Title: Just Like A Gryffindor

Author: Anj ([info]anjenue)

Pairing: Harry/Draco, hints of Snape/Draco

Rating: NC-17

Word Count: ~34,000 in four parts (Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, Part 4)

Summary: Draco hasn't gotten over the war yet, but the real problem is that everyone else has. So when an old curse comes back to haunt him, maybe he doesn't resent it quite as much as he should.

A/N: Thank you so much to Di for the speedy and awesome beta job, and of course to [info]gmth for running Merry Smutmas again. This fic was actually really hard for me to write, since the recipient asked for pretty much everything that I had written before for H/D or Snaco and trying to reinvent that threatened to break my brain. But I finally managed to come up with something, and I'm actually rather pleased with it. :D Also, though my recipient dropped out, I was very happy that [info]glockgal got it, because I can't imagine anyone more deserving of a bonus gift. ♥

Draco Malfoy sat bolt upright in bed, breathing hard. His vision blurred as his eyes fought to adjust to the light, the moon-glow painting the room in shades of silver and blue, and his fingers twitched where they were curled tight in the bedspread. His skin was cold and clammy, and his chest felt tight, like he'd been crushed slowly in a vise.

After a few long, breathless moments, he scrabbled for the buttons on his silk pajama jacket, yanking them free with clumsy, sweat-slippery fingers, and then tugged the fabric off and dropped it over the side of the high bed to pool in shadow on the floor. He looked down at his chest, raising a hand to follow the silvery serpentine scars twisting their way across his otherwise-smooth skin. They were barely noticeable usually, unless you knew what you were looking for, but right now they looked angry, rose-red against lily white, and he hissed as a fingertip brushed against one, making his nerve endings scream with sharp pain.

He hated the reminder of what Harry Potter had done to him, less than two years ago now, hated the fact that he would always have that four-eyed prat's marks all over him, but he loved it at the same time because it reminded him of Snape, the spell Snape invented to deal with cocky bastards just like Potter, which had then been turned around and used on Draco, of all people. He hated that he'd let Potter get close enough to almost kill him, but he loved that he'd survived it. He hated that he'd never gotten a chance to pay Potter back for what he'd done, but - and this was the part he'd never share with anyone -

he loved the fact that it had changed him. Not just his skin, though that was a definite, unfortunate modification that he could live without, but just the fact that he'd seen how powerful Potter was, what he would be dealing with if he committed to the Death Eaters, had helped sway him away from that path, and was quite possibly the reason he was still alive right now. For some people, it had been too late, he thought with a bitter curl of his lip, but for others, like himself, and, mercifully, his family, there had still been a chance.

Potter. The fucking saviour of the Wizarding World.

It wasn't that Draco wasn't glad Potter had won. Pureblood supremacy, it would seem, wasn't all it was cracked up to be, especially since the Dark Lord himself had been a Mudblood. Draco's ideas hadn't changed on that front necessarily, but he had learned that moral and social beliefs generally had no place in politics, save as a leg to prop up the political platform. No, what he was angry about there too was the constant reminder of what Potter had done. His name in the paper every day, the fixations of the gossip columns (not that Draco read them, but still), the dedication ceremonies, the state dinners, the fact that Potter was in line to become a fucking Auror - it was all too...sickeningly goody-two-shoes, and it made Draco want to vomit.

Right now, though, he hardly needed to think of Potter to feel that - the pain was doing a good enough job on his own. It didn't make any sense, the liquid burn under his flesh, the way his skin felt singed, the steady throb of blood through his temples that seemed to pulse white-hot along the snaking curvature of the old slash marks. The wounds were long since healed, Snape had promised him that, and yet...

Draco sighed, dropping back against the pillow and staring at the ceiling. As if the uproarious reminders of Potter every day weren't irritating enough, it seemed that now he was cursed to remember him at night too, in the most unpleasant way possible. He curled his hands into fists, wondering if this was in fact a curse, Weasley's idea of a joke, perhaps (though he was pretty well certain Weasley wasn't nearly clever enough for that), and then reached into his bedside drawer, pulling out a tiny phial of sleeping potion.

'Healing sleep,' he muttered, uncorking the phial and lifting his head just enough so he could drink it. 'I hope it works for this too, Professor.'

He was asleep in a matter of moments.

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Draco spent the majority of the next day in a fit of paranoia that any moment, his skin would start burning again. His mother asked him, worriedly, what was the matter, and even his father seemed concerned (which, for Lucius, meant a lot of frowning and meaningful glaring), but he dodged their questions and escaped to the library at his earliest convenience. He spent the afternoon in there, looking for anything on unusual scar behaviour, but after three or four hours, his attention wandered to how far across the room he could chuck the books. He felt restless - the itch under his skin this time was psychological rather than physical, but no less intense, and no less painful to deal with. The fact remained that he was an adult now, but still lived at home with his parents, had no prospects of what to do with his life, and could no longer even stand the girl who was supposed to be his wife someday. Quite frankly, Draco Malfoy, who had once practically owned Hogwarts, was now a complete loser, and it was all thanks to...

And it was back to bloody Potter again. Some days, Draco wondered what life would have been like had Potter decided to be friends with him on that first day. It was likely good that he hadn't, since Draco gathered he'd grown more as a person being Potter's enemy than he would have being his friend (Weasley being a prime example of that), but it didn't make it any less annoying. Yes, he was glad he'd changed, but that meant that now he knew he was unhappy, that what he had wasn't enough for him, and at this point, it felt like he would rather not have known. Of course, that would likely have involved him being dead.

At the moment, though, that almost seemed like a better option.

Dinner was a tense affair, since Draco spent it picking at his food while his parents exchanged worried looks over his head, but when Lucius snapped at Draco to stop sulking, Draco simply said that he had a headache and was going to bed early, thanks very much. He almost expected his father to wallop him, since on one level he was aware he was being impossible, but he managed to escape to his room unscathed, and then flung himself down onto his belly across his mattress and glared at the wall in irritation.

'That sleeping draught you took last night does not have irritation as a side effect, Mister Malfoy. There is no reason for you to conduct yourself in such a sullen manner.'

Draco lifted his head. 'I know that,' he said sharply.

Snape raised a brow, oil-black eyes burning bright. 'You will cease your use of that insolent tone this instant.'

Draco sighed. 'Sorry,' he muttered, dropping his head forward against his folded hands. It seemed that now even the paintings were going to scold him. Fantastic.

After a moment, Draco heard the faint rustle of painted fabric, and then Snape said, 'You are far superior to this life you are leading. Why do you persist in idleness?'

'I'm rich,' Draco replied without lifting his head. 'I'm supposed to live a lazy lifestyle.'

A snort. 'So you may end up like your father, all entitlement and little intelligence? I think not, Draco. I know quite well that you do not ever wish to be backed into a corner with no way out, the way Lucius was, and to avoid that, you must choose your own path. Why do you refuse to attend university as your mother suggested?'

Draco sat up in barely veiled frustration. 'Because she wants me to be a model little academic, and that's not me. You know that.'

'I do indeed,' Snape replied dryly. 'But the fact remains that you can have academic pursuits without being an academic. Rothenburg has an excellent school of potions arts where you may--'

'I don't want to move to Germany,' Draco grumbled. 'I may be going stir-crazy here, but it's still my home.'

'Is it?' Snape's other brow went up. 'Or is it your shelter from the outside world?'

Draco said nothing, glaring daggers at the bedspread.

'You will have to face it eventually, Draco.'

'I thought you said,' Draco bit out, 'that I had to choose my own path.'

'Yes,' Snape replied, equally acerbic, 'but that means choosing a path, not simply saying "I don't want to become a Potter disciple". Negation is not the same as directionality.'

'But you chose your path because you didn't want that woman to die. Isn't that a negation?'

Snape's nostrils flared. 'Her name,' he said evenly, 'was Lily. And yes. It was a negation.'

'Then?'

Snape pressed his lips together. 'You're stronger than I was,' he murmured, and sounded almost sad. 'You can do better than I did.'

It's not too late for you.

For the assertions Snape made, Draco might have come up with an argument, but it was what Snape hadn't said that stopped his mouth.

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By the time Draco finally changed into his pajamas, Snape had disappeared, presumably to go check in at

Hogwarts again. Draco had gotten used to falling asleep with an empty frame next to his bed much more quickly than he had initially gotten used to falling asleep under his former Head of House's watchful eye - it had, of course, been his choice to have the painting moved into his room from the portrait hall in the East Wing, but that hadn't prepared him for the very odd sensation of being watched while he slept. Especially by Snape, who had the most piercing gaze Draco had ever experienced.

That he got to experience his former mentor's gaze at all, though, was a luxury, but again, another pleasure he would never admit to. Having Snape around reminded him of things he needed to be reminded of. He didn't want to remember them - didn't at all enjoy the memory of being saved by Potter, of watching Crabbe die because he was too stupid to listen, or to understand subtlety, of being surrounded by death and hatred and realising that was what he'd stood for his whole life, of feeling so out of place that it was almost preferable to have died rather than to be pitied, of hearing of Snape's death, and then of having to sit there while Potter spoke about what an amazing man Snape was, which Draco had known all along (granted, he hadn't known amazing in what sense, or just how Slytherin Snape had been, but at least he'd respected him from the get-go)... They were all memories he would much rather be without. But he'd found, within the first few weeks following that final battle, that remembering what had happened to him was far preferable to pretending it never existed, like his mother and, to some extent, his father were insisting on.

He could certainly understand the reason his parents would want to forget about it, to move past it and start afresh, and he appreciated that mindset, but starting afresh without processing the old wasn't going to get them anywhere either. What he was doing wasn't much better - fixating on the past was a waste of time, and he knew it. But he didn't know how to move beyond it, not yet, and just shoving it to the shadowed recesses of his mind and forgetting it was there would only come back to haunt him in the end. He knew that, because that was what had happened with the doubts he'd had about the Dark Lord, the bitter rejection-turned-hatred caused by Potter, and so forth. No, Draco learned his lessons.

Snape had seen to that.

I wish you were still here, he thought in the general direction of the portrait frame, even though Snape wouldn't be there to hear the words were they to be spoken aloud. Draco didn't know if he'd ever be able to say them aloud, but then he also knew that Snape didn't need him to.

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'Don't kill him! Don't kill him!'

'Expelliarmus!'

'Avada Kedavra!'

'It's somewhere here--'

'Like it hot, scum?'

'The door, get to the door!'

'...C-Crabbe...'

'He's dead.'

Draco jerked awake, sheet-tangled, sweat-chilled, scars burning in throbbing waves beneath his skin. His hands shook, his head pounded, and a sudden wave of nausea hit him and he retched, bending over the side of the mattress and taking deep breaths in an attempt not to throw up. Crabbe's face, white with terror, was burned across the insides of his eyelids, and every time he blinked he could see it, the horror slicing through the ever-present dull stare until his face lit with life in a way it never had when he'd actually been alive.

Once the worst of the sickness had passed, Draco sat up again, taking deep, cooling breaths and trying to calm his thoughts. What had happened to Crabbe had never hit him this hard before - he'd gone through a period of shock, and then it had sunk in and he'd been upset to have lost his childhood friend, but never like this. He'd never felt it so...viscerally, like his entire being was protesting the fact that it had happened.

Goyle still didn't understand. He would never get why Draco was upset about Crabbe - that he hadn't been able to do anything, because he knew better than the both of them but had had no influence anymore. "It was his own fault," Goyle had replied offhandedly when Draco had brought it up. "He should have listened to you like we always did."

Draco couldn't tell if that made him smarter or stupider than Crabbe.

He sighed and reached for another phial of sleeping potion. He hadn't had to use it much over the past several months, as he'd adjusted to what had happened and the feelings of abject terror had ebbed away, but it seemed that his reprieve was now coming back to bite him in the ass.

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Two similarly traumatic nights later, Draco was starting to wonder if something was seriously wrong with him. The possibility that it might be a curse seemed more plausible now, though he didn't know of any nightmare curses that could be cast from a distance like that, and since he only ever saw his parents (and Snape), the likelihood of it being one of the nightmare curses he did know about seemed minuscule at best.

A few more hours in the library turned up very little, save a book on vodou that he almost considered before laughing at himself for his ridiculous paranoia and flinging the book across the room to join the steadily-growing pile of rejects. He didn't want to ask his parents about this, since they would only fuss, and that was the last thing he wanted. He did know, however, that he wouldn't be able to keep up a façade for long though, since even glamours were starting to prove inadequate to cover the pasty-whiteness of his face, the dark circles under his eyes, the bloodlessness of his lips, and they certainly did nothing for the way he was shuffling around like one of those zombies mentioned in the vodou reading. On top of that, he only had two more phials of sleeping potion left, and so he was going to have to venture out for more ingredients. Even he wasn't about to deceive himself into thinking the nightmares would stop on their own.

Three quarters of an hour later, he Apparated into Diagon Alley, upsetting a canoodling young couple, who gave him dirty looks as he scowled at them for inconveniencing him and then stalked off with a dramatic swirl of his robes. (At least he could still manage that.) People moved out of the way for him,

either because they recognised him as one of those Malfoys or because they knew when someone was their better, Draco didn't care which. His stride was purposeful - he wanted to get in, get out, and get home as quickly as possible, before he ran into someone he knew who would start asking him--

'I'm so sorry, I didn't see you comi-- Malfoy?'

Draco froze. The urge to run away screaming was as strong as it had been when he was a boy, perhaps stronger now after all was said and done, but he made himself stand taller, transforming his expression from horror to appropriate disdain before turning to look down at the man who never seemed to get the fuck out of his life.

'Potter,' he replied, with (paradoxical) hostile neutrality.

Years of being a Slytherin had taught him to conceal his reactions, but his first thought upon seeing Harry Potter was wow, he looks like shit. He hadn't even tried to glamour away the circles under his eyes, and he was, if possible, even paler than Draco. Not that Draco had any desire to compare himself to Potter, thanks very much. Besides that, Potter had always been a shabby dresser, but this was even worse - he looked like he'd inherited Lupin's wardrobe. His hair was even more of a rat's nest than usual, and Draco was fairly well certain that was a smudge of chocolate on his glasses.

When Potter said nothing for a moment, Draco added, 'Is that meant to be your disguise to conceal your whereabouts from your rabid horde of fangirls?'

Potter sighed, running a hand through his hair and making it stand more on end. 'Shut up, Malfoy,' he said wearily. The challenge was gone from his voice, and really, he just sounded like he wanted nothing more than to drop this and be on his way.

This, inevitably, made Draco furious.

'What's the matter, Potter? Too good for old schoolmates now that you're famous, eh?' The vitriol in Draco's voice was only somewhat assumed - it held up strongly on a base of bitterness and frustration.

'Malfoy, you're making a scene.' Potter was still speaking evenly, voice quiet and gaze sliding about as if he was afraid of being noticed. 'Look, I'm sorry I knocked you, all right? Let's just...leave it.'

'Giving up so soon?' Draco felt a bit better already, finally getting to lash out at the person who'd made him who he was now instead of sitting around at home thinking about things that only served to make him feel miserable and frustrated and helpless; he didn't know where the words themselves were coming from - old habit, he assumed - but they kept coming, and he didn't even consider checking them. 'Well, well, Potter, and I thought you had a competitive streak, yet here you are conceding defeat already. Tired of fighting?'

Potter's eyes flashed behind his glasses, and Draco took an involuntary step back as Potter almost seemed to swell, the static electricity of his hair crackling as he drew himself up until he was almost equal height with Draco and glared at him like he was casting Avada Kedavra with his eyes. 'Yes,' he spat, coldly, and that single word made Draco flinch.

So this is the most powerful Wizard we have, Draco thought, and might have felt a bit awed were he not so simultaneously scared and infuriated. That was a bad combination when it came to Draco, and even he knew it, but he wasn't thinking about that at the moment. All he was thinking about was the way this confrontation was making him feel alive somehow, the way the tension of so many weeks and months of torture by solitary confinement was pouring out of him in waves, the way he felt better just falling back into his old patterns of behaviour, from before any of this happened, before his father went to Azkaban and the Dark Lord took over their lives completely and everything started to go to shit. And as a result, instead of listening to the terrified part of his brain, he grabbed onto the anger and went with it.

'Then you've certainly chosen the wrong fucking profession, haven't you, Boy Wonder?'

'Malfoy.'

Draco shut his mouth, staring at Potter in open, morbid fascination. This wasn't the Potter who failed his Potions exams or shrank away from the crowds or committed public indecency with the Weaslette. This was the Potter who'd defeated the Dark Lord without once backing down or giving in. This was the textbook Potter that Draco'd learned about as a child. This was the Potter that Draco had always

admired.

This was the Potter you didn't want to cross.

They stared at each other in silence for a few moments, and then finally, Draco gave. 'Fine,' he said, shrugging. 'Your loss. You know how to find me should you ever grow a spine.'

Potter glared at him, but said nothing else, the apparent exhaustion taking hold again. He pulled off his glasses, raising a hand to rub his eyes, and Draco noted absently how young Potter looked without them. Bare-faced like this, Potter could almost be a mere mortal, like the rest of them.

'Oh, and Potter? A friendly word of advice. The beauty sleep isn't working.'

Potter snorted, passing his hand over his face before perching his glasses back on the bridge of his nose. 'You should fix your regimen first before you start offering advice to others,' he retorted, but in such a halfhearted manner that Draco couldn't even summon up the energy to be properly offended.

'Hey -- it's Harry Potter!!!'

Besides, Draco thought as Potter's expression turned frantic and he fumbled for his wand. There was something satisfying about seeing Potter so discombobulated without him having to do any of the work. And really, watching him get mobbed by fangirls before he could Apparate made Draco's week a whole lot brighter.

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'Your stirring has gotten sloppy, Mister Malfoy.'

Draco added the hibiscus root to the swampy green slurry, watching as it turned a bright red before

starting to stir again. Snape made a sound of disapproval, but Draco ignored him. Or at least, he pretended to. Really, he could have made this potion just about anywhere else, but the reason he was doing it in his bedroom was so Snape could watch him and make disapproving sounds. It was comforting, familiar, and it made him more confident because it felt like being back at school again, being the top student in the class, instead of just some nameless faceless Death Eater wannabe.

'Do pay attention, Draco - you must add the foxglove blossoms now or else--'

'--or else it'll explode and turn my skin bright purple for a week, I know.' Draco raised a sardonic brow as he stirred in the flowers. 'I did actually learn something in your class, you know.'

'Wonders never cease,' Snape snorted, folding his arms, but watched in silence as Draco finished the stirs - fourteen times counter-clockwise - and then set the rod down, letting the potion steep over the heat. Draco preempted his your workstation, Mister Malfoy by beginning to clean up as soon as the potion could be safely left to its own devices, and earned for his trouble another snort and a grudging, 'At least you're better at this than Longbottom was,' which was Snape's way of giving a compliment.

Draco smiled, then hid it by biting his lip. 'Only marginally though, I'm sure,' he countered.

'Mm.'

'At least you aren't asking me to move your frame to a different county, so I suppose that must be an improvement.'

That earned him a chuckle. 'I suppose so,' Snape replied. 'A very slight improvement.'

They fell silent as Draco put away his equipment with great care and then wiped down the surface of the table. The potion wasn't quite ready yet, so Draco flopped down onto his chair and stared into the swirling liquid. It was hypnotic, the alternating bands of sky and royal blue that spiralled toward the centre of the potion - it would eventually be a uniform teal colour, but until then, Draco was content to stare into its depths and zone out, the almost-sleepless nights taking their toll.

'For what purpose is this potion to be used?'

Draco looked up, blinking heavy eyelids, and then smirked. 'For sleeping.'

'Brat,' Snape replied, acidulous tone tinged with a hint of fondness. 'Why do you require a potion to sleep?'

Draco shrugged, smirk falling from his face, and turned back to look into the cauldron. 'Been having nightmares again,' he mumbled, barely audible.

Of course, it was Snape, so naturally he heard. 'What sort of nightmares?'

'About...about that night. About Crabbe.'

Snape fell silent for a moment, and Draco could hear his frown. 'But you did not experience such dreams before?'

'No. There were some that were disturbing, but in a very abstract sort of way.'

'Hm.' Snape pursed his lips. 'It would seem that you are just now able to process the events in a more rooted manner. If that is the case, then it would seem this is a healthy, if unpleasant, stage of your growth.'

Draco scowled, folding his arms on the table. 'I've grown enough, thanks.'

'Draco.'

The note of real displeasure in Snape's voice eased Draco's frown slightly, but he continued to stare into the cauldron instead of looking over at Snape. Snape, too, was silent for a long moment, and then finally, Draco heard him exhale.

'Is it helping, at least?'

'I don't know.' Draco sighed too, tracing a whorl in the wood with a fingertip. 'Obviously it's putting me back to sleep after I wake up, but it's the very same thing the next night - horrible dreams, cold sweat, breathlessness, pain so severe it makes my eyeballs hurt--'

'You are experiencing pain as well?' Snape sounded surprised and, much to Draco's equal satisfaction and concern, worried. 'What sort of pain?'

'My scars,' Draco replied, quietly. He didn't have to specify which ones - it was a sore point for both of them. 'It's like...the wounds have been opened up again, only they hurt under the skin, as if they're being cauterised from within somehow.'

'And this happens every night?'

Draco nodded. 'I go to bed feeling fine and then wake up in absolute, blood-curdling agony.'

Snape ignored the hyperbole and began pacing his frame. 'Why did you not mention this before?'

'You're never around at night to mention it to,' Draco snapped, and then leaned forward onto the table again, suddenly weary. 'And I hoped that I'd be able to figure out how to fix it so nobody would have to know. But nothing's worked yet.'

'And it is only at night?'

'Yes.' Draco shut his eyes. 'Fortunately. I don't know that I'd be able to handle it all the time.'

'Nobody can,' Snape muttered. Draco was under the impression the words were not meant for his ears, but Snape was a bloody painting, and Draco's painting at that, so Draco wasn't about to just pretend he hadn't heard them.

'What do you mean "nobody can"? This is normal?'

'Hardly.' Snape grimaced. 'I have only heard of one other case, yet it was pervasive enough to affect others as well.'

'What are you talking about? Stop being cryptic and...'

Draco trailed off as he saw Snape's hand go to his left arm.

'...the Mark?'

Snape nodded grimly.

'You're joking.'

'I wish I were, Mister Malfoy.' Snape's voice was threaded through with regret. 'Unfortunately, that is the only widely documented study of one wizard affecting another via cursed scars.'

Draco shuddered, fingers going to his unmarred forearm. Had he succeeded at the mission he'd been assigned, he would have received the Mark, with all the pomp and circumstance (and screaming) of a proper initiation ceremony. Had he not, though, he would have been dead. Draco considered himself

lucky for having escaped mostly unscathed, but never had he felt it so strongly as he did right now, hearing Snape explain the true power of the Mark.

'He could control....?'

'Yes,' Snape replied. 'You know of course about the summoning properties of the Mark. However, there is also...mind control, manipulation by pain, direct imbuing of spells via the curse-connection, even forced Apparation to a location other than the Dark Lord's, should he so require it.'

'But...' Draco flexed his fingers, then folded his arms again, tight against his chest. '...but I don't understand. That was deliberate on his part, to be able to do that, was it not? What does that have to do with me?'

A scowl. 'The remainder of that story, Mister Malfoy, is the part that is not documented. The one person who was not deliberately branded by the Dark Lord, but was branded nonetheless, was subject to the Dark Lord's whims as well. However, in that case, it was involuntary, connected to strong emotion such as rage or frustration or even happiness, and was manifested in the form of debilitating nightmares.'

Draco froze, and slowly looked back up at Snape. 'You mean Potter.'

'I mean Potter,' Snape confirmed. 'His scar was the unknown variable, and while the Dark Lord could use his rage to punish the individuals who had taken the Mark freely, anything Potter experienced was merely...leakage. It was not until later that the Dark Lord learnt of this connection and used it to his advantage.'

'His...'

Draco was starting to feel sick. His clothes were stifling him, and his breath was coming shorter, and he wanted to get away from this conversation, take a phial of potion, and sleep for a week, preferably two.

'So at first, Potter was having nightmares because the Dark Lord did not make the effort to control the connection, because he did not know better, but then the nightmares came because the Dark Lord orchestrated them?'

'Correct.' Snape nodded. 'Curse scars are strong, and even Occlumency does not always protect one fully from the onslaught.'

'So...the reason I'm having nightmares is because of my curse scars?'

Snape scowled. 'It would seem so, yes.'

'And there is no cure.'

'Short of learning to control it, no.'

'I do know Occlumency,' Draco thought aloud. 'I could practise that, work on closing my mind unconsciously so it will happen automatically when I am asleep, and...' He trailed off at Snape's piercing stare, and raised a brow in a silent what?!

'It must be controlled by both sides,' Snape clarified. 'With the Mark, we were only subject to the Dark Lord's mood swings when he wished us to be, as he had learned to control that aspect and could turn it on and off like a faucet. However, since your affliction is presumably involuntary...'

'Bugger,' Draco grumbled. 'You mean I have to go track this person down and explain to him what is going on? It's like finding a Knut in a pile of Galleons. That is the most--what now?'

Snape was still staring at him, pointedly. He said nothing for several long moments, and then, when Draco didn't fill in the blank, he sighed and shook his head. 'Draco. The Mark, and Potter's scar, were both results of the Dark Lord casting a spell, deliberately.'

'Yes....' Draco replied. 'And?'

'And the Dark Lord was the only one who could control the Mark fully.'

'What's your point?'

As soon as the words were out of Draco's mouth, he got it. His mouth dropped open, and he stared at Snape in shock and absolute disgust. 'Please tell me you're joking.'

'I assure you, Mister Malfoy, I wish it were so.'

'Great,' Draco groaned, slumping back against the table again. As if it weren't enough that his week was rapidly turning into an exercise in insomnia, now he was faced with the possibility that the cause of it, yet again, was one Harry Potter.

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'This is stupid,' Draco muttered to himself as he eyed the terrace suspiciously. For the fourth time since Apparating to the (very Muggle) neighbourhood, he considered Apparating straight back home and just dealing with it, but the memory of the nightmares he'd had to deal with the night before steeled his resolve. They were getting worse by the day, it seemed, and they were going to have to fix this now or else Draco might never regain his youthful good looks.

Sighing, he raised a gloved hand to the little brass knocker. Three taps, and then a voice called, 'Just a second!'

Draco took a step back just in time for Potter to yank the door open, poking his rumpled head out and blinking owlishly in the dim evening light. 'Can I help--'

Potter's eyes widened in recognition, and then narrowed and he took a step forward, blocking the doorway. 'What do you want, Malfoy?'

'I see your manners have not improved from the other day,' Draco retorted, lifting a brow, but when Potter made to step back and slam the door in Draco's face, he changed tactics. 'That is, I simply wanted to talk.'

'Talk.' Potter's brows went up in incredulity. 'You want to talk to me. Is that rich-boy code for "hexing"?'

Draco snorted. 'No, that's "having a tea party",' he retorted, deadpan.

Potter's lips twitched noticeably before he jerked them flat, dialing his glare up a notch. 'So you don't want to hex me. What do you want then? I refuse to believe you just want to have a nice little chat, catch up on the old days, reminisce about that time you turned into a ferret....'

Draco clenched his jaw, taking a deep breath. It was tempting to hex Potter's lights out and leave it at that, but there was no guarantee that that would stop his nightmares. Though it would feel very, very good.

'That is all I require, Potter. A simple, civilised conversation, if that's not too difficult for you to manage.'

Potter sighed, running a hand through his hair. Draco thought he was about to get another weary brush-off, but then Potter took a step forward, pulling the door half-shut behind him, and folded his arms. 'Fine,' he said. 'You wanted to talk, so talk.'

Draco looked around in disgust. 'Here?'

Potter gave him a Look.

Draco sighed. 'Fine,' he said, pulling his cloak a bit tighter around himself. 'I assume the front step is glamoured?'

'Disillusionment charm.'

'Of course.' Draco rolled his eyes. 'You never did have--' He caught himself before he could insult Potter again, since while Potter was all Gryffindor-y, he did not, as Draco had learned, have infinite patience, and Draco really needed to get this out.

'So.'

'So...?'

Draco sighed, folding his arms as well. 'I was wondering...you look like you haven't been sleeping much lately. Is there a reason for that?'

Potter drew himself up taller, expression turning cold. 'What's it to you?'

'I have no desire to hear about your strange sordid fantasies about the Weaslette,' Draco replied, pulling his spine straight as well. 'This is not an attempt to pry into your personal life, because frankly, I could care less.'

'Good,' Potter replied, but he didn't relax, still eyeing Draco warily.

'I ask because...I haven't been sleeping very well lately either, and I am inclined to believe there is a connection.'

Potter snorted. 'Oh, that's rich,' he scoffed. 'The world does not revolve around you, Malfoy. Just because you're having nightmares doesn't--'

'I never said I was having nightmares.'

Potter shut up, face turning pasty white, and Draco coughed to hide his smirk.

After a moment, Potter took a deep breath. 'All right. So I've been having nightmares. What does that have to do with you?'

Draco stared at Potter for a beat, and then unfolded his arms, fingers moving to the fastening of his cloak, and then the buttons of his coat.

'What are you doing?'

Draco didn't reply, simply unfastening the buttons one at a time, graceful even with gloved fingers, and not looking away from the increasing discombobulation on Potter's face. The jacket finally fell open, and Draco reached for the buttons on his shirt, before--

'Malfoy, stop.'

Draco arched a brow. 'I thought you wanted to know what your nightmares had to do with me,' he said pointedly.

Potter's forehead creased. 'What, are they being caused by the frightening whiteness of your chest?'

Draco snorted. 'You're almost as pale as I am,' he said with a smirk. 'That attempted insult doesn't have quite the same effect.'

Potter rolled his eyes, but fell silent, a faint hint of pink tingeing his cheeks. Interesting. Draco hadn't taken Potter for the modest type, though obviously he was a total prude - anyone who spent that much time with the youngest Weasleys and Granger would have to be. Though Draco had heard some stories about the eldest...

He finished with the buttons on his shirt, and let it fall open, baring his chest. He'd left his undershirt off in a preemptive attempt to maximise the drama of his demonstration, which it seemed was a good idea as Potter's eyes widened and he took an involuntary step forward, corners of his mouth turning down.

'Is that...'

'Yes, Potter.' Draco sighed in a long-suffering manner. 'Those are the scars from that lovely curse you decided to acquaint me with. And yes, they are red. Very red. Very painful too, so don't you dare touch.'

Potter looked up, and Draco almost sucked in a breath at how honestly contrite Potter looked. Guilt was a good expression for him, Draco was finding, and he'd be interested in seeing if he could coax that look out of Potter more often, only that would require seeing him more often, and Draco really wanted nothing more than to fix this and move on with his life, Potter-free.

'Your scars have been...'

'They've been hurting,' Draco confirmed. 'Burning, every time I wake up. I spoke to Snape and he mentioned that you...'

Potter's eyes went a bit glassy at the mention of Snape's name, and then he dropped his head, staring listlessly at the ground. 'He told you that.'

It wasn't a question, but Draco answered anyway. 'Of course he did. He is my mentor, after all. He only wants what's best for me.'

Potter grunted wordlessly, scuffing his toe against the stone step. 'Mine hasn't hurt me since Voldemort--'

'Bully for you,' Draco interrupted him in an attempt to counter the chill he knew was coming at the mere mention of the Dark Lord's name. 'That's because he's long gone, no? You, however, are not.'

'You think I'm causing your nightmares?' Potter finally lifted his head, looking incredulous. 'Bollocks.'

'Not at all - it makes perfect sense,' Draco countered. 'The Dark Lord--'

'Voldemort.'

Draco shuddered. 'Whatever. He left you with a curse scar, which proceeded to hurt whenever he was experiencing strong flashes of emotion, right? Well you left me with several curse scars, so I can only assume they hurt when you experience strong bursts of emotion. Such as, oh, I don't know, nightmares, perhaps?'

Potter scowled. 'But we're not linked the way Voldemort and I were. It's not like I put some of my soul into you--'

Draco gave Potter a Look.

Potter winced. 'You've got to be bloody joking.'

'I wish I were,' Draco replied in a scarily accurate echo of Snape's tone from the night before. 'But that's the only feasible explanation. Snape did say that the spell was Dark magic, and so while it might not be on the same level as the Unforgivables, it's pretty damn close, so I wouldn't be surprised if--'

'But that's not possible.' Potter was starting to get hysterical now. 'I wasn't in the process of making Horcruxes; there wasn't a death involved; it doesn't make sense that you would...'

'Yes it does,' Draco replied with faux patience. 'Honestly, Potter. Rudimentary magical theory. Every spell a wizard casts contains a minuscule fragment of his soul. The weaker or simpler or, in Gryffindor terms, whiter the spell, the tinier the particle, until it's barely noticeable, and in fact in many cases may strengthen the wizard via a simple energy exchange. The more powerful or darker spells have more of a trade-off, or in other words, a larger sacrificial fragment. It's not anything like making a Horcrux, because it's magic exchange instead of magical displacement, but the principles are in effect the same - balance, conservation, et cetera. Surely you didn't believe you could get something out of nothing?'

From the way Potter blinked, it was clear that he had. Or at the very least, he'd never bothered to consider it before. Unsurprisingly.

Draco sighed. 'That's part of why Bellatrix went insane,' he said briskly. 'Too much casting of hyper-powerful spells without recuperation or appropriate penance, as some wizards like to call it, will take its toll on the mind.'

Potter blinked some more, stupidly. 'I'd never thought of it like that,' he said, slowly.

'Obviously,' Draco snorted. 'Well that's the way it works, anyway. The spell you used might as well have been an Unforgivable, and the Unforgivables are the most powerful of all - the Cruciatus and Imperius curses both cycle, so any energy or soul expended is returned immediately, often times twofold, if the target is weak enough. The exchange in the Killing Curse is even more pronounced, though I wouldn't consider it an exchange so much as a leaching. This one though...it wasn't of the same ilk as the Unforgivables, for all that it was on the same level of power expenditure, so it didn't have the same sort of loop. Shame, really - I should see if there's a possible modification that might make it--'

'Shut up.' Potter looked almost green, eyes blazing as he stared at Draco as if he wanted to burn him alive. 'You disgust me, Malfoy. The way you speak about Unforgivables, it's like you think they're...'

'Useful?' Draco shrugged, studying his fingernails. 'They can be. All spells have their uses, Potter, including the ones that blast bunions off a hobgoblin's arse. You just have to know when and where to use them.'

'I can't believe you just compared--' Potter cut himself off with a sharp shake of his head. 'No, you know what? Yes I can. You haven't changed at all, Malfoy.' He took a step back, slipping half behind the doorframe. 'We're done here.'

'You haven't told me how you're going to fix your little problem.' Draco stepped forward as well, putting a hand on the door so Potter couldn't slam it shut. 'I need my beauty sleep, you know.'

'Even sleeping for a hundred years wouldn't make you beautiful, Malfoy,' Potter spat. 'You're just an ugly person.'

'Excuse me?' Draco's expression slipped back into the familiar I-Hate-You moue of disgust as he glared at Potter, taking full advantage of the three inches he had on him.

'You heard me.' Potter's voice was harsh, unforgiving. 'I think you're making this shit up to garner you pity votes, Malfoy. Pathetic, if you ask me. Haven't you felt enough pity from your once-adoring public?'

Draco saw red. 'My life does not fucking exist to provide you with personalised torture and other forms of endless entertainment,' he snarled. 'You always were an egomaniacal--'

'Look who's talking!' Potter growled. 'You want to talk about ego!'

'There is a difference between confidence and arrogance,' Draco snapped. 'I have the former. You have the latter in spades, Boy Wonder.'

'Get out.' Potter's voice lost all heat and his eyes flashed green fire behind his glasses. 'Get the fuck off

my property, Malfoy. I don't want to see you here again.'

'Good,' said Draco. 'I don't want to see your hideous face ever again.'

'Good.'

'Good.'

They glared at each other, white-faced with rage and standing about two inches apart, Draco in a position that could only prove dangerous should Potter decide to shut the door all of a sudden. Potter didn't though, choosing instead to stare Draco down, waiting for him to concede, but Potter would be waiting for that until the day he died, so instead, Draco simply smirked, lip curling in a pleasantly familiar sort of way.

'On that note, I suppose I shall take my leave,' he said, sweeping a mock-obsequious bow. 'Best of luck with your wet dreams - oh, sorry, nightmares. Do try not to scare yourself to death.'

Potter bared his teeth in a poor approximation of a grin. 'And you,' he returned. 'You had better get started on that beauty sleep right away - you'll need all the time you can get.'

And with that, Potter did slam the door in Draco's face, though with more of a quiet click than a massive bang, and with surprisingly little damage to Draco's person. Mostly, it was just his pride. And also his nipples, because fucking hell, it was cold outside, and his shirt was hanging open about his shoulders.

'A very bad idea,' Draco muttered, and tugged his robes tightly around his body before Apparating with a soft pop.

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'That's my wand you're holding, Potter.'

'Not anymore. Winners, keepers.'

'No! If you wreck the room you might bury this diadem thing! Potter came in here to get it so that must mean--'

'Must mean? Who cares what you think?'

'If we die for them, I'll kill you, Harry!'

'What are you doing?! The door's that way!!'

'That's the second time we've saved your life tonight, you two-faced bastard!'

Draco jerked awake as he hit the floor, sheets tangled around his legs, pajama jacket half-off and twisting his arm behind his back. His heart raced, and he swallowed hard in an attempt to soothe his parched throat. When he was able to move again, he struggled out of the tangle of fabric and reached for the glass on his bedside table, spilling water into it and taking a deep, cooling draught, not stopping until he'd drunk it all.

Then he slumped back against the side of the bed, tipping his head back and closing his eyes. That had been the worst one yet, and he had the feeling that even a sleeping potion wouldn't let him rest again tonight.

'Did you not speak with Mister Potter this afternoon?'

Draco cracked one eyelid, then twisted around to look up at Snape's painting, which Snape was,

unusually for this time of night, still in. 'I did.'

'To no avail?'

Draco shrugged. 'He seemed disinclined to believe I was being truthful.'

Snape scowled. 'Were he not Potter, I might commend him for his unwillingness to trust so easily, but instead I am simply disgusted by his--'

'--utter stupidity?'

A snort. 'I was going to say naiveté, but stupidity will suffice.'

Draco snorted as well, and leaned back against the bed again. He was exhausted, bone-weary to the point where his teeth ached, and if he didn't get some sleep soon he was going to start picking off Muggles with crotch-itch curses just to cheer himself up. Maybe if he just closed his eyes for a second, then he would...

'So how come you three aren't with Voldemort?'

'We're gonna be rewarded. Decided to bring you to 'im.'

'I don't take your orders no more, Draco. You an' your dad are finished.'

'Like it hot, scum?'

'Draco.'

Draco jerked awake. His hands were clenched into fists, and he was trembling, though he managed to stop himself as soon as he became aware that he was doing it. Snape had already noticed though, and was eyeing him with mingled concern and sternness.

'You cannot continue like this,' he said, unnecessarily. 'If Potter is unable to see reason, you must simply make it plain to him that there is no reason involved.'

Draco rolled his eyes. 'And how do you suggest I do that? Show up in his bedroom, point at my face, and say, "oi, golden boy, you woke me up again"?'

Snape shrugged. 'If that is what it takes.'

'You have got to be kidding me.'

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Ten minutes later, re-clad in his pajamas, wrapped in a velveteen robe, and wearing lambskin-lined slippers, Draco Apparated on Potter's front step again, arms wrapped tightly around himself to shield his body from the cold. Had he been smart, he would have worn something warmer, or at least cast a warming charm, but he just wanted to get this done with and get back to bed, which right now meant knocking until Potter got his arse out of bed and answered the door.

Unfortunately, after two minutes of near-continuous knocking, there was still no sign of Potter, and Draco was in danger of freezing off parts of himself that he'd be loath to part with. Since his choices at this point were to go back home and not sleep, or find a way in, he decided it was time to go back to Slytherin 101.

Exactly nineteen seconds later, he had managed to get Potter's wards down and his door unlocked. 'Very naive, Potter,' he muttered as he slipped through the door and cast a dim Lumos. Potter's home was sparse but...homey, in a disgustingly Gryffindor manner, and Draco picked his way past giant sacks that

looked like they were maybe supposed to be chairs, a wall covered in framed photographs, a tiny kitchen, and a sitting room with a single sofa before finding what he assumed was Potter's bedroom. His suspicions were confirmed a moment later when he heard Potter moan, low and loud and ragged, like he'd been doing it for the better part of the evening, and Draco very deliberately dragged his mind back out of the gutter before he could follow that line of thought through to its inevitable conclusion, because he really didn't want to be thinking about Potter and...inevitable conclusions in even the same vicinity as each other.

The very unwelcome idea that perhaps Potter didn't answer the door because he was in fact engaged in sinful endeavours occurred to him, and he was on the verge of aborting his mission and coming back when Potter was no longer horizontal, but then he remembered that he'd been awoken by bad dreams, which meant that if Potter was being shameful with some unfortunate fan, then by going in there, Draco would be saving him from being scarred for life by Really Bad Sex.

Then he remembered that it was Potter and he didn't give a shit whether Potter was happy with this situation anyway, and pushed open the door without a second thought.

Potter was thrashing around (alone) on the bed, head rolling back and forth on the pillow, limbs fidgeting beneath the thin cotton sheets. In the slice of moonlight spilling through the window, Potter's glasses-free face was illuminated in a way that made him look like a young boy, but the furrow in his brow made absolutely clear the troubled nature of his dreams, as did the continual moans and mutterings of 'no, not Fred'. This was the Boy Wonder as few people ever got to see him, and for a moment, Draco's long-held fascination won out over his general hatred of Potter, and he just watched him, studying the lines of his face, made lean and angular with the years and the battles he'd fought, the sharp jut of his collarbones peeking out of the neck of his t-shirt, the wild mop of hair tangled on the pillow as his head flopped to one side, then the other, hopelessly knotting the thick strands...

Potter threw an arm out, grasping for an invisible assailant, and Draco snapped back to the present, reminded that he was tired and he wanted to go home and get into his own bed rather than looking longingly at Potter's (which he wasn't doing - he was simply observing). Another half-moan half-whimper made him take a step forward, and he reached out a hand and poked Potter in the shoulder.

Potter didn't wake.

'Oi, Potter,' Draco said, and then again, louder. 'Wake up, you speccy git.'

Potter still didn't wake, and Draco found that it was infinitely less satisfying to insult someone who wasn't aware he was being insulted. This entire endeavour was starting to wear on his nerves.

He sighed, and climbed up onto the bed for better leverage. Potter started thrashing some more, one hand smacking Draco in the stomach, and Draco gritted his teeth, rolling Potter over onto his back with a well-placed shove and pinning him in place by sitting on him. Then, in the most satisfying act of the day, he smacked Potter across the face.

'Potter. Wake up.'

Potter woke up.

In fact, Potter bolted upright, wildly, eyes wide and myopic, hands curled into defensive claws, and as Draco wasn't prepared for the sudden jolt of movement, Potter unbalanced him, knocking him back until he nearly tipped over backward; he leaned forward to compensate, throwing out a hand, and that was how, a few moments later, he found himself sprawled out atop Potter, face buried against Potter's throat, their bodies pressed together in what could very soon prove to be a dangerous and potentially embarrassing way. Not because Draco wanted anything to do with Potter, especially not in that way, but because Potter had yet to stop squirming.

'What the fuck are you doing in my room? Who are you? What do you want?'

Draco cleared his throat, taking a moment to curb his reactions, and then sat up, face arranged into a careless smirk, and brightened his Lumos until the room was washed with proper illumination.

'Malfoy?!' Potter blinked, stilling. 'What are you...'

'You were having a nightmare,' Draco replied flatly, sparing Potter's attempts to formulate a coherent

question. 'I came to wake you up.'

Potter propped himself up on his elbows. 'Why?'

Draco rolled his eyes. 'Do you need me to show you again?' he asked sharply. 'Could you even see if I did show you?'

Potter stared at Draco in open-mouthed shock and confusion for a moment, and then his face twisted into a furious frown. 'Malfoy, what the fuck do you want?'

'I want you to stop having nightmares,' Draco retorted. 'I need to sleep. You are making it impossible. Fix it.'

Potter's expression didn't change. 'I thought I told you I never wanted to see you again.'

'You did,' Draco replied with relative unconcern. 'But the fact remains that every time you have a nightmare, I suffer, and since you seem to have chosen the path of ignorance as so many of your little Godric disciples have done, I have no choice but to continue to harass you until you either see reason or, much more likely, get sick of me and do what I say just to get me to shut up.'

'Why does everything always have to be about you?' Potter exploded, and that quickly, Draco found himself being thrown off and to the side where he landed in an ungainly sprawl, limbs splayed out all directions and face smushed against Potter's (very scratchy) bedspread.

'About me?' Draco asked, voice muffled, and pushed himself up, deliberately, throwing a blazing gaze over his shoulder. 'The fuck it's all about me. You're the one who thinks the sun shines out of your arse so you can't possibly have done any lasting damage to anyone. Wake up, Potter. Magic is magic, no matter how "good" the wizard - and there is no such thing as "good" or "evil", or "white" or "black" magic; everything is just different shades of grey - and no matter who is wielding the power, if that person casts a powerful curse, there will be consequences.'

'But I didn't know,' Potter spat. 'It's not like I was trying to--'

'What? Trying to kill me?' Draco lashed out, shoving Potter back against the mattress again. 'Well you sure did a damn fine job of it, since I almost did end up dead, and I'm still feeling it two years later. It doesn't matter what your intent was. So if you're so horrified that you've managed to tarnish your perfect little record there, then instead of pretending it didn't happen, bloody do something about it!'

'What do you want me to do? Go back in time?' Potter's eyes flashed with fury, and he lunged, flipping Draco over, knocking his breath out of him as he pinned him flat. 'I said I'm sorry, okay, Malfoy? There isn't anything else I can do. I can't control my nightmares any more than you can.'

'Yes, you can.' Draco's eyes narrowed, and he glared. 'It's simple Occlumency, Potter - you learn involuntary control, so you keep your nightmares to yourself, then you're not affected, I'm not affected, and we can go on our merry fucking ways and forget this ever happened. Well, you can, anyway - I'll have these--' He nodded at his chest. "--for the rest of my life.'

'The passive-aggressive bullshit won't get you anywhere with me, Malfoy.' Potter's eyes narrowed as well, and he shoved Draco harder into the mattress until Draco's breath came faster and shallower. 'Fine, I scarred you for life. I'm sorry. Only I'm not really, because you're not perfect and you've been a whole lot less idiotic since you figured that out. Maybe it was because you don't look perfect anymore, or maybe it was getting left out of the Slug Club, or having to deal with your daddy in prison - I don't really care why. But at least now you're not trailing in your father's footsteps and you've grown something resembling a brain.'

'Excuse me?' Draco went very still. 'You're telling me that I have something resembling a brain? If you had even an atom of intelligence, you would acknowledge that this is a problem that needs to be fixed, and that even if you loathe me, it's not going to go away on its own so you have to suck it up and deal with it. That's what a real hero does.'

'And you would know so much about being a real hero,' Potter spat bitterly.

Draco pressed his lips together until they were almost white; when he finally spoke again, his voice was so soft that even he could hardly hear it.

'It would seem, judging by your behaviour, that at least I know more than you.'

Potter's eyes went wide, face white with mingled shock and fury, and Draco took advantage of his discombobulation to flip him over again, coming up astride Potter's hips and shoving him down with a hand hooked around his throat.

'Don't you dare lecture me,' Draco breathed, low and dangerous. 'I may not be perfect, but neither are you, and you're the one in this room who's not willing to acknowledge that he made a mistake.'

For a long moment, neither of them said anything, glaring at each other, breaths coming hard and fast, eyes wide and wild, hands clutching at throat and wrist and shirt and hair, neither one willing to concede. And then, all of a sudden, Potter relaxed, went still beneath Draco's hands, eyes sliding half-shut and out of focus.

'I'm sorry,' he mumbled; it was barely audible, and not exactly the formal sort of apology Draco might expect of someone who had tried to kill him, but it was so unexpected, and sounded so honest, that his grip slackened automatically and he straightened, studying Potter's face with a mixture of confusion and suspicion.

'You're sorry,' he repeated dubiously.

Potter's eyes slid open, and Draco realised in that instant just how exhausted Potter really looked. It was even more pronounced now than it had been the last two times he'd seen Potter - the circles under his eyes were almost black, his eyelids red-rimmed, his face pale and sickly-looking, especially in contrast to the pitch-black of his hair. Even his eyes, usually bright green, were a dull sort of moss colour, muted even without his glasses to hide behind. Potter looked...defeated in a way the Dark Lord had never managed to cause, not even with Dumbledore's death or the casualties in the Battle of Hogwarts, and just looking at it made Draco exhausted as well.

'Fine,' he said, trying to shoot Potter a glare that said this isn't over, but he couldn't manage a decently caustic tone, and he spoilt it anyway by yawning.

'Can we fight about this in the morning?' Potter slurred. 'I haven't slept much in a long time, and all that choking you just did kind of wore me out.'

'Fine,' Draco said again. 'I'll just be on my way then. Please, don't get up.'

Potter snorted, closing his eyes and settling back against the pillows. Draco looked at him for a long moment, wondering how he could be so relaxed all of a sudden when he was still half-pinned under someone else's body, when his house had just been broken into by someone who could easily have been there to pick him off - he didn't know whether it was just sheer idiocy or some sort of misplaced yet oddly beautiful faith in the world, and no, he didn't just think that. Clearly he was in desperate need of sleep as well.

'I'm leaving now,' Draco stressed.

Potter grunted without opening his eyes. 'Have a nice trip,' he mumbled.

Draco blinked in incredulity at Potter's lack of reaction. Then he blinked again. The second time, his eyes took a good second and a half to open again.

'This isn't over,' he said, aloud, but Potter's only acknowledgment was a deep, sleepy breath that made Draco's eyelids feel like they had weights on.

'I'm really going.'

Potter said nothing. Upon closer inspection, Draco found that he was already asleep.

It figured.

I should really get up, he told himself in the sternest mental voice possible, but a few long moments passed, and the only movement he made during that time was to blink, heavily, and to yawn, so it seemed that that mission was a spectacular failure.

Well, he amended, it'd be pointless to go home and try to sleep again if Potter still hasn't gotten it through his thick skull that I can't sleep well if he doesn't, so maybe I should just check to make sure he doesn't end up having any more nightmares. I'll just... He rolled off of Potter, settling onto the mattress beside him, and then folded his arms behind his head. 'I'll just watch him for a few minutes before I decide to go....'

He was asleep before he managed to finish the sentence.

On to Part 2

Draco woke slowly, rubbing sleep from his eyes. His other arm was twisted under his body oddly, but other than that, he was very comfortable, and as such was loath to move, even though the light in the room suggested it was well into the afternoon. He felt refreshed for the first time in several days, and though he could still feel the tiredness lurking behind his eyes, clearly something had gone right the previous night in his discussion with--

--Potter.

Draco snapped upright, looking around wildly. This was definitely not his room. He had much better taste than to put orange and red together, that was for certain, and especially not on the wall like that. Cringing, he turned his head slowly to the side, hoping that maybe....

...but no, that was Potter there, fast asleep, dark lashes curled against slightly less pale cheeks, chest rising and falling in a steady rhythm. Potter had slept soundly. Draco had slept soundly. It seemed that

the problem had somehow resolved itself. It was most likely Draco's gift of oratory, but then again, Potter had no appreciation for any sort of higher intelligence, so maybe it was just one look at Draco's face that had allowed him to have pleasant dreams all night long.

Potter shifted, lips curving into a sleepy smile, and murmured something under his breath as he rolled over onto his side, slinging an arm across....oh, shit. Draco looked down at his lap, which was now in Potter's grasp, and shortly thereafter he realised that his lap was other things too that he definitely did not want Potter to know about. Purely physical, of course, but either way, he had to get out of there before Potter woke up.

Gingerly, he scooted back as far as he could, pressing his back against the headboard, though that turned out to be a bad move as instead of shaking Potter's arm completely, he only managed to displace it so that Potter's hand ended up...well.

Draco did not squeak in a most undignified manner, but it was a close call.

'Sodding Gryffindors,' Draco muttered, snaking fingers around Potter's wrist and attempting to extricate his hand from his lap. 'So prudish that you have to cop a feel of the first person who gets into bed with you? No, wait. Ugh. I don't want to think about that.' It had just occurred to him that Potter and Weasley probably stayed up half the night in bed together giggling like girls.

Now Draco really had to get out of here before he was sick all over Potter's bed. And his favourite pajamas, which would be far more tragic. But Potter, it seemed, treated everything like the Golden Snitch - once he had a hold of it, he refused to let go, which was why Draco found himself struggling to pry Potter's hand off his bits, which, traitorously, didn't seem to mind the attention. Granted, it had been several months since the last time he got laid, but that didn't change the fact that this was Potter, and Draco would rather lick a grindylow than have any sort of physical relationship with Potter. Unless said physical relationship involved punching Potter in the mouth until he lost all his teeth.

'Potter,' he hissed, when Potter sighed and snuggled (snuggled!) closer, grabbing at Draco until it actually hurt. 'I'm not your little ginger girlfriend. And if your little ginger girlfriend has what you're holding onto right now, then you really need to drop her, unless that's your thing, in which case you might consider one of the other Weasleys who would be more suited to your predilections.'

Potter still showed no signs of letting go though, and Draco was rapidly losing patience with the situation. That, and his body was rapidly reacting to the attention to the point where he was going to embarrass himself if he didn't do something now. So he did the only thing he could think of.

'Potter!'

Potter jumped, eyes flying open as he sat straight up in bed, and Draco took advantage of his moment of disorientation to yank his wand out of his sleeve and Apparate the hell out of there before Potter saw who had woken him. With any luck, Potter would think he'd just been dreaming, would go back to sleep, and Draco could go take a very hot, cleansing shower and forget any of this ever happened.

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Unfortunately, Draco's luck did not seem to want to hold.

Gritting his teeth against the pain, he stomped out of the bathroom, slamming the door behind him, and shook his dripping hair back from his face before reaching for the trousers he'd laid out on his bed. His wishful thinking that he'd only have to deal with nightmares and pain at night had proven to be exactly that, as he'd zoned out in the shower and, instead of dreaming of Crabbe again, had dreamed of the night Potter had found him in the bathroom and-- Well, suffice it to say that his scars throbbed, like they'd all been ripped open anew, which left Draco quite convinced that his brilliant tactics had not worked as well as he'd thought they had. And if he was being subjected to daymares now as well as the nightmares, then he hadn't any time to waste.

He didn't bother with the front step this time, instead just Apparating straight into Potter's bedroom, now that he knew where it was and how to get through the wards. Potter was, of course, still sleeping, thrashing back and forth again even moreso than the night before, and Draco sighed before brandishing his wand.

'Aguamenti!' he intoned, and gave a little smirk of satisfaction as a jet of water burst from his wand and hit Potter right in the face, drenching him. Potter woke coughing and spluttering, blinking the water from

his eyes, and then froze when he caught sight of Draco.

'What the fuck was that for?' he snapped. Absently, Draco noticed that his voice was hoarse, and he wondered if Potter had actually been screaming before he showed up.

'You were having nightmares again,' Draco said, slipping his wand back up his sleeve. 'I simply came to wake you. Again.'

'My hero,' Potter said dryly, and then shook his head like a dog, spraying water droplets everywhere.

Draco grimaced. 'You really have to find a long-term solution to this problem,' he bit out. 'I can't keep coming back here and saving you time and again.'

'Nobody's asking you to,' Potter retorted, slumping back against his pillow, and then made a face as it squelched. 'And you ruined my bed, you git.'

'I wasn't going to sit on you again,' Draco replied. 'Last time--'

'Let's not talk about last time.' Potter made a face, then climbed out of bed, groping on the bedside table for his glasses, and then his wand. 'And speaking of last times, this should really be the last time I find you in my bedroom. You never did have any respect for boundaries, did you, Malfoy?'

'Boundaries?' Draco replied, arching a brow. 'That's a nice way to speak to the person who rescued you from a truly dreadful dream, and on more than one occasion now!'

'Rescued? Hah! You just...' Potter trailed off, eyes going out of focus for a moment, and Draco froze, staring at him wide-eyed and hoping he wasn't about to have another Episode or something. After a moment, Potter blinked, and looked up at Draco, recognition dawning.

'Didn't we do something like this last night?'

'You mean argue?' Draco examined his fingernails. 'When do we ever do anything else?'

'But...' Potter rounded the bed, moving toward Draco. 'But after we argued, I slept, right? I know I slept because I don't feel like I have elephants in my head right now - just hippopotamuses. So...'

'You think that arguing made you sleep better?'

Potter shrugged. 'It's possible, I suppose. Arguing with you is an exhausting endeavour, mostly because your idea of a sound argument is "because I say so", which gets you absolutely nowhere.'

'Excuse me?' Draco's other brow went up. 'It gets me nowhere? I'll have you know that I can argue my way out of--'

'--an encounter with a Death Eater?' Potter retorted pointedly. 'Yeah, I saw how well that served you. "No, stop, wait, I'm on your side! Please don't hurt me!"'

'You don't know what you're talking about,' Draco hissed, feeling suddenly murderous. 'That was a sound negotiation technique, and I would have had him had you not decided to play hero again, like you always have to.'

'Bullshit!' Potter spat. 'I wasn't playing at anything, Malfoy. I was helping someone who couldn't help himself. You're the one who's always playing.'

'There is a difference, Potter,' Draco replied coldly, 'between playing around and pretending. The former is what Gryffindors like to do. The latter is a Slytherin survival skill.'

'Why are you so fucking obsessed with houses?' Potter exploded all of a sudden. 'Yes, the Sorting Hat

sorts us into houses, but that doesn't define who we are! I think that being put into a particular house influences the way people think they should behave, so they become who they become because they think it's what they're supposed to do, and that's utter bollocks!'

'You'd rather do away with houses?' Draco asked incredulously, too shocked to remember to be angry.

'Yes,' Potter replied with such vehemence that it sent a lancet of heat through Draco's belly. 'I mean, just think about the day that Voldemort died.'

'I'd rather not,' Draco muttered, wincing at the name.

'Regardless of what happened, everyone in Slytherin had this attitude that the Death Eaters were still obviously right, that Voldemort was trustworthy! I seriously doubt any of them were actually thinking about it - they just agreed with it because it's what they're taught to think!'

'And Gryffindors don't do that?' Draco's hands clenched into fists and he glared at Potter. 'How is that doing away with houses so much as it is doing away with Slytherin?'

'I didn't say that,' Potter snapped. 'You aren't listening.'

'You aren't making sense.'

'Because you're not paying attention.' Potter glared right back until Draco actually found himself shutting his mouth without even thinking about protesting.

'All of the house characteristics are constricting. You keep telling me how Gryffindor I am because you assume you know what it means to be Gryffindor, and therefore since I was a Gryffindor, I must be exactly that. How much of me do you actually see, and how much of what you're seeing is your idea of what a Gryffindor is supposed to be?'

Draco blinked, honestly taken aback by Potter's diatribe. His face was red, eyes flashing green fire, and there was something about the way he was holding himself, something so alive about him at that moment, that Draco felt an odd twinge of something disturbingly like desire.

'And how much of what you know about me is actually me and how much is your idea of what a Slytherin is supposed to be?' Draco said, taking that strange, confusing energy and channelling it into his words. 'I don't see how it's any different.'

'It didn't use to be,' Potter replied, and now he almost sounded...contrite? 'I always thought you were just like everyone else in your house. All of sixth year, I was convinced you were up to something because of course Slytherins are sneaky like that. And you were up to something,' he said quickly before Draco could interrupt, 'but it wasn't anything like I expected it to be. It used to be so easy to see things in black and white when I was younger, but you were right. Nothing is black and white - not magic, not wizards, and definitely not people. Everyone has a reason for doing what they do, and while the reasons might be crap, or might not be things I agree with, that doesn't change the fact that they're still there. And then this last year, when I saw you with Crabbe and Goyle, and with your parents...'

Potter trailed off, and Draco only realised how tightly wound he was when he went to open his mouth and couldn't seem to unclench his jaw. He felt in a complete turmoil, Potter's words throwing his stone-set ideas into sharp relief, and worse, he realised that Potter was, astonishingly, making sense. It didn't change the fact that the Hogwarts houses were the result of a centuries-old tradition, and that wasn't something he had any desire to do away with, but there was a certain restrictive element to the Sorting ceremony, one he knew very well, having lived the Slytherin ideal his entire life. And...Potter was right too, he had to concede. He hadn't thought of Potter outside the bounds of Gryffindoriality, but...

'You would have made a passable Slytherin, Potter,' he said after a long moment, grudgingly.

Potter gave him a wry smile. 'I'll take that as a compliment,' he replied, and yawned. Draco yawned too, an automatic reaction, but he was surprised to find that he was exhausted as well, thoroughly worn out from the debate, the first heated discussion he'd had in months. Well, the first heated discussion he'd had with a living person in months, anyway. He chuckled under his breath, wondering how Snape would feel about being compared to Potter like that, and then yawned again.

'Seems you may have been correct,' he muttered. He squinted at the clock - half seven in the evening, but he felt like he could go to bed and sleep for a year.

'That's a first, isn't it?' Potter replied, and laughed wearily. 'Well. As long as it lets me - lets us - get some sleep.'

'Mm,' Draco said, and then closed his eyes, swaying on the spot. Potter laughed again, and shoved Draco gently.

'Go home before you fall asleep on your feet, Malfoy.'

Draco forced his eyes open, shooting Potter a weak glare, and then sighed. 'I suppose you'll expect me to return tomorrow to tire you out again?'

A snort. 'If you're doing it willingly, it won't be much of an argument, will it?'

'Don't underestimate my prowess,' Draco retorted.

Potter chuckled. 'Good night, Malfoy,' he said with an air of finality, and Draco sighed again, pulling his wand from his sleeve. The last thing he thought before he Apparated was that he'd better not be tired enough to splinch himself.

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'Having a last meal, Potter? When are you getting the train back to the Muggles?'

'You're a lot braver now that you're back on the ground and you've got your little friends with you.'

'I'd take you on anytime on my own. Tonight, if you want.'

Draco jerked awake, and blinked in confusion as the context of his dream slowly became clear. It wasn't a nightmare, not exactly, though he remembered how furious he'd been, how much it had made him fume to see Potter just brush him off like that, how completely helpless he'd felt at learning that someone didn't give a shit that he was Draco Malfoy, and it was definitely enough to upset him. At the very least, it wasn't a peaceful night of sleep, and he'd only been sleeping - he glanced at the clock - three hours, which meant that yet again, Potter apparently hadn't been sufficiently exhausted.

Draco sighed, rolling out of bed and grabbing his robe. At this rate, he was going to exhaust himself.

'Leaving again?'

Draco blinked wearily at the painting. 'He's still having nightmares,' he mumbled, 'so I have to go yell at him some more until he stops.'

Snape snorted. 'Perhaps you may wish to employ a different tactic?'

'Did you have something specific in mind?'

'Such as...' Snape shrugged elegantly, one-shouldered. 'Some other form of exhaustion aside from mental, as clearly that is not enough.'

'Point,' Draco replied, forehead furrowing. 'Although Potter is...'

Snape arched a brow, and Draco stopped himself before he could actually pay Potter a compliment, and having to do with his intelligence no less. Snape had already died once - he didn't need to suffer from a heart attack as well, painting or no.

'Fine. Exhaust him physically then. What do you suggest, a friendly game of Quidditch?'

Snape's other brow went up.

Draco scowled.

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'You want to what?'

Potter blinked at him, myopic and bleary, rubbing the ill-fated attempt at sleep from his eyes.

Draco sighed, switching his broom to his other hand. 'Play a game of Fetch,' he repeated. 'Two Seekers, one Snitch...'

'Now?'

'The night is young yet, Potter,' Draco scoffed. 'I realise your idea of a social life is a Friday night in with a cup of tea and your right hand, but--'

Potter snorted. 'Stop projecting,' he replied. He blinked again, tiredly, and then got up, fingers going to the hem of his shirt. 'All right. A game of Fetch. And you really think this is going to work?'

Draco averted his eyes as Potter stripped off his shirt, not because of any sort of consideration for Potter, but because he had no particular desire to have images of Potter's naked torso burned onto his retinas. 'It's worth a shot, isn't it?' he replied, staring at the floor.

'Fair enough.'

Ten minutes later, the pair of them Apparated into Hogsmeade. At Potter's urging, they quickly mounted their brooms, and took off flying toward Hogwarts before some drunken straggler could spot them and raise the alarm that Harry Potter was in the neighbourhood. Or Draco Malfoy, but Draco didn't think much of that likelihood.

'Why Hogwarts?' Potter shouted over his shoulder once they were suitably far from the village. 'I would have thought you'd want to stay far away from it.'

'What is this?' Draco called back peevishly. 'Social hour?'

Potter rolled his eyes. 'Malfoy,' he said, 'I don't like you and you don't like me, but we have to work together in order to fix this problem, so we might as well make it as painless as possible. Which means, I don't know, trying to be civil?'

'How disgustingly Gryffindor of you.'

'You're doing it again!' Potter shook his head. 'You never stop, do you? It's always Gryffindor this and Slytherin that. Surely there has to be something about you that doesn't scream Slytherin all the time.'

'And what makes you think that?' Draco snapped, annoyed. 'What gives you the idea that I'm not the pinnacle of Slytherin life?'

Potter smiled, a small, tight smile, and gestured at Draco. 'You're here with me, aren't you?'

That shut Draco up. It was true that there were things about him that weren't entirely Slytherin - his father liked to remind him of them constantly - but he had started to learn that those were the things

that placed him where he was now, annoyed at everyone he used to call a friend and disgusted with the forget-all attitude his parents had about the war and the Dark Lord, but better equipped to survive to the next generation. Some days he hated being where he was, wished that he could go back to being completely convinced of...well, of anything, really, but the war had changed him, and he couldn't go back now.

But after seeing what had happened to Snape....

Draco shrugged. As much as he may have loathed Potter, he had to admit that Potter was the first person in months who actually wanted to talk about what happened, and there was something refreshing about that. And after coming to the conclusion that maybe Potter wasn't a complete imbecile after all (not that he'd ever tell him that), he had to consider that maybe this civility thing was worth a shot.

'I may not have the best memories of Hogwarts,' he said finally, 'but I do have memories. I would rather not pretend that none of it ever happened, because that solves nothing. I'm tired of skirting the issue.'

Potter was silent for a moment, and then he turned his head, staring straight at Draco. 'You really have changed, Malfoy,' he said, sounding almost impressed, and Draco snorted to hide the odd tingly warm feeling Potter's words induced. Because Potter did not make him tingle. Absolutely not.

'Don't sound so shocked,' he replied. 'People change. That's just the way life is.'

'Truer words were never spoken,' Potter said, and flashed Draco a grin - not a teeth-baring grimace, or a dangerous grin that said Draco should check his tea for some Weasley invention that would turn his cheeks blue, but a genuine grin that made Potter look about five years younger. Draco found himself wondering, again, if he would have seen that grin more often had Potter not rejected him that first day, but that was long past now, and continuing to fixate on the unchangeable was as ill-advised as denial of it.

'Yes, well,' he said, trying to shove away that same strange feeling again, 'Professor Snape was a smart man.'

Potter's grin faded, and he nodded. 'He was,' he agreed, and faced front again, and the rest of the broom ride passed in silence.

When they arrived at the Quidditch pitch, however, something about the atmosphere, centuries of competitive frenzy burned into the land, was stronger than any spell, and did more to energise them than a Pep-Up Potion would have. Potter's eyes glinted with boyish glee, and his cry of "I'm going to crush you, Malfoy!" could almost have come from five years past. In that same vein, however, Draco's response of "Not if I crush you first, Potty" was just as childish, and felt just as good, making them both grin wider as they faced each other, staring each other down in challenge as Draco pulled out his wand and aimed it at the little box holding the Snitch. It burst open and the Snitch zoomed out, circling around their heads once before darting off, with the both of them in hot pursuit.

Playing Fetch was very different from a regular game of Quidditch - while in a proper game, there were Seekers and Beaters and Bludgers and a Quaffle flying around and causing appropriate distraction, in this game, the only handicap they had was that it was nighttime and therefore somewhat difficult to see where the Snitch had gone. As a result, most of Fetch involved not only looking for the Snitch yourself, but also finding ways to prevent your opponent from getting there first. Draco had been playing this game for years, so he knew just how to bump Potter to knock him off-course, how to feint in a way that would draw Potter's attention, how to disturb his aerodynamic balance in order to force him to change his tactic, but Potter was either a fast learner or a damned sneaky bastard, because it wasn't long before Draco found himself on the receiving end of a lot of nasty tricks from Potter as well.

'You play dirty for a Gryffindor!' Draco shouted as Potter dove past him, brushing his leg and making his broom roll violently.

'This is why it's dangerous to categorise!' Potter laughed. 'You'll do yourself a disservice! Gryffindors can be sneaky too! If you underestimate us, then you'll--'

Draco snickered as he shot past Potter, sending him into a tailspin. '--capitalise on the fact that you talk too much?'

'Why you--'

The snitch zipped past, a sparkle of gold just visible in their peripheral vision. Draco whooped and changed directions abruptly, but instead of taking off after it as well, Potter flew straight at Draco, fast, practically lying flat on his broom, eyes narrowed and lips curved into a smirk. Draco, caught off-guard as he focussed on the Snitch, yelped as Potter broadsided him, sending both of their brooms into a mad spiral toward the ground.

'Let go!' Draco bellowed, all too aware of the ground rushing up to meet them.

'You let go first!' Potter retorted, smirk turning manic as his eyes widened behind his glasses, and that was all the indication Draco got that this wasn't going to be an ordinary game of Fetch before the two of them plowed into the ground at top speed, the cushioning charms on their brooms and on the pitch the only things keeping them from getting seriously injured.

Unseriously injured though...

'Owwww...' Draco groaned, rolling off his broom and flopping over onto his back. 'That sodding hurt, Potter. What was that for?'

'Don't be a baby,' Potter replied, rolling over as well until their shoulders nudged together, and laughing. 'You just injured your pride.'

'And my arse,' Draco muttered, kicking Potter in the shin. Potter yelped indignantly, and kicked Draco back, and the following minutes were filled with the sounds of rustling fabric and shoes impacting limbs and a string of curses hot enough to melt silver. When they finally stopped, legs bruised and breaths coming fast, they turned their heads to look at each other, and then promptly burst into somewhat hysterical chuckles.

'You certainly have pulled the stick out, Malfoy,' Potter said in amusement.

'Don't flatter yourself, Potter,' Draco replied, though not as convincingly as he might have liked. 'I still don't like you. I'm just too exhausted to hex you.'

'Lucky me,' Potter said, and grinned wider. Draco noticed with a detached sort of fascination that Potter's eyes crinkled when he grinned, and that he had a little dimple in his left cheek, and that he was sporting a five o'clock shadow that nearly covered it up, and before he knew what he was doing, he reached up and ran a finger across Potter's cheek just to see if it was as scratchy as it looked. It was, incidentally, but that realisation was quickly overshadowed by his awareness of what he'd just done.

He jerked his hand back as if he'd been burnt, but Potter was looking at him now, really looking, eyes dark and puzzled, mouth turned down at the corners, and Draco cleared his throat awkwardly, turning his head to look up at the sky.

'Malfoy...'

'That really did wear me out,' Draco said with abrupt finality, closing his eyes and giving a fake yawn that quickly turned real as he realised just how tired he actually was. Potter was silent for a long moment, but then Draco heard a shift of body against grass, and another yawn.

'We haven't caught the Snitch yet.'

Draco chuckled a bit weakly. 'It'll find its way back,' he murmured. 'Besides, I think I'm too tired to give a shit.'

A snort. 'You know, I think I am too.'

They lay in silence for awhile. Draco was still tense, the thought of what the fuck is wrong with me?! throbbing through his mind, but the longer he lay there, the more tension he could feel draining out of his body. The ground felt warm beneath his back despite the fact that it was winter in Scotland, and the rhythmic sound of Potter's breathing beside him soothed his weary nerves until he could practically feel himself dissolving into sleep, limbs heavy and eyelids heavier.

'We probably shouldn't fall asleep here,' Potter said presently, voice slurred and almost incoherent.

'You're right,' Draco replied. 'That would be a bad idea.'

'Very bad,' Potter agreed.

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'Malfoy.'

Draco muttered something incoherent but scathing under his breath, rolling over onto his side. It was early yet, and he did not appreciate having his sleep disrupted indiscriminately, not when his pillow was so...

...grassy.

Draco blinked his eyes open, looking around in puzzlement before he realised that yes, he was in fact lying in a field somewhere. Wearing his day clothes, it would seem. Which was a monumentally stupid thing to do, since the buttons had left a line of imprints all over his skin until--

'Malfoy!'

Draco rolled over onto his back, squinting at the glare from the sun. 'What,' he grunted.

A figure moved into his line of vision, shielding him from the sun. 'Is that better?'

'Yes, it's--' Draco's eyes widened and he sat up the instant the voice registered, which made the events of

the previous night come crashing back to him. Quidditch. Fetch. Barrelling into the pitch. Almost embarrassing himself. And apparently, falling asleep on Hogwarts grounds. Which might not have been too much of a problem, except...

'Good morning, Mister Malfoy.'

Draco fought not to grimace. 'Professor.'

Professor McGonagall looked between them both, stern face even sterner and eyes searching in a way that made Draco feel very naked, and not in a good way. He drew his knees up to his chest, then disguised the intentionality by beginning to pick the blades of grass off his trousers. Next to him, Potter was doing something similar, fiddling with loose threads; neither of them looked at each other, or at Professor McGonagall.

After a long silence, which might as well have involved McGonagall screaming at them, considering the weight of her stare, Potter finally cracked.

'Ah, I'm very sorry, Professor, we just...'

He trailed off, obviously searching for words, and McGonagall sighed. 'Fell asleep here. Yes, I can see that. Dare I ask what you're doing here in the first place?'

Potter ran a hand through his rumpled hair, making it stand even more on end. There was a blade of grass sticking up off the top like some odd plantlike growth. Draco resisted the urge to reach up and pluck it out.

'We were playing a game of Fetch,' Potter offered before McGonagall could snap at them.

She raised both brows. 'In the middle of the night?'

'We couldn't sleep.'

McGonagall looked between them sharply, eyebrows climbing higher, and Draco winced. He knew That Look far too well - Blaise had displayed it often - though it wasn't ungrounded here, since Potter's statement had sounded disturbingly suggestive of...something. Not that Draco would ever think about something like that on his own, but he had to admit he could see where McGonagall's thought process had come from. Before he could clarify though, she spoke again.

'I see. And you chose to come here because...?'

Potter hesitated, obviously at a loss for words. Draco looked over at him, arching a brow, and Potter gave him a look that said well why don't you try?

Draco shrugged. 'It seemed like the right place to be.'

McGonagall studied them for a moment, and then chuckled, her stern expression softening as she looked up at the castle. 'Ah. Of course.'

'What do you mean by that, Professor?' Potter sat up straighter, twisting around to follow her gaze.

'It's standard theory of magic exchange,' McGonagall returned, sounding a bit nostalgic. 'In the same way that casting a spell drains a tiny bit of yourself, a place where many of those spells have been cast will feel like home to the caster. Sometimes all it takes to relax the body is to place yourself in proximity to a familiar source of magic. Then the magic fields will recognise each other and align.'

'...like magnets,' Potter murmured.

'Precisely, Mister Potter.'

A thought was starting to coalesce in Draco's mind, and he most decidedly did not like the direction it was heading. Between McGonagall's words and his experience over the past several days, he was beginning to realise that his analysis of the situation had been all wrong. Snape's comment of try another tactic was making even more sense, and while the recognition itself was pleasant, what it meant made Draco want to bang his head against the ground until he passed out.

And then Potter voiced his thoughts exactly.

'Is this confined to places only?'

McGonagall chuckled. 'Oh, good heavens, no. Oftentimes, the most healing sort of sleep comes as a result of proximity of two people whose magic is linked somehow. Familial magic works that way - many parents choose not to treat young children with potions, and instead rely on the familial bonds to re-tune their magical field. Even professional medical treatment draws on the theory, which is why St Mungo's has a companion healing ward for curse victims. If the one who cast the curse and the one who was cursed both end up in hospital, they put them together because it redistributes the magic between them properly, allowing them both to heal. If the curse is severe enough, they may require longterm therapy in order to continue to balance the two individuals. Of course, curses that are severe enough to require hospitalisation are often cast deliberately and malignantly, so this is not always possible, but Aurors who are treated, for example, will sometimes be placed in a room with the leader of their squadron, because the nature of Auror training is enough to make that proximity an effective healing device.'

Potter's gaze slid off to the side, and Draco could see the moment McGonagall's words registered because Potter's skin took on a distinctly greenish tinge. McGonagall must have seen it too, as it was rather impossible not to see how pale Potter had gone, but she didn't comment.

After a long moment, she smiled, looking at both of them with that same intent, catlike gaze that had given Draco the willies in school. 'Well, Mister Potter, Mister Malfoy, while I am delighted to see you both back here, and obviously getting along better than you did in school, you perhaps might wish to be on your way before the students wake and find you here.'

Draco winced. Between the Quidditch and the sleeping and the unpleasant awakening and now this

realisation, he'd completely forgotten that Hogwarts was in session. Judging by the angle of the sun, it was still only six or so, which meant most students wouldn't be up yet, but he didn't want to run the risk of being seen. The rumours that would fly about the fact that he and Potter were here together would be unbearable.

Clearly, Potter felt the same way; Draco watched him clamber to his feet, looking dazed but decisive. 'Thank you, Professor,' he said. 'We're very sorry to trouble you.'

'I've gotten very used to troubling children in my time,' McGonagall said, and chuckled, giving Potter a fond look that made Draco's stomach tighten. 'It keeps things interesting.'

Potter grinned finally, blinking the sleep from his eyes and rumpling his hair again, and gave McGonagall a cheeky wink as he reached for his broom. The rapport between McGonagall and Potter was comfortable, almost kindred, the teasing tones and easy familiarity all too reminiscent of days past, and Draco pressed his lips together, grabbing for his own broom and blinking against the sudden, infuriating sting in his eyes.

'Mister Malfoy.'

Draco tensed at the shift in tone, and slowly turned, clutching his broom handle until his knuckles turned white. McGonagall eyed him for a beat, distant, appraising, and then her expression softened and she gave him the first genuine smile he'd ever gotten from any one of his professors.

'I am glad to see you looking in good spirits,' she said. 'It would seem that you have not forgotten the things you learned at Hogwarts.'

It might have seemed non sequitur to anyone who didn't understand, but Draco got it, and that he did get it was a complete shock. The double meaning twined through the seemingly innocent remark, a verbal olive branch as it were, the deeper conception of what it meant to learn, the surprising perceptiveness that had often disturbed Draco in class but that now seemed entirely appropriate...they were all such Slytherin traits that he nearly said something to that effect. But Potter's words came back to him, and he shut his mouth hastily, realising once again that as shocking as it was, Potter may actually have been correct in this. McGonagall was smiling at him in a way that suggested she knew what he was

thinking, a look he remembered all too clearly, so he simply inclined his head with perfect politeness and offered the faintest hint of a smile.

'Thank you,' he murmured. 'And yes, I have learned my lessons well.'

Sharp eyes flashed with acknowledgment, and acceptance, and then McGonagall was Professor McGonagall again, drawing herself up tall and giving them a no-nonsense glare. 'Well, off with you both. Don't let me catch you asleep on the Quidditch pitch again, do you understand?'

'Yes, Professor,' they chorussed, and she gave a nod of satisfaction before turning and sweeping off in a whirl of emerald green that wasn't the heavy black drape Draco so wished to see, but was closer than he had ever thought possible.

A hand caught his sleeve, and Draco started, then turned to look at Potter with a hint of annoyance (albeit mostly at himself for having let his guard down). 'What do you want?'

Potter stared at him steadily, gaze heavy with unspoken words, and Draco's spine pulled taut, muscles tensing, as he recognised the look in Potter's eyes as the same one he'd attempted to avoid the night before. The meaningful look might have made sense in one aspect, since they were both aware now of what was going on physiologically with them, but it also made even less sense today than it had the day before, since the thought hadn't occurred to them before and yet Potter had still looked at him like that, like there was something significant that needed saying. It was disturbing to say the least, and as much as Draco may have learned that facing one's difficulties instead of running from them or burying them was a much more productive way to go about life, in this case, he didn't feel especially inclined to put that ideal into practice.

'You heard the lady,' he said briskly, shaking off Potter's hand and turning away to hide the tremor in his hands. 'We'd best get going.'

'Right,' Potter replied, voice tight and odd. After a few moments, Draco heard him straighten his clothes, then mount his broom, seemingly following Draco's suggestion, though the weight of Potter's stare never left Draco's back, and for a second Draco wondered with total irrationality whether he'd be too

encumbered to get off the ground.

'Ready?'

Draco shook off the thought, and the odd prickling of the hairs on the back of his neck, and nodded, then kicked off from the ground, aware of Potter right behind him as they pointed their brooms toward Hogsmeade.

It occurred to him, as the village became visible, that there was no definite reason for them to be leaving together. They weren't friends, they didn't even really like each other, although he had to admit that Potter's company wasn't entirely distasteful, and yet there had been not a word of protest from either of them at the assumption that they would head back to Hogsmeade together and then presumably (in Draco's understanding, anyway) apparate back to Potter's house. It seemed like the sort of thing friends would do, understanding each other like that, and the implications of that were almost as troubling to him as the knowledge that their connection went beyond a simple magic exchange.

It was a magic exchange still, but if he was right, this one was anything but simple - had it been, it wouldn't be affecting him so much nearly two years later. The part of the theory that neither he nor McGonagall had mentioned to Potter was that sometimes the transfer was permanent, like in a consensual ritual exchange, only without the consensual part. Magical rape, as it were. Draco didn't like to think of it like that, but the fact remained that that's what it was. With Cruciatus, for example, the energy expended to cast the curse was less than the energy drawn from the target, which meant the curse involved stealing magic. The target, in that case, would be weakened, and while their magic would replenish itself from the latent magical energy in the environment, there would be a permanent connection formed between the caster and the target. Draco hadn't really considered the possibility that the curse Potter had used would have the same level of effect, but considering the effects of the spell, he supposed he shouldn't have been surprised. There wasn't the same feedback loop, as he'd told Potter, but the connection seemed to be the same.

Bugger.

'Malfoy?'

Draco looked up. Potter was looking at him in concern, and Draco realised that they must have landed a few moments ago and he hadn't even noticed, and was just standing there with the broom half between his legs, staring off into space.

'I'm tired,' he said, his response brusque. 'I should go home and try to get some sleep.' It was a futile attempt, and he knew it, but he really didn't want to deal with Potter right now, not when he still had to come to terms with the fact that Potter had this hold over him, nevermind the fact that whenever Potter looked at him like that, he reacted in a way that wasn't like his former desire to stomp on Potter's face.

'You can't,' Potter replied. 'You heard what Professor McGonagall said.'

'What about it?'

Potter sighed. 'If we are connected like she suggested, then the reason we were able to sleep last night was because we were both in the same place, not because we were just that tired. Which is probably why before that, you got woken up by...'

'That doesn't explain the night before that though,' Draco argued, though he knew he was treading on thin ice. 'We both slept fine then, didn't we? And I left after you fell asleep. So your theory isn't sound.'

Potter stared at him for a long moment, and then laughed, eyes gleaming. 'Malfoy,' he said, 'you may have some of the traits of a Slytherin in plenty, but you are a terrible liar.'

'I'm not lying!' Draco lied.

'Uh huh.' Potter smirked. 'I may not be very lucid first thing in the morning, but I do know that of the people I've had in my bed before, you're the only one who would ever wake me up by calling me "Potter".'

Draco scowled. 'I did not need to know that.'

Potter snickered. 'Come on,' he said, and caught Draco by the elbow. 'You can berate me more back at my house.'

On to Part 3

Letting Potter Apparate them both back had been a bad idea. Draco had known this at the time, but he'd gone with it anyway. Now he was strongly regretting that decision.

'You want me to what?'

'You heard me.' Potter tugged his t-shirt down, covering the strip of flesh between its hem and the waistband of his jeans.

'I was hoping I was hearing things,' Draco muttered, and folded his arms. 'Does that line really make girls fall into bed with you?'

'It wasn't a line,' Potter replied, though Draco saw his cheeks flush a light pink. 'All I said was that you should sleep here so we can both actually get some sleep tonight.'

'So you can get some sleep tonight, you mean,' Draco retorted. 'You are not the most considerate bedfellow, you know.'

Potter quirked a brow. 'What, did I drool on your designer shirt?'

Draco snorted. 'No.'

Potter stared at him for a moment, and then laughed. 'Malfoy, you're blushing. What did I do, talk in my sleep?'

'No.' Draco scowled. 'And I'm not blushing.'

'You are so. Did I kick you out of bed?'

'No. This conversation is over.'

'It is not. Come on, tell me what I did so I can try not to do it again.'

Draco turned his head away, pressing his lips together.

'It can't have been that bad.' Potter took a step forward, brow furrowing. 'Did I...try to spoon with you or something?'

Draco glanced over. He was gratified to see that Potter was blushing now too, darker than before, but the flush made his eyes glitter, and Draco's mouth went dry. Potter being this close, looking like that, while talking about...that morning, was going to be very dangerous to Draco's sanity, which he had precious little of after the morning's revelations, and Potter was wearing that stubborn expression that meant he was going to get an answer out of Draco if it killed them both, and at this point, Draco was fairly well certain it might just do exactly that.

'I'm going to go home,' he said abruptly. 'I have some things I need to get done.'

Potter blinked, blush fading a bit. 'But...'

'It's not even eight o'clock in the morning, Potter,' Draco said pointedly, gesturing to the odd-looking faceless clock on Potter's bedside table where the numbers 7:43 glowed in blocky green letters. 'We did get a full night's sleep last night. In a field, I might add, which means I must be covered in grass stains, and I very badly need a shower. You...do whatever it is you do when you're not graced with my excellent company, and I'll come back over before you go to bed.'

'You'll...'

Draco sighed. 'It's a business relationship,' he said. 'If I'm not here, we both have nightmares, and I end up having to come over to wake you up anyway before our dreams drive us both insane. So I figure I will just save myself the hassle. That's all.'

Potter looked at him, gaze flicking across his face, and Draco fought down the blood trying to rise to his cheeks again at the perusal. It was a business relationship. That was all. Even if Potter was standing six inches away and looked like he'd just been shagged hard and rough for several hours, it was Potter, and he hated Potter, and he was not so hard up that he was going to confuse a painful responsibility with desire.

'All right,' Potter said finally, and stepped back. 'This evening then. Around...?'

'Whenever,' Draco said, taking advantage of the increased distance to pull his composure around his frame like a blanket. 'I'll be over when I'm done with everything I need to do.'

'Fine,' said Potter. 'Enjoy your shower.'

'I will,' Draco replied, taking up his broom, and Apparated before Potter could say another word.

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'So now you are sleeping with him.'

'I'm not sleeping with him,' Draco snapped, cursing his fair complexion yet again. 'We are sharing a sleeping space in an attempt to alleviate the symptoms of the curse.'

'I see.' Snape folded his arms. 'And you are not worried that you will accidentally murder Potter in his sleep?'

Draco snorted. 'No. He's...' He cleared his throat. 'He's not entirely loathsome.'

'Is that so?' Both of Snape's brows went up. 'Will wonders never cease?'

'I suppose that dying must have been good for him,' Draco said, but the jab didn't have as much bite in it as it might have before. By the look on Snape's face, he recognised it too.

'You like him.'

'No!' Draco objected. 'I absolutely do not. He is still an arrogant, self-important, uncultured, speccy-faced half-blood git.'

'Draco.' Snape eyed him sternly. 'You remember what I have told you about lying.'

Draco scowled. That was twice in one day he'd been reminded of his inability to lie, and it was starting to set his teeth on edge. He knew he was a terrible liar though, and it had almost gotten him into trouble, until he'd learnt how to fudge the truth instead - yet another trick he'd gotten from Snape. It was odd, how the things he'd learnt without wanting to had gone on to save his life, to make him who he was

today.

'All right,' he said. 'I don't hate him.'

Snape gave Draco a look that might have been a smile had it not come from Snape. 'As much of a brat as Potter might be,' he said, lip curling as always as he said Potter's name, 'he does have merit, both as a wizard and...and as a person. God only knows I have never liked him, but you have been different these past few days. More alive, perhaps. This indicates to me that his influence on you may actually be a positive one. You should not dismiss that simply because of who or what you think Potter is.'

'He said the same thing,' Draco replied quietly, a bit taken aback by Snape's assertion. Snape liked the idea of Draco spending time with Potter?

'Perhaps he has grown up as well then,' Snape said, though it looked like it pained him to speak the words. 'The war certainly changed you. You are a true survivor. Not like your parents. And Potter...'

'Potter's a hero,' Draco murmured, bitterness and wistfulness mixing in his tone.

Snape made a soft sound, and moved toward the front of the frame; had he not been made of oils, Draco would have expected a hand to come down on his shoulder in the next moment. 'There are several kinds of heroes, Draco. We cannot all of us be the Golden Boy.'

'I'm not a hero.' Draco frowned. 'I couldn't even save my own friends. I can't even speak to my parents about what happened without being brushed aside. Nobody will remember my name after I die.'

'Then perhaps,' Snape said, 'you are searching for recognition from the wrong group of people.'

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Draco shouldered his bag, taking a long look around his room. He'd told his parents he had a headache and was going to bed early, so he wouldn't be disturbed, and he'd informed the elf assigned to take care of him that were it to inform Master Lucius or Mistress Narcissa that Draco was not in fact in bed, he would personally remove its ribs one at a time with a pair of spoons. That seemed to shut it up, though he was fairly certain it would be ironing its feet later for lying to the Master and Mistress, but that couldn't be helped. Trying to reason with an elf was like trying to teach Weasley about taste - an impossible endeavour.

Snape had gone back to Hogwarts again, and the room felt very empty - funny, how he had never really noticed it before so much, but these past several months, and especially the past few days, he'd come to realise just how alone he was on a regular basis. Goyle was his best friend these days, though that didn't mean much, since Goyle had the mental capacity of an eight-year-old, and Pansy was ostensibly his soon-to-be fiancée, but she was one of those people Potter had mentioned, who parroted what her parents and her society told her without once thinking for herself, and while a younger Draco might have liked that malleability in a wife, who he was now was made ill by the mere idea.

Snape was the only person Draco had felt he could talk to who actually talked about things - his mother continued to want to protect him, and his father had adopted an attitude of it's all over so it doesn't matter anymore, and Draco found both of those approaches equally loathsome. He still loved his parents, of course, but it wasn't the same. He wanted something more than that. Hence the restlessness, he supposed. And also, hence the reason that he found himself, against all reason, looking forward to seeing Potter that evening.

He hitched his bag further up his shoulder, and pulled out his wand, casting one last look around before Apparating into Potter's bedroom. There was no sign of Potter anywhere - the bed was made up with fresh sheets though, and Potter had thoughtfully provided an extra pillow. Upon closer inspection, however, Draco found the sheets to be made of cotton that couldn't have had a thread count higher than 300, and the pillows were some polyfill monstrosity that tickled his nose just to smell from a distance of ten inches. This absolutely would not do. If he was going to be Potter's personal dreamcatcher, he was sure as hell going to make sure he was comfortable.

Setting his bag down, he brandished his wand and got to work, finding with no small amount of satisfaction that he still had a knack for Transfiguration.

Fifteen minutes later, the now-king-size bed sported silk sheets, a chenille blanket, a velvet coverlet, and goose-down pillows, as well as a sturdier headboard and a thicker mattress with boxspring. It was little

wonder Potter couldn't sleep on the monstrosity he'd had before - it might as well have been deliberate torture. Never mind the fact that he himself had managed a night on it - that was simply because he was too exhausted to realise he was being subjected to such horrors. Until he woke up, that was.

Transfiguration complete, Draco stowed his wand, and then looked around the room. It was ascetic, but it would do for the time being - hopefully he would not have to spend too many nights here before the magical fields rebalanced themselves. At least, enough to let them sleep apart. He didn't think he would object as strongly to having to see Potter on a semi-regular basis if it didn't involve sleeping in the same bed.

If that were to be the case though, it was perhaps best that he check out the rest of the house as well. Going out, they would run the risk of being spotted, and the rumour mill shifting into overdrive again, and he didn't even want to imagine the scenario in which he took Potter back to his house. So Potter's house it would likely have to be, at least for a short while.

Draco wandered out of the bedroom. The sitting room was to the left - he had seen it in the dark before, but this time he flipped on the lights, and winced at the awful checked pattern covering the sofa. That would definitely have to go, as would the hideous table that looked like it had been gnawed on by crups. The room did seem to get a fair amount of light though, which was promising. The kitchen was next, and Draco supposed it was passable - it wasn't like he'd ever really had need to be in the kitchen before, so he couldn't say for sure, but it seemed to suffice for Potter, which was all that mattered since Potter would be the one making the food. The hall was narrow but functional, the foyer poky but Draco didn't really suppose it mattered if he was going to be Apparating in and out, the parlour - or what passed for one - cramped, but acceptable, and the room he assumed was the dining room had altogether too little in it, but that was easily fixed. All in all, he supposed it wasn't entirely horrible. Now the only thing left to check was (horrors!) the bathroom.

Draco found the door after a moment's search - he'd originally passed it, thinking it was the coat closet, which was disturbing in and of itself. Once he had found it though, he yanked the door open and poked his head in, steeling himself against the worst.

And then froze, mouth dropping open. Whether the bathroom was passable or not, he couldn't really say, because a flash of movement had caught his eye, and he'd looked immediately only to see that no, Potter in fact had not left the house at all, but was in the shower. Very naked. And--

'Oh god,' Draco breathed, trying to make himself look away. And failing, miserably. The movement of Potter's hand was hypnotic, the flexing muscles of his arm visible through the clear shower curtain, the curve of his spine as he dropped his head back making heat coil in Draco's belly. It wasn't like he was a prude like Potter - he'd seen people wank before (he had been a Quidditch player, after all) - but he'd never really considered that someone like Potter, who had always seemed so goody-two-shoes, would...well...pleasure himself like that. Because it wasn't just a cursory wank, relieving tension and getting it over with quickly - this was self-seduction, and by the looks of it, Potter had seduced himself quite thoroughly.

His grip was loose as it slid smoothly over his shaft, pausing at the tip every time so he could catch his foreskin with the pad of his thumb and shift it back as he drew his hand slowly down toward the base, fingers brushing against the underside in a way that made the muscles in Potter's thighs ripple. His other hand, instead of being braced against the wall, wandered across the front of his body, tracing patternless shapes over his chest, thumb brushing across a nipple, a collarbone, down to strum across his ribs, then up again, fingers splaying out across his arched throat. His lips were parted and glossy-wet with water, dewy eyelashes curling against flushed cheeks, and he looked so completely alive that Draco felt his toes press against the soles of his shoes and his hands clench into fists by his sides.

Potter twisted his wrist as he pulled, stroking base-to-tip, and tightened his hand, a low, ragged moan spilling liquid-thick from his mouth. His eyelids fluttered as his strokes sped, other hand creeping up into sodden hair and twisting there, pulling his own head back and making his spine arch harder - he was threading himself out, torturing himself with not-fast-enough not-hard-enough, holding himself in place, the master and the slave all at once, and Draco hadn't thought it was possible for one person alone to be so impossibly hot. Potter was captivating, winter-paled skin glistening beneath rivulets of water, pitch-dark hair plastered against his skull in places, sticking up wildly in water-drenched spikes in others, and his face was raw sex, the line of his neck, the muscles tight in his jaw, the mottled stain of his cheeks, the swollen red of his mouth, and it was all Draco could do not to walk right into the shower with him. In that moment, it wasn't a question of male, or Gryffindor, or sometimes-enemy, or antithesis, or anything of the sort - this was just Potter, bare and simple, and Draco had never wanted anything more in his entire life.

Which was exactly what made him run for it.

He slammed the bedroom door and slumped against it, breathing hard, flushed and gasping and so hard he was going to split the seam on his trousers. It's Potter! he told himself firmly, with the intent to

dissipate his arousal by sheer logic, but even if that ever had a chance of working, which it didn't, reminding himself that it was Potter only threw into sharp relief the things he had learned the past few days - that Potter actually knew things, and could speak about them with lucidity and passion - that speaking with Potter would not result in a dismissal of those very things he'd wanted to talk about for so long but with nobody who was willing to listen, and that Potter would just as soon initiate the discussion as he would acquiesce to it - that though they had always loathed each other, something about Potter's constitution made that loathing seem less caustic and more playful, turning sharp words into teasing barbs and insults into jokes until Draco almost felt that Potter saw him not so much as an enemy than as a friend-in-the-making - that Potter hated categorisation, and not only accepted that he had categorised Draco but also wanted to make amends, wanted to find out who Draco really was, which was something Draco didn't think anyone had ever sought before.

And now this. That on top of Potter either being able to make the best of a bad situation, or taking advantage of their ill-advised partnership by attempting to actually make friends with Draco, there was the fact that Draco...wanted that too. He liked speaking to Potter, even though the first thing out of his mouth was always insulting or acrimonious simply because that was what he was used to, but when Potter responded in kind, which he did, he had a way of making it familiar instead of hostile, until it felt like friendly banter instead of verbal sparring. He liked that Potter had Ideas about Things, and he liked that he didn't agree with all of them, and he liked that Potter didn't seem to mind that he didn't agree because it only led to more arguments. He liked that Potter wasn't trying to forget that he'd almost been killed, or that many other people had been, but that he spoke about it with both frankness and gravity that expressed a maturity he never would have thought possible from Potter. He liked...

He liked Potter.

Draco dropped his head back against the door with a groan. This entire situation was a mess waiting to happen - he was the one being put upon here, because Potter had foolishly cursed him with a might-as-well-be-Unforgivable curse, and then had begun having nightmares that Draco then had to suffer by proxy. He was being forced to sleep in Potter's house, in his bed, just so he could hope for a decent night's sleep. He was having the entire world he had cemented in his mind torn down brick by brick, every certainty he'd ever had being questioned just by Potter's mere existence, and now he had no way of undoing what Potter had done just by being himself. And now he had to deal with the fact that Potter had apparently grown into someone who made his mouth dry and his cock hard, all the while being unaware that he was doing it.

Draco was so very screwed.

He beat his head against the door a few more times, trying not to think about the fact that Potter was wanking in the shower less than ten metres away, and then gritted his teeth, hastily stepping away from the door and stripping out of his clothes. Maybe if he got changed and got into bed quickly enough, he'd be asleep by the time Potter...finished, and he wouldn't run the risk of embarrassing himself with his newfound understanding of just how far in over his head he was.

When Potter did come into the room a good fifteen minutes later, Draco was curled up in bed facing the wall, as far to the edge of the bed as he could manage. His spine went taut anyway when he heard Potter enter, and the sharp indrawn breath that meant Potter had seen the modifications, but he held still, hoping Potter would assume he was asleep and wouldn't try to talk to him or anything. He was wound far too tight to sleep, in more ways than one, so that part of the plan hadn't worked, but plan B seemed to be more plausible, as Potter didn't say a word, the only sound in the room the rustle of fabric as Potter dressed, and the struggled evenness of Draco's breaths.

Potter eventually climbed into bed, the mattress balanced enough by Draco being perched on the edge that it dipped only slightly under his weight, and after a moment the lights went out, plunging the room into darkness. Draco squeezed his eyes shut, hoping Potter wouldn't be as friendly awake as he had been asleep, but then the mattress shifted as Potter settled in, so far on the other side of the bed that Draco couldn't even feel his body heat.

He relaxed.

Maybe this won't be so bad after all, he thought.

'Good night, Malfoy,' Potter said, and then chuckled softly. 'You really are crap at lying, you know.'

Draco winced.

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The first thing Draco realised as he woke slowly to the dim light of curtain-filtred sun was that he had actually managed to sleep through the night without being woken up by disturbing dreams or even more disturbing professorial stares. He felt refreshed, really refreshed, and the relief at knowing that even if he did have to share a bed with Potter, there was a way around this mess, was palpable.

The second thing he realised was that sharing a bed with Potter was going to prove to be dangerous, if the arm slung around his waist and the face buried against his nape was any indication.

The third thing he realised was that his body didn't seem to have a problem with this situation at all.

While he'd managed to will away the physical arousal from the night before, the rest of it had haunted him, keeping him awake by spiking anew whenever Potter moved or stretched or made a soft sound in his sleep, and by the time Draco had finally dropped off, he'd been having a hard time keeping his hands to himself. Potter, it seemed, was not so restrained, and though he did not currently have his hand between Draco's legs, it wasn't far off. If Potter woke up like this, things could become very ugly very quickly, and the last thing he wanted was to throw this tenuous truce into another tailspin.

Carefully, he extricated himself from Potter's vise-like grip, and tiptoed off to the bathroom, hoping that Potter wouldn't mind if he used his shower.

At least he wouldn't be using all the hot water.

When he returned, freezing but significantly less uncomfortable, Potter was awake, sleepy-eyed and tousled, looking around the room confusedly. When he spotted Draco, he gave him a tired yet triumphant smile, and Draco's stomach twisted. Again.

'Looks like this plan is a success,' Potter rasped, blinking myopically. 'And it was mostly painless.'

'Mostly,' Draco muttered in agreement, and wrapped his arms around his torso. The thin Egyptian cotton that was more than sufficient in his own house was significantly lacking in Potter's, both due to the lack of temperature control and the cold shower he'd just taken, but he supposed that gave him more of an

excuse to leave quickly, before Potter could notice just how...uncomfortable he was.

Potter yawned, shifting back until he was propped up against the headboard, and regarded Draco curiously. 'Are you always an early riser?'

Draco snorted. 'Not especially,' he returned. 'I was just...hungry.'

'Oh,' said Potter, and grinned. 'Would you like some breakfast? I make a mean omelette.'

'I should go home. My parents might come looking for me.'

'Oh,' said Potter again, quieter. 'You're probably right.'

'Mm,' Draco replied, and wondered why he suddenly felt so guilty.

Potter didn't say anything as Draco gathered his belongings and put them back in his bag, then pulled out his wand. Draco glanced over at the bed and saw Potter watching him intently; without his glasses, the green of his eyes was more intense than usual, and it made Draco feel almost naked.

'Do I have something on my face?' he asked peevishly.

Potter chuckled. 'Just your nose,' he replied. 'See you, Malfoy.'

And he rolled over and burrowed under the blankets again, leaving Draco to Apparate confusedly back home.

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'You're off early this evening.'

Draco didn't look up from packing his bag. 'Mm.'

'That eager to see Potter, are you?'

Draco gave a one-shouldered shrug. 'He's decent conversation. And it beats trying to pretend everything's just peachy for my parents.'

'I see,' Snape replied. 'You find Potter an adequate alternative then?'

'Well he's better than nothing,' said Draco.

'I see,' Snape said again, this time with enough irritation that Draco looked up.

'I didn't mean that you were nothing, Professor,' he said hastily. 'I only meant that...well...'

'Potter is still alive,' Snape replied, folding his arms across his chest.

Draco pressed his lips together. 'Yes, I suppose that is what I meant.'

'Then that is a fair assessment, Mister Malfoy.' Snape's scowl lightened just a bit. 'It perhaps may be advantageous for you to take your meals with other company on occasion.'

'Maybe.' Draco fastened the clasp on his bag. 'As long as my parents don't find out. Somehow I doubt

they would agree with you.'

'Mm, perhaps not,' Snape agreed with a slight smirk. 'But then, parents do not always know best, do they?'

'Too true,' Draco chuckled, and inclined his head as he pulled out his wand and Apparated into Potter's front hall.

'You're early today,' said Potter, poking his head out of the kitchen. His face and hair were dusted with a liberal coating of white powder, and he was grinning. 'Couldn't get enough of me, hm?'

'You're stealing my lines, Potter,' Draco scowled, but set his bag down and took a step forward. 'And what is that on your face? Are you producing spores?'

Potter snorted. 'It's flour, dimwit,' he retorted. 'I'm making cheese scones to go with the beef stew. Though I imagine you've already supped on chateaubriand or something like that and you could not possibly want something as mundane as stew and scones.'

Draco opened his mouth to say something scathing about Potter's limited knowledge of fine cuisine, but his stomach ruined it by growling. Loudly.

Potter stared at him for a moment, and then burst into laughter. 'Guess that answers that question,' he chuckled. 'Well in that case, come here. You can help me cut the scones.'

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Draco should have known that resisting Potter could only result in devastation and ruin. After all, it had done so for the Dark Lord - there was little that led him to believe his attempts would be any more successful. But that didn't mean he couldn't complain about the inevitable anyway.

'You really didn't have to dump the whole bowl of flour on my head, Potter.'

'You were asking for it,' Potter returned, leaning back in his chair and munching a piece of scone. 'Besides, it pretty much blends in with your hair. You can hardly see it.'

'You are incorrigible,' Draco scowled, making a great show of brushing the flour from his arm and watching it go up in a huge white puff of dust. 'You had better watch your back.'

'Oh dear,' Potter said in mock terror. 'Are you going to grate nutmeg on my head?'

Draco's brow furrowed. '...grate....?'

'....never mind,' Potter replied, and snorted. 'You really are hopeless, Malfoy.'

'Well then I suppose it's lucky for me that I have you to rescue me, o kitchen hero,' he groused.

Potter blinked at him in surprise, and then burst into laughter. '"Kitchen hero"!' he repeated between snickers. 'That's a good one, Malfoy! Who'd've known you had a sense of humour hiding underneath all that flour?'

'Ha ha,' Draco replied, voice dripping with sarcasm to hide the fact that he was actually somewhat amused by Potter's amusement. 'I'll bet you've just been waiting for that one to bloom all evening.'

That set Potter off again, and Draco actually had to bite his lip to keep from joining in. There was something about seeing the Great Hero of the Wizarding World reduced to tears of hysteria that was heartening, especially since he'd spent the large majority of his childhood putting Potter on a pedestal, and then the large majority of his Hogwarts years trying to knock him back down again.

After a long bout of giggles, Potter finally subsided, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. 'It's nice to laugh,' he said, almost offhandedly. 'I don't get to much anymore.'

'Why not?' Draco asked, curious despite himself.

Potter shrugged. 'If I go out in public, people want Harry Potter the hero, which means I have to be larger than life, and everything's a show. If I see my friends, mostly they either want to see if I'm okay or else have a good time by pretending none of it ever happened. You don't do any of those things. You don't see me as a hero - except perhaps of the kitchen,' he amended with a snicker, 'and in fact seem to take great pleasure in reminding me that I'm not. You don't care if I'm okay or not, so you're certainly not going to ask me. And you have as much of a problem with people pretending it didn't happen as I do. So. It's easy to just be myself.'

Draco blinked, taken aback by Potter's candour. He didn't know that he agreed with Potter's statement entirely, since he did see Potter as a hero, though perhaps not as the untouchable public figure that most people might, but he definitely could see where Potter was coming from.

'That's fair,' he said after a long moment. He hesitated, studying Potter's face, which was half-relaxed with pleasure and half-expectant, as if he was waiting for Draco to make a similar confession, and then shrugged. 'I find it refreshing to speak to someone who has...a different perspective on what happened. We may have been on different sides of the war, but you aren't as...close-minded about it as most people - they seem to either want to celebrate the victory without thinking of the individual effects, or forget it ever happened because it was an embarrassment, depending on which side they have chosen. You don't seem to do either. You just...'

'I see it as it is,' Potter said, expression turned serious now. 'It wasn't some grand triumph heralded by a chorus of trumpets. It was bloody. It was messy. People died. People lost people they loved. People realised that what they'd spent their whole lives believing in could shatter in a single moment. There's nothing triumphant about war. You fight because you have to, you kill because you have to, and you move on.'

He lifted his gaze from his clasped hands, and met Draco's head on. 'And there's no such thing as black and white, good and evil, the right side and the wrong side. The heroes aren't the ones who do exactly

what's expected of them - the heroes are the ones who make a critical choice at a critical moment that can change the course of events.'

Draco's mouth went dry, face flushing at the intensity in Potter's gaze. It wasn't the first time it had been fixed on him in the past few days, but it was the first time he'd felt so exposed, like Potter was really seeing him, straight into his soul, and pulling out all the things that he'd wanted/not wanted to keep hidden. Snape had always done that to him, and McGonagall, but Potter was better at it than either of them because he didn't see a student, or a protegé, or a ward - he saw an equal.

'I never thanked you,' Potter said softly, 'for not giving us away. When we were captured. You could have turned us in for quite the glorious place in history, but you didn't.'

'I didn't do anything so noble, Potter,' Draco mumbled, cheeks heating more. 'I just couldn't recognise you with your face all uglified. Well, moreso than usual.'

Potter laughed, but it wasn't the same sort of laugh as before - it was serious too, somehow, and it made Draco shiver. 'You are a terrible liar, Draco,' he said softly, and Draco's breath hitched at the sound of his first name on Potter's lips, familiar and comfortable and right somehow, even though that it was right was wrong in so many ways. 'You can fudge the truth, but you really can't just lie outright. And it's Harry.'

Draco pressed his lips together, swallowing hard. 'It didn't seem right,' he said with as much offhandedness as he could muster. 'You deserved a better fate than that.'

Harry smiled. 'And that sort of decision is the kind that really makes a difference.'

Draco wanted to argue with that, he really did, only he couldn't think of anything to say.

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'You leaving?'

Draco looked up as Potter sat up, blinking sleep from his eyes. 'I am,' he confirmed. 'I am being fitted for new robes today, and I can't miss that.'

'Oh, heaven forbid,' Potter said dryly, and Draco swallowed a smile. It was strange how a remark like that would have had him spitting mad less than a week ago, but now it seemed almost affectionate. Apparently sharing a bed with someone changed your perspective on the way they thought.

'Then I thought I might acquaint you with the gloriousness that is French pastry this evening.' Draco arched a brow. 'Your taste in food is distressingly plebeian, and I am convinced this is because you simply have never been educated in the art of epicureanism.'

'That's your fancy way of saying you're going to stuff me with sugar, isn't it?'

'I object to that accusation very strongly, Potter.'

'Harry.'

Draco pressed his lips together. For some reason, while Potter calling him Draco felt all right - well, better than all right, really - the idea of reciprocating seemed somehow wrong. He couldn't even bring himself to think of Potter as anything but Potter.

'I'll be sure to bring some wine then to cut through the sugar-stuffing,' he said, deflecting Potter's attempts. 'If you object to it so strongly.'

Potter's brow furrowed a bit, but he said nothing, and after a moment it smoothed out again and Potter smiled. 'I see. So you're trying to get me drunk and high on sugar. Trying to take advantage of me?'

It was on the tip of Draco's tongue to point out that Potter was the one who'd been taking advantage of him, judging by the fact that he'd woken up with one of Potter's hands up under his shirt and the other one somehow down the front of his trousers (and he was really beginning to wonder what Potter dreamed about), but the words stuck in his throat, his not-quite-dissipated arousal threatening to make itself known again.

He scowled instead. 'You wish,' he retorted, and jerked his mouth flat as Potter grinned at the familiar response.

'Now who's stealing whose lines, Draco?'

Draco snorted, and pulled out his wand. 'If you cover me in flour tonight,' he warned, 'I will hex you.'

The last thing he saw as he Apparated was the evil gleam in Potter's eye.

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'I believe the heather grey will suit...although perhaps the charcoal, more striking against Monsieur's fair complexion...'

Draco rolled his eyes behind closed eyelids. Normally he loved getting fitted for new clothes, even when his mother brought in pompous French tailors to fuss over him like he was six again, but he had little patience for it today. If someone had told him two years ago that he would willingly give up fitting for a new wardrobe in order to go eat dinner in Potter's poky little dining room while covered in flour, he would have laughed in their face. But now...

'Draco, darling.' Narcissa glided forward, tilting her head to one side as she studied Draco. 'You look displeased.'

'Not at all, Mother,' he replied with as broad a smile as he could muster. 'I am simply hungry.'

'Perhaps we should pause,' she said, giving the tailor a meaningful look that said make yourself scarce right now if you value your boules, and put a hand on Draco's shoulder as the tailor excused himself and hurried out of the room.

Draco sighed. 'That was not necessary, Mother,' he said. 'I could have waited.'

'Nonsense,' said Narcissa, eyes flashing, and Draco was reminded again how much of his mother was pure Black blood. She was stubborn, determined, and downright scary when something she cared about was threatened, but unfortunately for him, what she cared about most was her son, which meant she was fiercely protective to the point of being restrictive.

He knew better than to argue with her, so he let her call for a luncheon, and watched the elves bring in far too much food for them to finish. None of it looked especially appetising though, and he was perplexed to find that what he really wanted was beef stew. That, however, was not something he wished to explain to his mother, so he sat next to her at her request, ate the food she put on his plate like a dutiful son, all the while thinking that this couldn't go on forever, that she would have to relax her hold on him eventually, once the shock of the war had worn off.

'Narcissa, Draco.'

Lucius on the other hand...

Draco looked up as his father swept into the room, long hair spilling immaculately over rich black-clad shoulders, everpresent cane brandished in a gloved hand. Lucius always dressed as if any moment he would be invited back to the Ministry, though Draco knew it was a futile endeavour - the Imperius excuse would only work once. It wasn't that he didn't still care for his father, because he did, but the events of the past two years had thrown into sharp relief just how flawed his father was. It was a product of his upbringing, Draco was certain, the fact that he had such stone-set ideas about who to be and how to behave, that he was completely inflexible when it came to political and moral standings, that he continued to pursue a single goal even when it was hopeless, but that made it no less...in a word, pathetic. As a boy, Draco had always looked up to Lucius as the pinnacle of manhood. Now he saw him as

the man he'd once wanted to be, but had long since surpassed.

'Lucius,' said Narcissa. 'Do come join us, won't you?'

'I cannot stay,' he said. 'I have a meeting with an old friend of mine shortly. I simply came to speak to Draco.'

Draco looked up, swallowing his mouthful of roast beef. 'Yes, father?'

'The friend I am meeting is a vice-count in Luxembourg, who has long since been affiliated with the magical affairs division of their Ministry. I have told him of your academic excellence and your keen mind, and he would like to take you on as his assistant.'

'Oh, Draco!' Narcissa beamed, setting her napkin down carefully and standing so she could move to stand next to Lucius. 'That is wonderful news!'

'You see,' Lucius went on, looking quite pleased with himself, 'this way, you are not confined to either the academic or the political environments - you can do both at once. And there is ample room for advancement - Yves is nearing retirement age now.'

Which, in Lucius' terms, meant that Draco could be in line to take over after this person retired or died, whichever came first. But Draco couldn't even think that far ahead. He was too stuck on the fact that his father had just arranged a career for him without consulting him, had apparently agreed to it on his behalf, and neither of his parents seemed to have a problem with this method of approach. Draco, on the other hand, had a pronounced problem, namely...

'I don't want to do it.'

The smile dropped from Lucius' face so fast that the room felt suddenly cold. 'What did you say?'

Draco swallowed, and stood, squaring his shoulders as he met his father's gaze head on. 'I said,' he repeated, 'that I don't want to do it.'

Lucius stared at him, face set into hard lines. 'You think you are too good for it, do you?'

'I never said that.' Draco dug his nails into his palms. 'I simply said that I don't want to do it. It isn't my career of choice, and while it may be a very prestigious one, it is not what I want to do.'

'Then what do you want to do?' Lucius snapped, shaking off Narcissa's hand and stalking forward. 'Spend the rest of your life talking to a painting?'

'It's healthier than spending the rest of my life pretending I still have the same life as I did ten years ago,' Draco retorted, rapidly losing patience. Unlike some, who would back down when cornered, the harder someone pushed him, the harder he pushed back, which was dangerous, perhaps, but a necessary adaptation for living with Lucius Malfoy.

'Why you....' Lucius grabbed him by the collar, ignoring Narcissa's protests. 'You are an ungrateful little brat, did you know that? You think you know so much better than I do? Wake up, Draco. There aren't that many opportunities left for you. If you don't take something now, you may miss the chance completely.'

'The chance to do what?' Draco grabbed his collar as well, yanking himself free. 'To rise to power? To become a politician? To exercise my will over hundreds of thousands of people? To preach pureblood supremacy? You want me to wake up? We lost, father. We lost twice. Don't you think maybe that means something?'

Lucius' eyes blazed. 'How dare you,' he hissed. 'How dare you question this family? This is who we are. This is who we have always been.'

'Then maybe it's time to change,' Draco shouted.

The slap of leather on skin resounded throughout the room alongside Narcissa's scream. Draco raised a hand to his cheek, looking up at his father in shock and resentment. Lucius stared right back, lip curled in furious contempt, ignoring Narcissa as she grabbed Lucius' arm and started shrieking at him.

'You understand so little about what it means to be a Malfoy?' Lucius' gaze was sharp, filled with ice and fire. 'I see you are useless after all.'

'If embodying what it means to be a Malfoy means becoming as rigid and inflexible and foolish as you, father,' Draco said, every word deliberate and measured, 'then perhaps I don't wish to be a Malfoy at all.'

Narcissa froze, eyes wide, but Lucius grinned, baring his teeth. 'Good,' he spat. 'You aren't worthy of the name.'

'No,' said Draco, feeling lucid, certain, alive. 'What I'm not worthy of is to carry on your legacy, to promulgate your name so that the world will know of the greatness of Lucius Malfoy. If you cannot succeed, have your children do it for you, isn't that right? You failed at achieving ultimate power both on your own and at Voldemort's side--'

'You dare speak His name--'

'--and so you want me to do it for you. Well I won't. I'm better than that.'

Draco had never seen his father turn quite so red before, and it was so satisfying he wanted to laugh. It was probably hysteria, the adrenaline of defiance mixing with the thrill of certainty, of finally knowing what he wanted, and that he could do something other than what had always been expected of him, but he didn't care.

'Snape thought the same thing,' hissed Lucius. 'He thought he knew better than I did, so he turned

traitor, and look at what happened to him.'

'Yes,' said Draco, 'but even dead, he is still a better man than you.'

Taking advantage of Lucius' rage-induced speechlessness, Draco grabbed a glass of wine off the table, drained it, and turned, regarding both his parents with a smile. 'I may have been raised to be a model Malfoy,' he said, 'but as long as I constrain myself to the specifications of that label, I will never realise the true potential of a Malfoy, which is to prevail no matter what. And I can do that, because I'm more than just a Malfoy, more than just a Slytherin, and more than just your son. I am myself.'

Holding their gaze, he drew his wand and Summoned his bag from the bedroom.

Narcissa finally spoke up. 'Draco, what are you doing?'

Draco smiled gently, shouldering the bag. 'I'm choosing my own path,' he murmured, and Apparated.

On to Part 4"

'You keep getting earlier! You had better be careful or I'm going to start to think you actually look forward to-- Draco?' Potter came out of the kitchen, wiping his hands on his jeans. 'What's the matter?'

Draco let out the breath he'd never quite exhaled all the way. The euphoria was starting to make him dizzy now, and it was only just sinking in what he'd done, what he'd said, what the implications were, and it terrified him so much his knees buckled, and he would have slumped to the floor had Potter not been there to catch him.

'Whoa, easy,' said Potter, looping an arm around his waist. 'I think you're on a sugar low there. We'd better fix that, get some good old refined white sugar into you, put some meat on--'

'I shouted at my parents.'

Potter blinked, monologue forgotten. 'You...what?'

Draco's smile dropped completely from his face and he shivered, digging his nails into Potter's arm. 'I shouted at my parents,' he said again; his voice sounded like it belonged to someone else, eerily calm and emotionless. 'I told them I didn't want to be a Malfoy anymore.'

Potter was silent for a long moment, obviously shocked, but then he tightened his arm again and started moving toward the sitting room. 'All right,' he said. 'I think you're in shock. You need to sit down, have some water, and then you can try that again.'

'Not in there,' said Draco, and giggled. 'The upholstery'll make it worse.'

'Okay, maybe not shock,' Potter snorted, but turned Draco obligingly, leading him into the bedroom, waving his hand absently to turn on the lights. He helped him sit down, propping him up against the headboard, and then Summoned a glass, spilling water into it before holding it up to Draco's mouth.

Draco giggled again, wearily. 'I'm not an invalid, Potter,' he mumbled. 'I can drink it myself.' He took the glass and drained the contents in one long gulp, letting the cool water wash away the metallic sting of adrenaline. Then he slumped back, eyes falling shut, and didn't protest when Potter slipped the glass out of his hand before he dropped it.

'Better?'

Draco nodded, then shook his head, then shrugged. 'I don't know,' he muttered. 'I don't know what I was thinking. I just...snapped.'

'What did they say to you?'

Draco shrugged again. 'Lucius told me that he'd found me a job pushing paper in Luxembourg. I told him I didn't want to go. He told me I was being stupid. I told him he was being stupid. He hit me, I snapped.'

'He hit you?' Potter sounded shocked, and his naiveté was so funny that Draco laughed again.

'It's not a big deal, Potter. He used to spank me all the time when I was naughty. He just never hit me across the face before.'

Potter went silent, but Draco could hear his teeth grinding.

'Really, Potter,' he said. 'It's nothing. Besides, it's not like you like me, right? So what does it matter if my father smacks me around a bit?'

The teeth-grinding stopped, and for a moment, the only sound in the room was the clink of metal against glass against wood. Then, a hand found his shoulder, warm and strong, pressing down against the muscle. It was the first time Potter had touched him like this, with this sort of familiarity, of intimacy, while awake, and the tension holding Draco's body shifted suddenly, winding in coils through his chest, his stomach.

'I don't hate you,' Potter said softly.

Draco turned his head slowly, breaths coming shallow and ragged. Potter looked steadily back, green eyes dark and intent and huge without his glasses, face a perfect mask of sincerity, and he looked so serious that Draco's stress bubbled free all at once in a choked, truncated laugh.

'Stupid Gryffindor,' he whispered, and kissed him.

Instead of pushing him away, or freezing, Potter kissed Draco back immediately, free hand curving

around the back of his head, and the unexpectedness of it was such a shock that Draco moaned, eyes squeezing shut as heat exploded in the pit of his belly. Potter responded, a low murmur that may have been an attempt at soothing but only served to arouse Draco even more, and he grabbed at Potter's nape, fingers digging into soft skin, and parted his lips, tracing Potter's mouth with his tongue.

Potter sucked in a breath, sharp and cool against Draco's lips, and Draco took that as his cue to slip his tongue into Potter's mouth, exhaling slowly at the liquid heat as their tongues slid against each other. Potter tasted of salt and butterbeer, not sweet like a girl or refined like a Slytherin, but real, and honest, and so typically Potter that Draco felt tendrils of warmth trickle down his spine. The tangle of fingers in his hair tightened, pulling at the strands, but it didn't even occur to Draco to protest, because that was perfectly Potter too, the demanding determination, the sense of entitlement, but not in the way he'd used to think. Potter wasn't the arrogant, self-important bastard younger Draco had thought he was, but he was stubborn, and he was sure of himself in a way that was refreshing rather than obnoxious, and despite the forcefulness of his kisses, the sounds he made were ragged, almost pleading, combining certainty and genuine want in a way that Draco had never imagined possible before. Just Potter, bare and simple, no posturing, no pretences, and just as before, the verity of this, of Potter's actions and reactions, was so arousing that Draco ached with it.

This was sharing a bed with Potter and waking up to find Potter's hand down his trousers. This was seeing Potter in the shower, vivid and open and alive. This was knowing that Potter was not as simple as he'd once thought, that maybe he and Potter weren't so different after all. This was that realisation that everything he'd been certain of was maybe not so certain after all, and finding that was actually okay. This was him, not a Malfoy, not a Slytherin, just himself, just Draco, and just Draco knew for the first time beyond all shadow of a doubt that he wanted.

Potter hissed as Draco twisted his body, pushing him down against the mattress and settling atop him, knees digging into the mattress and back curving over as he kissed Potter more deeply, tracing the ridges of his palate with the tip of his tongue. Potter was impossibly warm and solid beneath him, fingers digging into his back, nails scratching over his scalp, and Draco let out a shuddering breath as he shifted, prick dragged against a matching hardness. Potter groaned, fisting his hand in Draco's shirt, and arched up, pressing their bodies together from shoulder to hip, and the contact was electrifying and grounding all at once, sucking Draco's breath from his lungs. He broke the kiss, turning his face aside and gasping, which quickly turned into a hitched moan as Potter's mouth found his throat and latched on, biting down until sparks exploded behind Draco's eyelids. Potter's lips curved against his throat, a smile instead of a smirk, and then Potter's tongue swept across his skin, tracing the throbbing line of his vein up to the spot beneath his ear before Potter's teeth sank into his earlobe.

Draco's hips jerked, eyes rolling back in his head and fingers clutching at Potter's shoulders, and he felt Potter chuckle, his only warning before Potter's muscles bunched and he surged upward, flipping Draco off and onto his back and settling between his thighs like he had every right to be there, like he belonged there. Draco certainly wasn't going to object, since Potter felt so fucking good, the little flexes of his hips driving his cock down against Draco's until Draco felt his toes start to curl, and Potter's mouth on his throat felt like heaven and hell all at once, equal parts soothing and punishing, until it was all Draco could do not to come in his pants just from that.

'Potter,' he panted, 'I don't know about Gryffindors, but Slytherins prefer not to hump each other like dogs in heat.'

Potter snorted, tugging Draco's hair sharply and biting down on the juncture of neck and shoulder until Draco hissed. 'You never give up on the House thing, do you?' he murmured, damp lips brushing Draco's ear. 'And it's Harry.'

'Force of habit,' he gasped, though he wasn't sure which part of Potter's statement he was responding to.

'Break it then,' said Potter, pitilessly, and dragged his hand down Draco's side, curving fingers around the back of Draco's thigh and pulling it up alongside his hip, locking their bodies together and turning Draco's protest into a thready moan.

'If you want something,' Potter went on, voice breathless but stern, 'then just say what you mean. You've done it before - I know you can do it.'

'Thank you for the vote of confidence,' Draco said dryly, or as dryly as possible with a hand on his arse and a mouth on his throat. Potter snorted again, biting Draco sharply, and Draco yelped in mingled surprise-pain-arousal, cock throbbing against the restrictive material of his trousers.

'Just say it,' Potter murmured, breath warm and humid against sensitised skin.

Draco gritted his teeth. He had learnt growing up never to speak plainly, to only say things that could be

spun out in more than one way, to allow him an out, but he knew how far that had gotten him, and though it might have been what he knew, that didn't mean it was the right way to be. Besides, as Potter had said, he was a horrible liar.

'I want...' Draco swallowed, spine arching as he tipped his head back and stared blurrily at the ceiling. 'I want you to fuck me.'

Potter lifted his head. His cheeks were flushed, lips swollen and wet, eyes nearly black behind half-lowered lashes, but he said nothing, simply staring steadily at Draco, expectant, waiting.

Draco licked his lips, prick twitching at the intensity of Potter's gaze, and took a breath. '...Harry.'

Potter -- Harry -- smiled, pleasure twining with predatory want until he looked almost dangerous, and Draco shuddered with the sudden rush of arousal, fingers twitching against Harry's back.

'See?' Harry breathed, voice like crystallised honey, liquid-smooth and ragged all at once. 'That wasn't so hard.'

Draco raised a brow. 'I beg to differ,' he retorted, twisting his hips deliberately, and couldn't help but smirk when Harry's eyes rolled back and his mouth fell open.

'Touché,' Harry replied after a long moment, and then grinned, teeth flashing white in the dim light. 'Better this way anyway.'

Draco opened his mouth to say something else, but the words died on his tongue as Harry's hand slid between them to curve around the outline of his cock, and despite the layers of fabric, it scorched him, fingers pressing just there, palm flat against the underside, and it felt so good it hurt, making Draco drop his head back against the pillow and groan, hips pushing up against Harry's hand. It was so like what he'd experienced before, the possessive, certain grip he'd felt combined with the torturous restraint he'd seen Harry use on himself, and yet so different because this time it was deliberate, and aware, and really meant for him, and that made it ten times better than any of the hints of it he'd had, and made him ten

times more desperate for more.

'Too slow, Potter,' he growled, grabbing at Harry's arm in an attempt to urge him on, but Harry simply raised a brow, not ceasing his slow strokes over Draco's prick, but certainly not hurrying them either.

'I'm sorry, are you speaking to me?'

'Potter...' Draco threatened, but Harry was unmoved, taking his own sweet time about it, and Draco was right, Harry did like to torture, only he seemed to be enjoying it even more now that he was torturing someone other than himself.

'Faster, Harry,' he whined, slamming his head against the pillow again, and then groaned loudly as Harry's hand tightened right away, giving a long, hard stroke from base to tip that had Draco's toes curling hard against the soles of his feet.

'You see?' Harry murmured, his smile audible in his voice. 'That's all it takes.'

'I wish I'd known that was all it took when we were in school,' Draco muttered, sentence punctuated with gasps and hitched breaths. Harry laughed, and bent his head to Draco's neck again.

'I don't know if I would have listened to you when we were young,' he murmured, scraping his teeth across Draco's throat, 'but it's a nice thought anyway.'

'Why are you listening to me now then?'

Harry paused, exhaling against damp skin, and then smiled. 'Because you listen to me,' he said softly. His tone suggested that the listen in that sentence was different than the listen in the sentence before, but before Draco could think about it, Harry's teeth sank into his shoulder again, and Draco whimpered, wrapping his leg tighter around Harry's waist and arching up hard against him.

'Take them off,' he breathed as Harry's hand skimmed the fastenings of his trousers, and Harry chuckled against his skin, though Draco didn't miss the way his fingers trembled as he began to tug open the row of buttons. Draco's hands went to the hem of Harry's t-shirt, catching hold of the thin cotton and dragging it up over his spine; Harry curved his back, letting Draco tug the shirt up to his shoulders, then lifted his arms just long enough for Draco to yank it off and throw it aside before crushing his mouth against Draco's, fingers returning to Draco's buttons with renewed determination.

Draco kissed back hungrily, their tongues battling for dominance, teeth scraping muscle, sinking into flesh, breaths passing from mouth to mouth until he could no longer tell inhale from exhale; when Harry's fingers yanked open the last button and his hand slid between the flaps of fabric, squeezing Draco's prick, Draco groaned into Harry's mouth, clutching at his arse with both hands and shifting restlessly in a silent plea for more. Fortunately, it seemed that Harry's desire for Draco to say what he meant only applied to verbal requests, because Harry's fingers immediately withdrew, but went straight for the waistband of Draco's trousers, dragging them down as Draco lifted his hips to help Harry yank them down his thighs, then unwound his leg from Harry's back and kicked the fabric off his legs, along with his shoes, to land somewhere on the floor with a satisfying rustlethump.

'Well, we're halfway there,' Harry murmured, voice thick with amusement and arousal all at once, and Draco's percolating quip turned into a wordless moan as Harry's hand finally wrapped around his prick, just this side of not-enough, but so fucking good that any complaint Draco could make was twisted into a gasp before it could form. Harry's palm was lightly callused, his fingers wiry and strong as they wound around his shaft, pads resting against the sensitive network of veins, but his thumb was soft where it skimmed up the underside and brushed feather-light across the head. Regardless, it still felt so good it ached, and Draco choked on a groan, hips jerking, driving his cock through the loose circle of Harry's fist.

Harry hummed, other hand sliding up beneath Draco's shirt to trace patterns across his belly before pressing him back down against the mattress; when Draco arched up again immediately, Harry made a soft sound of something like displeasure, and withdrew, sitting back on his heels.

Draco opened his eyes, staring up at Harry dizzily. 'What?' he said sharply.

Harry shrugged. 'You're very wriggly,' he said thoughtfully, studying Draco's supine form, and then grinned. 'Which is a good thing, really, but I think...'

Before Draco could snap at him to get the fuck on with it before he did hex him, more out of frustration than actual desire to do so, Harry slid down the bed, and Draco's mouth fell open as Harry wrapped his lips around the tip of Draco's cock and sucked. His back arched again, sharply, muscles trembling with tension, but Harry's arm came down across his belly, pushing him slowly back against the mattress and holding him there like a brace as Harry's other hand wrapped tight round the base of his cock and his mouth slid further down his shaft.

There was no way Harry hadn't done this before, Draco thought with what little of his mind he had left - the pressure of Harry's tongue flat against his frenulum was maddening, and Harry's lips moved over him in slow, long, tight passes that drew out his mind until all he could think was righttthereohgodmore. And when Harry's hand shifted, sliding back to brush against his sac, then behind, teasing sensitive skin, withdrawing, then returning cool and slick with gel, Draco didn't have the presence of mind to think anything but yes.

Harry didn't ask him if he was sure, didn't ask him if he was okay with this, and that was as expected, since they didn't like each other, but the fingers that slid into him were gentle, careful, notenoughbutsofuckinggood, and the brief flash of pain was gone as quickly as it had come, leaving only the pleasure, the maddeningly slow stretch of muscle, the torture of oversensitised nerve endings, and when Harry's fingers curved upward with unerring accuracy, it was all Draco could do not to scream, his back coming up off the bed despite the weight of Harry's arm and his heels digging into the mattress as he shuddered with wantneedmorenowplease.

Harry laughed, the sound vibrating against Draco's prick, and Draco moaned hoarsely, hands finding Harry's hair and tugging until Harry lifted his head, mouth sliding off with a wet pop.

'Please, Harry....'

It wasn't a verbal request, nor was it a nonverbal demand, but Harry got it anyway, judging from the way his pupils dilated until they swallowed his eyes completely. He slid his fingers out, leaving Draco feeling painfully empty, but when he watched Harry's hands drop to the fastenings of his jeans, tugging them open with rapid movements and shoving them past his hips along with his shorts, his muscles coiled in anticipation instead of protest and he sucked in a breath, lifting his head to watch Harry strip the rest of the way out of his clothes. He had never really seen Harry naked before, he realised, since there'd always been at least a shower curtain between them, and he drank in the sight, the flat planes of Harry's back,

the rippled muscles of his belly, the dark-rose nipples peaked sharply in the cool air, the smattering of hair that started just below his navel and trickled down to join the dark curls between hard-muscled thighs. Harry's cock stood out proudly hard and flushed dark with blood, the tip glistening with pre-come; it was slightly shorter than Draco's, but thicker, veins twisting around the shaft in tantalising patterns, and Draco's fingers twitched with wanting to touch, to feel his palm slide against silk-smooth heat, to brush his thumb across the tip until it was slippery-slick.

He tore his eyes away after a long moment to find Harry watching him, lips curved up into a smile, but eyes blazing with hunger, and his mouth went dry at the promise written in verses across Harry's face.

'Well?' he asked, voice low and rough with arousal and maybe something else. 'Am I suitably Gryffindor, as expected?'

Draco swallowed, chest tightening with undefined feeling, and reached out, catching hold of Harry's wrist and squeezing. 'No,' he murmured, 'but you're suitably Harry.'

If possible, Harry's eyes got even darker, but Draco didn't have time to wonder why, because then Harry was on him, moulding against him shoulder-to-hip, prick dragging against the tendon-tight top of Draco's thigh. Harry's hand shifted in his grasp, sliding down until their palms met, and he twined their fingers, pressing Draco's hand back against the pillow next to his head as he kissed him again, biting down on Draco's lower lip until Draco could taste blood.

'I'm going to fuck you now,' he growled when he pulled back, lips swollen and blood-dark, and Draco sucked in a sharp breath, but managed to raise a brow anyway.

'About bloody time,' he said peevishly.

Harry stared at him, and then laughed, but his amusement paled in comparison to the want chiseled deep into his features, and Draco's half-smirk faded as Harry slid his free hand between their bodies, wrapping it around his prick. It had been a long time since he'd let someone do this, even longer since he'd actually liked the person enough to want to do this, but as he felt the blunt pressure of Harry's cockhead press against his hole, he didn't eve think of objecting. Instead, he hooked a leg around Harry's

back, dug his heel into his arse, and pushed down.

They gasped in unison as just the tip pushed inside; the flash of pain struck through him like a bolt of lightning, and then was gone as Harry slid deeper, nerve endings sizzling with pleasure. Harry's thighs trembled, his breaths coming fast and shallow against Draco's throat, and Draco could tell he was holding back, trying not to hurt him.

'Oi,' he said, voice hoarse. 'You don't like me, remember? You don't have to hold back like that.'

Harry stilled, breath stuttering to a halt, and then sucked in a lungful of air, lifting his head just a bit.

'And what if I did?'

Draco's breath stopped too. They stared at each other, Harry's gaze searching, maybe a bit hesitant, and Draco's face heated with the roar of blood through his ears. After a moment, though, he shrugged.

'You still wouldn't have to hold back like that.'

Harry stared at him a moment more, eyes widening, but then he nodded, a sharp jerk of his head, and buried his face against Draco's shoulder and let go.

Draco gasped at the first thrust, the stretch of muscles as Harry buried himself halfway sending sparkles twisting across his field of vision, but then Harry drew partway out and pushed in again, deeper, and Draco's gasp became a moan, then another, and another, a cascade of sound that spilled steadily from his throat as Harry set a rhythm, driving into him with smooth, sharp thrusts, the fluid roll of his hips deep and slow and threatening to drive Draco mad with how good it felt. Harry's mouth slid along the column of his throat, tongue tracing a line of liquid heat along his throbbing vein, and Draco groaned and dug his nails into Harry's flexed forearm, then slipped his hand up into Harry's hair, pulling his head up so he could kiss him.

Harry kissed back fiercely, growling into Draco's mouth, and sped his thrusts, pressing Draco back against the mattress; Draco's fingers flexed against Harry's, pressing against the taut tendons on the back of his hand, and Harry squeezed back, then lifted their joined hands and pulled them down and between their bodies to wrap around Draco's cock.

Draco inhaled sharply and arched up, thighs quivering, cock pushing through the braided circle of their fingers. Harry shifted the angle of his thrusts to match, and Draco's exhale came in the form of a surprised yowl as Harry's cockhead dragged against supersensitive skin, stabbing heat up his spine to burst in white-hot sparkles behind his eyelids as his muscles coiled all at once, pulling tension upward from his toes and inward from his fingers and twisting it all into an explosion of energy in the form of the most violent orgasm Draco had ever had. Harry's mouth slid down his arched neck to his shoulder, his breaths coming faster and more ragged against Draco's skin as he thrust into him harder, deeper, matching the stuttering clenches of his muscles, and then stilled, hips jerking against Draco's as he came too, fingers flexing against Draco's still-twitching prick and teeth digging into Draco's shoulder until Draco's vision went black.

When Harry finally stilled, slumping against Draco tiredly, Draco blinked open his eyes, and then squinted, confused.

'It's dark in here,' he slurred, voice hoarse and painful. 'Or am I blind?'

Harry groaned, removing his face from Draco's shoulder, and then laughed in disgust. 'No,' he said, extracting his hand from between their bodies and propping himself up so he wouldn't crush Draco. 'We overloaded the surge protector.'

'We did...what?' Draco's brow furrowed. 'Potter, that wasn't English.'

Harry bit Draco. 'I told you to stop calling me Potter,' he said when Draco gave a yelp of protest.

'Fine. That wasn't English, Harry.'

'Thank you.' Harry shifted, and Draco winced as Harry's prick slipped out of him, leaving him feeling

bereft, cold, and rather sticky. He reached for his wand, then blinked as Harry produced something and began to smooth it across his skin - a damp washcloth. Well. he had to admit that was rather more personal than a scouring spell; it made his chest tight, and he coughed, uncomfortable with the feeling.

'So did you want to explain yourself now?' he said, a bit more sharply than he'd intended.

Harry chuckled. 'This is a Muggle neighbourhood,' he said, ignoring Draco's twitch of displeasure, 'so the lights and such are run off something called electricity, which is a form of energy that doesn't do so well in the Wizarding world because it tends to interact with magical fields.'

'How primitive,' Draco sniffed, and yelped again as Harry pinched him.

'Pay attention,' he said sharply. 'So...well, basically, if there's a sudden surge of magic, it has a tendency to overload the electrical circuit. There are built-in protections against energy surges, but energy surges coming from magic tend to outdo even that, so...'

'...so you're saying we fried the lights,' Draco said flatly.

'That's pretty much the gist of it, yeah.'

Draco rolled his eyes, pulled his wand out of his sleeve, and cast a Lumos on the room. Harry's face flared into focus, his pupils contracting suddenly in the burst of light, and he blinked a couple times before grinning, lifting a hand to trace Draco's neck. Draco hissed.

'That hurts! What did you do, try to suck my blood?'

'No,' Harry snorted, 'but I think you'll probably have some bruises there tomorrow unless you heal them right away.'

Draco made a face. 'Barbarian,' he grumbled, but made no move to heal anything, instead settling back against the pillow and letting Harry finish cleaning him up.

Harry paused, studying his face for a long moment. Draco lay still, too pleasantly exhausted to protest, but when Harry said nothing else, he turned his head, arching a brow.

'Can I help you?'

Harry shrugged awkwardly, looking away. 'I was just wondering if maybe that magical surge was what we needed in order to rebalance our magical fields.'

Draco blinked. It was possible, he supposed - since the problem had been an unbalanced exchange, it would make sense that a recombination such as the type that occurred during sex would rebalance it; sex magic was, after all, one of the most powerful forms of magic, right up there with blood magic and sacrificial magic. It surprised him that he'd never considered that before, despite the irritation he'd felt at the inconvenience of their situation. He'd known about sex magic for years, so it wasn't like he had an excuse for forgetting it.

He lifted his head, studying Harry's profile, Harry looked tired again, but not in the way that said he hadn't had enough sleep - instead he looked weary, worn out, maybe even resigned, and the expression didn't suit him at all. It made Draco feel...wrong somehow, to see Harry Potter looking like that.

No, he realised. It felt wrong to see Harry looking like that. Harry Potter had nothing to do with it.

He cleared his throat, and lifted a hand, touching Harry's arm. Harry started, looking over at him with wide eyes, and Draco shrugged slightly, pressing his lips together.

'Does it matter?'

Harry's eyes widened still further, and he looked like he was about to laugh, or cry, or both, but he

(thankfully) did neither, instead giving a shrug of his own. 'I suppose not,' he said.

Draco smirked to hide his smile. 'Now you're speaking my language.'

Harry laughed, shaking his head, and then subsided, meeting Draco's gaze seriously. 'I'm sorry about your parents,' he said softly.

Draco shrugged again, looking away. 'It's not a big deal,' he said.

'But they're your parents.'

'Yes, and?' Draco made a face. 'How I feel about them doesn't change the fact that they wanted me to be something I wasn't.'

'How very Slytherin of you,' Harry murmured.

Draco looked back, raising both brows. 'I thought you said labelling someone by their house was unnecessarily restrictive?'

'It is.' Harry chuckled. 'I guess I just meant...'

'You meant that for a Slytherin, self-advancement is more important than family and friends.' Draco scowled. 'Well, that is one stereotype that is generally true. I suppose it is in my case as well. I just didn't...' He trailed off, cleared his throat. 'I didn't want to end up like my father.'

Harry smiled faintly. 'You're nothing like your father, Draco.'

'How do you figure?'

'You're here with me, aren't you?'

The echo of their conversation at Hogwarts made Draco fall silent, his thoughts once again in turmoil. He still didn't know how he felt about the fact that he'd ostensibly chosen Harry over his parents, whether that was his original intent or not, and Harry was looking at him in a way that made him realise just how huge of a decision that was, if it was even the case.

After a moment, Harry cleared his throat. 'Well, your mum seems like a more reasonable person than your dad,' he said. 'I'm sure she'd understand far better than he would that it's nothing against them, but you just don't want them to run your lives.'

It was a remarkably understanding statement from anyone, let alone Harry, and Draco found himself unsure of what to say to that. Instead, he shifted into a seated position and fixed his gaze on Harry. 'You never told me,' he said, 'what it was you were dreaming about.'

Harry's expression shuttered, and he looked away for a long moment. Draco watched him steadily, studying the tension in his shoulders, and almost wanted to take it back. But then Harry faced him again, gaze steady, open.

'I kept dreaming that...no matter what I did, I couldn't help anyone,' he said, so softly that it could have been to himself. 'That nobody was hearing me. That everything I tried to do to be helpful only ended up making things worse.'

Draco blinked. It was so completely Harry Potter that it was almost laughable - he couldn't think of anyone else he knew who would have scream-inducing nightmares that involved not being able to help someone. But Harry was still talking.

'I dreamed about you too, about seeing you sitting in the middle of the Room of Requirement, with fire everywhere, and flying over to help you, and not being able to get hold of your hand. And...sometimes...'

He swallowed hard. 'Sometimes you didn't put your hand up at all.'

'You...dreamed about that?' Draco had no idea what to say to that. He hadn't ever realised he was that important to anyone aside from his parents and maybe Snape. Especially recently, since his failure to earn the Mark, which was all his entire life had led up to.

'Yeah. I guess...' Harry shrugged again. 'I guess there were so many people that I couldn't help, people who died because I didn't kill Voldemort before he got to them, but then...I managed to help you, but then I had no idea what happened to you. So I guess I thought maybe that even helping someone wasn't helpful.'

Draco stared at Harry incredulously, and then snorted, shaking his head. 'Stupid Gryffindor,' he said. Harry's head snapped up, a retort on his lips, but then he saw Draco's face and laughed instead, running a hand through his messy hair.

'It was pretty stupid, I guess.'

'Yeah, it was.' Draco chuckled, then reached out to touch Harry's arm. 'It suits you though.'

'Thanks a lot,' Harry retorted, but he was grinning now, and the tension in his shoulders was gone.

They fell silent for a bit. Draco slid back down against the pillows; the adrenaline had done its bit, and the orgasm had compounded it, and now he was very tired, and quite ready to sleep. He closed his eyes, relaxing, letting his thoughts wander, and presently, when he felt Harry's arm wrap over his waist, he simply chuckled, too lethargic to protest being spooned like a girl. 'You know, it makes a lot more sense now.'

'What does?'

'Your tendency to be grabby at me.'

'My tendency to...' Harry's voice was rife with confusion. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean your tendency to do this, like you're afraid I'm going to disappear. It's all part of your Saving People thing, isn't it?'

'I don't have a Saving People thing,' Harry said automatically, and tucked his chin over Draco's shoulder. 'I don't understand. How is this a tendency? This is the first time I've done it.'

Draco stiffened.

'Isn't it?'

'I suppose you're right,' he said after a moment.

Harry said nothing, and Draco pressed his lips together, hoping that Harry wouldn't press the matter. Shortly, Harry relaxed, settling in against Draco's back, and Draco relaxed as well, closing his eyes and thanking his remarkable luck and/or his sexual prowess that Harry was clearly too worn out to pursue the matter.

Then, Harry chuckled. 'Draco? You really are the worst liar I have ever met.'