover's ear, "I need you now, or… or…." He cried out again as Harry's fingers brushed his sensitive spot and suddenly the fingers were gone and he was being turned around to face the tiled wall. Bracing himself with his hands, he parted his legs as Harry wrapped his arms around him and caressed the soft skin of his stomach, before reaching up to tweak his nipples. Placing a soft kiss on the wet skin between Draco's shoulder blades, Harry leaned forward and nuzzled into the hair at Draco's neck.

Harry breathed against his ear, and Draco arched his neck back. His breath hitched as he felt the hard shaft move against him for a few seconds before breaching his entrance and sliding slowly into him. About halfway in, Harry stopped for a moment to collect himself. Leaning forward, he kissed the nape of Draco's neck, then gently laved the area with his tongue, as he slid in further and further, until he was fully sheathed inside his lover. As he pulled back out, he ran his hands tenderly down Draco's sides, massaging the soft muscles there before moving back to steady his hips as he thrust in again.

Slowly establishing a steady rhythm, Harry began to thrust harder and harder as Draco arched his spine and pushed back against him, straining to feel every last inch of him inside. Reaching around to stroke Draco's cock, Harry leaned in and kissed his neck again as his hand began to move. Draco groaned as Harry's grip tightened and his thrusts came faster.

"Harry…" The name was almost a gasp as Draco arched and thrust back hard, before coming in long, hot spurts over the tiled wall. Harry quickly followed, thrusting in once, twice, then groaning as Draco's muscles clenched around him, extracting his shuddering orgasm from him with force.

Draco's knees buckled and Harry reached around quickly to hold him by the waist, before slumping against him exhaustedly and laying his cheek against Draco's nape. They stood like that for long moments, savouring the intimacy and their delicious satedness. Finally, Harry pulled slowly away and

turned Draco around to kiss him gently on the lips.

Without saying a word, they continued to wash each other under the rushing water until all traces of their lovemaking were rinsed away. Harry turned off the water and stepped out of the tub to grab a towel, which he used to dry off his lover, paying special attention to his gently smiling face, which was aglow with warmth.

After drying himself off, Harry wrapped his towel around his waist and pulled Draco to him. “I adore you,” he whispered between soft kisses.

“Let’s go to bed.” Draco turned toward the door with a smirk, pulling Harry behind him. “And you can show me just how much.”

Fin

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