Must Love Quidditch by Dracosoftie

This story archived at The Hex Files - http://www.thehexfiles.net/viewstory.php?sid=13211

Index

Chapter 1: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 2: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 3: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 4: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 5: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 6: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 7: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 8: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 9: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 10: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 11: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 12: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 13: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 14: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 15: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 16: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 17: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 18: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 19: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 20: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 21: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 22: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 23: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 24: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 25: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 26: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 27: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 28: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 29: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 30: Must Love Quidditch

Chapter 1: Must Love Quidditch

***

This story is based on characters and situations created and owned by JK Rowling, various publishers including but not limited to Bloomsbury Books, Scholastic Books and Raincoat Books, and Warner Bros., Inc. No money is being made and no copyright or trademark infringement is intended.

***

Harry rolled his eyes as Hermione snorted inelegantly, swirling around in the desk chair to face him.

“Really, Harry. Internet dating?”

Harry’s eyes flashed defensively. It was easy for Hermione to look down on his attempts at finding a partner; she had Ron. His two best friends had been together for five years – they’d spent a few years after the war dating other people – and they were to be married in three months. It wasn’t that Harry wasn’t thrilled for them; he was. He was excited to stand in as Ron’s best man, excited to see two wonderful people start a new chapter in their lives. He just wanted the same thing.

“Don’t say it like that,” Harry chastised. “You know it’s hard for me to meet people like a normal bloke would. The last time I went to singles night at the local pub I was mobbed by slavering women.”

“Most men would have been happy to have a dozen good-looking witches hanging off their arm, Harry,” Hermione said with a barely suppressed grin.

“No doubt,” Harry said sourly. “It wasn’t my arm I was worried about, at any rate. One of them actually slipped a hand down my trousers!”

Hermione’s smile grew at Harry’s indignant expression.

“And it’s a bit hard to attract a fit-looking wizard when you’re knee-deep in witches, I suppose,” she said with a laugh.

“Too right, Hermione,” Harry said, shaking his head with mock exasperation. “Too bloody right. Now, did you come to help me write this ad or just to be a nuisance?”

Hermione turned her attention back to the computer screen in front of her. Harry’s ad was far from polished, but then again, so was Harry.

“So let me get this straight, if you will,” she said, giggling madly at her pun. Harry rolled his eyes. “You hope to find a serious partner from an ad on a Web site?”

Harry nodded. Hermione noted his earnest expression and sighed in resignation. If Harry was going to have an internet dating ad, then Hermione would make sure it was the very best it could be. By the time the two were finished, they had crafted an ad that clearly spelled out what Harry was looking for in a partner, keeping the language and tone casual and easy, just like Harry.

“Are you sure you don’t want to add candlelight dinners and long walks on the beach?” Hermione asked, waggling her brows suggestively at Harry.

Harry tried to look stern, but a grin broke through. He threw a pillow from a nearby chair at Hermione.

“Oh, sod off,” he said fondly. “This is a good idea. Besides, you know how much I hate sandy feet.”

***

“Listen to this one, Draco! He’s perfect for you,” Blaise said with mock delight, scrolling down to read one of the hundreds of ads posted to the online dating site Draco had joined the week before.

“Looking for a wizard to share quiet, candlelight dinners, long walks on the beach and relaxing vacations.

Picture me as tall, dark and handsome like Harry Potter. You should be fit and attractive as well. I prefer relationships to one-offs, but either is welcome."

Draco made a face, groaning as he lowered his head to the desk. Perhaps Blaise had been right when he told Draco that only wankers posted to these online services. His shoulders tightened, but he blew out a breath and forced himself to relax. They couldn't all be losers. After all, he had posted to the service, hadn't he?

"I am agog at your hilarity, Blaise," he said dryly.

"No? This one, then. He wants someone who will 'allow me to dominate you in every sense of the word'," Blaise said, looking at Draco with a grin.

Draco's eyes narrowed and he reached out and pulled his laptop away from Blaise, who raised his hands in defense and adopted an innocent look.

His heart sank as he continued to scroll through the brief list of new posts. Pansy had opened the online dating service last year, apparently drawing inspiration from an infomercial she had seen on a Muggle television channel, of all things. After months of wheedling, Draco had finally given in and agreed to start an account. As Pansy had so helpfully pointed out, he was striking out on the face-to-face front, so he might as well try something new. At least with online dating he could find someone who might actually be interested in him rather than his fortune or his notoriety.

"Wait, go back," Blaise said, his voice suddenly serious. He had shifted his chair over so he could watch the screen as Draco scrolled through the entries.

"Must Love Quidditch," Blaise read. "That one could be something, yeah? Open it up so we can see more."

Draco rolled his eyes but complied, opening the post titled "Must Love Quidditch" with a sigh. His straight-as-an-arrow friend was having much more fun evaluating Draco's potential internet suitors than

Draco thought the situation warranted.

Must Love Quidditch

I am an avid fan and amateur player; you'll be a fit bloke who enjoys the same. An interest in traveling, fine food and wines and gardening a must as well. I love to cook; you should either share my passion for the hobby or appreciate eating gourmet meals. My work schedule allows me ample time to indulge in my interests; yours should too. I am looking for a steady relationship; respond only if you are as well. I enjoy spending quiet time at home or with the company of friends; you should be someone who shies away from the club scene as well. #13279

Draco read through the post twice, resisting the urge to tick off the compatible interests on his fingers. This bloke sounded nearly perfect to him, and he figured Blaise felt the same way, since the other man hadn't spoken up yet.

The post wasn't signed, nor did it have contact information appended aside from an identification number. Draco knew what that meant, since his own post was similarly devoid of personal information. Pansy only allowed high-profile clients to be anonymous on the site, and only after she had verified the person's identity and need for secrecy herself. After the verification process, the client was randomly assigned a number and a generic e-mail address. Even if Draco wanted to, he wouldn't be able to wrest the mystery man's identity from Pansy; she swore an Unbreakable Vow with each of these special clients, ensuring their privacy.

Blaise watched Draco's face as his longtime friend scrutinized the post. He knew Draco's love life had been a mess for ages. He had a long string of failed relationships behind him. Men either wanted to date him for his money – either to have him support them or support various business ventures they wanted to pursue – or because they enjoyed the status of dating such a notorious and well-known man. Draco was loved and hated by the press at the same time; his every move was splashed across the pages of wizarding publications for all to see. Blaise wrinkled his nose in distaste. He hated the publicity seekers even more than the money grubbers, since they paraded Draco out in public so they could be photographed on his arm. Draco hated the press and he hated going out; though he'd never admit it, he was a homebody at heart.

“Well?” Blaise asked, impatient with Draco’s unreadable silence.

“He sounds too good to be true – probably has the looks of a troll,” Draco said with a weak laugh. He hadn’t even admitted to himself how much he wanted this internet dating venture to pan out; now that he had found someone remotely interesting, his courage was faltering.

“Your Malfoy mask is slipping, Draco,” Blaise said with a grin. “You’re falling all over yourself to contact him. I can tell. Go on, then. Do it.”

Draco hesitated, but clicked on the identification number. He keyed in his username and password, giving the site permission to contact the mystery man with Draco’s own post. It wouldn’t give his personal information, since his was also a high-profile membership, but it would give the man his e-mail address as well as a copy of his own ad.

Draco swallowed as the message flew into the ether; the ball was in mystery man’s court now.

***

Harry jumped up after reading his e-mail, hurrying to the fireplace and throwing in a pinch of Floo dust.

“Ron and Hermione’s,” he said clearly, sticking his head into the green flames.

Hermione heard the Floo roar to life just as she was putting the finishing touches on dinner. As she was finishing plating the takeaway, at any rate, which in a way could be considered making dinner, she reasoned. She grabbed a dish towel to wipe a stray bit of curry from her hands and walked into the sitting room.

“Harry? Are you coming through? I’ve just finished dinner,” she said.

“I was wondering if you and Ron would mind bringing it here instead,” Harry asked sheepishly. “I’ve just had a brilliant response to my ad, and I want you to help me respond.”

Computers and other electronic devices did not respond well to magic, which meant taking them through a Floo ride or Apparating with them could cause the devices to short out. Harry’s laptop had wards around it to shield it from the ambient magic in his home, but those protections wouldn’t hold up to the forces of magical transportation.

“Of course. We’ll be through in a minute,” Hermione said with an indulgent smile. “I’ll just pack up dinner. Open some wine, will you?”

Harry nodded and withdrew his head from the fire as Hermione headed back to the kitchen to return the takeaway to its original containers. She shook her head with a good-natured grimace at the irony of it.

Ron insisted they eat before tackling Harry’s e-mail response, reasoning they would all think a good sight better if they weren’t hungry. Harry merely picked at his curry with disinterest, his mind clearly on the anonymous bloke whose post had sounded so perfect. His name and other personal details hadn’t been included, and Harry was slightly apprehensive about what that meant. He wasn’t sure he wanted to date a high-profile man; he garnered enough attention on his own. What if the man was a professional Quidditch player or something? It would be impossible to stay out of the public eye and date someone like that.

When dinner was over, Harry cleared away the plates and brought his laptop out to the kitchen table. Ron slumped in his chair slightly, not quite disinterested, but clearly uncomfortable with the idea of being involved in Harry’s love life. Hermione’s eyes lit up as she pulled the computer closer to her, reading the automated response to Harry’s ad.

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: AutoResponseBot@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Sunday, May 11, 2008 6:37 p.m.

Re: Interest in your post

Dear User #13279,

User #11837 has expressed interest in your post. Please review #11837's post and contact the user directly at his or her e-mail address, IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk.

Introspective Intellectual

Seeking a partner who enjoys solitude and is comfortable with silence and introspection. Discretion is expected and will be given in return. I am fit and expect my partner to be as well. My interests include travel, Quidditch, intellectual pursuits and gourmet food and drink. I enjoy witty banter and intelligent conversation; my partner must be able to respond in kind. I am financially self-sufficient and require the same of my partner. Must like children. #11837

We at Magical Dating Online wish you the best in your search for love.

Thank you for your patronage, and remember, true love is only a click away.

The Magical Dating Online Web team

Hermione sat back with a thoughtful look. The writer sounded a bit pretentious, but his interests – and requirements for privacy and solitude – matched Harry's nicely. The bit about children, though, gave her pause.

“Do you think this wizard has children, then?” she asked Harry, who was hovering nearby waiting for her reaction.

“Maybe. He might just have nieces and nephews who are around a lot, or maybe he’s interested in adopting a child down the road,” Harry said. He had thought a lot about that requirement; in fact, he had very nearly included a similar one in his own post. He thought it would be strange, however, since he didn’t have a child, so he left it off, figuring that there would be plenty of time in the getting-to-know-you process with any prospective partner for his desire to have a family to come up.

“Are you alright with that, mate?” Ron piped up, his gaze questioning.

Harry thought for a minute and nodded.

“I want a family, Ron. I’ve wanted one for as long as I can remember. Being bent doesn’t change that, you know. Just because I’m gay doesn’t mean I wouldn’t be a good father,” he said, looking Ron in the eye.

Ron colored, embarrassed that his words had been so misconstrued.

“That wasn’t what I meant at all, Harry! You’d be a brilliant father. I just meant would you be alright with raising someone else’s child,” Ron said quickly.

Harry shot Ron a lopsided grin.

“I’m not exactly likely to have one of my own, Ron, being that the thought of sleeping with a woman is revolting,” Harry said with a grimace, smiling apologetically at Hermione. “My only other option is to adopt or find a partner who already has a child.”

Ron nodded and Hermione stood to pull Harry into a light embrace. He bent to rest his head on her shoulder and she pressed a kiss into his rumpled hair.

“We’re putting the cart before the horse,” she said, all business, as she released Harry. “We have to make Harry’s response witty and intelligent enough to keep this guy interested. We can worry about Harry’s reproductive future later. Say, after they’ve had their first date.”

Hermione hesitated, worrying her lower lip with her teeth as though debating something with herself. As Harry cocked his head as a silent question, she gave him a small smile.

“Those aren’t your only options, you know. For having children, I mean,” she said, slightly uncomfortable.

Harry’s face lit up in a big smile. He loved his friends, especially when they looked out for him like this.

“Oh, I know. I can hire a surrogate and have her carry my child. It’s not that important to me, to be honest. What would it matter whether or not the child was mine biologically?”

Ron opened his mouth to speak, but Hermione shushed him with a stern look. She settled back into the chair nearest the computer and looked expectantly over at Harry, her fingers poised over the keyboard.

“Shall we get started, then?”

***

Draco had put off checking his online dating e-mail account all morning. He knew if the mystery man had responded, he’d spend the day obsessing about how to answer the e-mail. If he hadn’t responded, then he’d spend the day obsessing over why he hadn’t answered yet. His schedule was too full for that sort of nonsense, so he’d avoided it altogether.

Blaise gave a cursory rap against Draco’s office door with his knuckles before entering. He sprawled

inelegantly on a chair in front of Draco's desk, arching an eyebrow.

"So, boss, any news?"

Draco looked at him sternly. Blaise's beautifully tailored clothes made his current pose even more indolent.

"You know I hate it when you call me that. And sit up, or you'll ruin your suit," Draco drawled. "I finished the negotiations on the Traylor land deal; the contract should already be on your desk for your review. We also closed on that empty warehouse near Diagon Alley, the one Theo wants to turn in to a club. I'll need you to run through the legalities of that so we have all of our bases covered before we go before the Diagon Alley Chamber of Commerce."

Blaise smiled. He had been working for Draco in of his stable of in-house corporate lawyers for six years, so he knew Draco always put business before pleasure. He also knew his friend well enough to see that Draco was nervous and stalling. Blaise straightened out of his slouch, adopting a more professional posture and crossing his legs.

"The Traylor contract is solid. The land is already zoned for residential development, so it will be a snap to get the permits we need. It's truly a genius idea, building a gated and warded wizarding community. The lots will sell like caldron cakes," Blaise said.

"The Diagon Alley warehouse isn't as cut and dried," he continued. "The zoning there is less clear, and I have the junior counsel looking into precedent. We'll need to know how other clubs and pubs are zoned and which permits we'll need before we try to go before the board. I'll have that report on your desk within the week."

Blaise uncrossed his legs and leaned forward in his chair, continuing to look Draco in the eye.

"Now stop stalling and check the blasted e-mail account. I'm dying over here," he said with a grin.

Draco turned slightly in his chair and called up his e-mail. There were several messages from others responding to his post, but Draco skimmed over those seeking out the one he was looking for. Triumphant, he motioned Blaise behind the desk so the two men could read it together.

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Sunday, May 11, 2008 10:13 p.m.

Re: Let's get to know one another

Dear #11837

I must admit I was surprised when I read your post. I was pessimistic that I'd ever find anyone I might truly get on with through this rather unconventional medium, but it sounds like our interests and requirements, at least superficially, match very well.

I gather from your identification number that you, too, are a high-profile client. I generally shy away from dating men who are in the spotlight, as I find its glare harsh at the best of times. I have enough trouble staying away from the media on my own— having a well-known partner would only exacerbate the problem.

Your post promises discretion, and you say you enjoy your privacy. I'm taking you at your word on that, as I hope you'll take me on mine. While I do enjoy a degree of fame it is not something I actively seek; as such, I spend much of my time at home, surrounded by family and friends, rather than out surrounded by the public.

I hope you won't be offended by my reluctance to disclose my name and other identifying details. While I trust your discretion, I would prefer to get to know each other over email before we divulge that information or meet in person. As I'm sure you understand, it can be hard to truly get to know a person who is well-known for one reason or another. You've likely had problems because of it yourself. I'd like you to get to know the real me before finding out who I am, and I am looking forward to getting to know

you as well.

I find myself uncomfortable with using the assigned identification numbers in our correspondence, as it makes this all so impersonal. I'd prefer it if we were to use nicknames. I'll divulge my first bit of information about my personal life as mine.

Gryffin

"It wouldn't be a bad thing to take this slow, like he says, Draco," Blaise said after reading the email. He smirked at the signature – a Gryffindor?

Draco picked up on the clue instantly as well, chuckling softly. The man might have been a Gryffindor when he was at Hogwarts – and Draco had no way of knowing whether that was 10 months ago or 10 years ago – but he clearly took a Slytherin approach to things. He found himself even more intrigued with the mystery man after reading his response, and he approved of the man's suggestion to simply exchange emails for the time being wholeheartedly.

He would have asked for Blaise's help writing a response, but his secretary poked her head in the door before he could ask.

"Mr. Malfoy, you have a meeting at Gringotts in half an hour. You'll need to leave now in order to make it. The Goblins have instituted some new security measures and it is taking a little longer than usual to get into the bank," she said.

Draco sighed and pushed back from his desk. His response would have to wait. He walked toward the door, stopping to grab his briefcase and cloak from his secretary.

"Thank you, Madge," he said, bowing to her slightly. She grinned. She was 80 if she was a day, but Draco

always flirted and joked with her. He turned to Blaise and nodded. “Blaise.”

Blaise tipped an imaginary hat at Draco as the other man left the office, whistling softly to himself as he made his way toward the office’s apparition point. Blaise shook his head fondly, watching him walk away. Draco was already on the road to smitten, that much was clear. He just hoped things worked out.

Back to Index

Chapter 2: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. Sadly, they aren’t mine.

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Monday, May 12, 2008 5:21 p.m.

Re: Answering the gauntlet

Gryffin,

I am in full agreement with your plan – though I must admit all this secrecy and shadow makes you

seem more Slytherin than Gryffindor.

I have had a series of rather unfortunately public relationships that have gone awry in the recent past, so I, too, am reluctant to jump in without first getting to know you better. Shall we continue our getting-to-know-you game slowly? Asking you when you were at Hogwarts would probably be giving away too much, as would telling you when I last haunted the school's hallowed halls as a student.

Instead I'll share a few less revealing things about myself. I am a keen Quidditch fan; I have had box seats to Magpies for as long as I can remember. I played at Hogwarts, but I shan't divulge which position. I spent many of my summers in France during my youth, and in fact lived there for several years as an adult. Though I'm back in Great Britain now, my experiences left me with a tendency to favor French wines.

I've likely given you enough to mull over for the moment. I look forward to our next volley of information.

Sly

"A Slytherin, Harry? For shame," Ron teased after Harry gave him the highlights of the letter over lunch at the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade.

Harry's grin nearly split his face as he saw his friend's tactical error. Before he could warn him, a sharp Stinging hex hit Ron squarely on the arse.

"Bloody hell!" he yelped, instantly drawing his wand in defense. A whiff of a familiar floral perfume had him sheepishly returning the wand to his wrist holster.

“There’s nothing shameful about a Slytherin, brother dear,” Ginny said smartly as she slid into the booth next to Harry, snagging a chip as she scooted past.

“Ginny, lovely to see you,” Harry said pleasantly, enjoying Ron’s discomfort at being caught out bad mouthing Slytherins. It wasn’t something Ginny stood for these days, even in jest.

Ginny lifted an eyebrow at Harry, looking from his face down to his mostly uneaten plate of chips. He held his hands up in surrender and she grabbed the plate, smothering the chips in loads of vinegar.

“Do you think the waitress could get me some butterscotch sauce, Harry?” she asked as she scooped the first chip into her mouth.

Harry put on his most supportive face, trying desperately not to look as revolted as he felt lest Ginny let fly with another stinging hex. Ron’s face turned a light shade of green and he quickly stood, offering to run to the bar to see if they had any on hand. Ginny nodded happily.

“Everything going well, then?” Harry asked when Ron returned with a small pot of butterscotch, averting his eyes as Ginny poured the lot of it over her vinegar-soaked chips. Her small moan of pleasure at the taste of the combination had him gagging silently.

“Brilliantly,” Ginny said, stopping to run a hand lovingly over her large stomach. “My mediwitch is working closely with Madam Pomfrey, just in case I go into labor before classes end for the year. It’ll be close; the baby is due in late June.”

“How’s your replacement doing?” Harry asked warily. Ginny had not been pleased when McGonagall and Pomfrey had banned her from flying just two months into her pregnancy, something rather integral to the job of flying instructor. She had taken over for Madam Hooch several years ago after retiring from the Holyhead Harpies.

Ginny waved the chip in her hand dismissively, sending a shower of butterscotch and vinegar over the

table. Both Ron and Harry flinched, but she took no notice.

“Oliver’s doing a fine job of it, so long as he doesn’t think the position is his to keep. I intend to come back after the baby’s born.”

The fact that he had no desire to fill the position for more than a term or two was what had made Oliver Wood an excellent choice as Ginny’s replacement. He was on a forced medical sabbatical from Puddlemere United due to a wrist injury he’d gotten earlier in the season. It didn’t prevent him from flying, but it would never heal properly if he had continued to play Keeper with the injury. He was spending his recuperation time helping out.

“And, uh, your husband? He’s doing well?” Harry asked, desperate to keep his mind of the concoction she was eating.

“He’s doing very well. He has a business deal going in Diagon Alley, actually. He’s partnering up with Draco Malfoy to develop a nightclub,” she said.

“Speaking of another dirty Slytherin bastard,” Ron began, stopping immediately when he noticed his sister’s narrowed eyes.

“I’d tread lightly if I were you, Ronald. What were you saying about Slytherin?”

“He was just taking the piss out of me, Gin,” Harry said quickly, earning a grateful look from Ron, who surreptitiously rubbed his arse where Ginny had hit him with the Stinger earlier.

“I’m corresponding with a bloke who was in Slytherin. We met through that site I told you about last time I visited,” he said.

“Who is it? Maybe Theo can tell you more about him. He is our age, right?”

Harry blushed slightly. He had no idea how old Sly was; he certainly hoped he was around his own age, but he tried not to think about it overmuch.

“I’m not sure, exactly. And I, uh, don’t know his name. He’s another client like me, so his personal information is kept confidential. We’ve decided to keep our identities a secret until we know each other better,” Harry said, suddenly aware of how silly that sounded.

Ginny frowned, but she seemed to accept his answer.

“Well, I’m glad you aren’t judging him just because he was a Slytherin, Harry,” she said, shooting Ron a cold look. “Good for you. Someone could really learn from that attitude.”

Harry laughed, reaching out to clap a hand on Ron’s shoulder.

“Hullo, someone. I think your sister wants you to cut her dear husband a break. It has been nearly six years, after all, and he’s managed not to poison or hex her yet. She may well be safe after all, eh?” he asked with a grin.

“He could make more of an effort too, you know,” Ron said grumpily.

“You’ll not get any sympathy from me, mate,” Harry said knowingly. Ron had been an absolute bastard to Theo for years. The rest of the family had been cool to the Slytherin at first but had quickly warmed; by the time they married he had been welcomed into the Weasley family with open arms. Except for Ron, who was sure his three year courtship and six year marriage to Ginny was just the prelude to some sort of evil plot.

Finally fed up after years of Ron’s taunts and insults, he’d laced Ron’s porridge with a Lip Locker potion on Christmas morning a few years back. While Molly had been slightly miffed, the rest of the family agreed that the holiday was much more pleasant without Ron’s constant griping. Ron still hadn’t forgiven

him, despite the fact that man had been nothing but polite to him since.

“Well, it’s a moot point,” Ginny said, swiping the last of the butterscotch sauce off the plate with her finger. “He’s managed to get your sister up the duff, which means he’ll be the father of a Weasley child. There’s no getting rid of him now.”

Harry laughed out loud at the horrified expression on Ron’s face.

“Gin!” he cried, sounding scandalized. “You can’t talk like that. You’re my sister!”

“Who obviously didn’t get this way –” she said, expansively gesturing to her stomach, “–on her own.”

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, May 13, 2008 10:23 a.m.

Re: A Slythindor, then

Dear Sly,

I admit I do have the trappings of both a Slytherin and a Gryffindor. I’ve never told anyone this, but the Sorting Hat did try to put me in Slytherin when I was a first year, but I asked it to sort me into Gryffindor instead.

Summers in France, eh? Most of my summers were spent miserably holed up in my family's suburban home near London. I always wished I could stay at Hogwarts instead of returning home, but circumstances prevented me from even considering it.

You must not be Muggleborn, since you talk of having had Quidditch season tickets your entire life. I wasn't introduced to the game until I started at Hogwarts, although I'm not Muggleborn, either. Again with those wonky circumstances, I suppose. I played for my house team as well, and I loved it. I still play when I can on one of the intramural teams in London, which I suppose answers another question for you.

I have no strong loyalties in terms of teams; my best friend is a die-hard fan of the Canons, but I can't stomach the hideous orange uniforms. I generally root for the Harpies, and I have a box there myself.

As for wine, I do appreciate many French labels, but I find myself drawn to the bolder flavors of the new wines from Australia. Some of the Pinot Noirs coming out of the Yarra Valley region are spectacular, as are the innovative Shirazes in Coonawarra. Are you a white or a red lover? I've had several good whites, but my favorite would have to be a nicely aged spicy Shiraz.

All this talk of wine has made me rather eager for the arrival of the end of the workday. Luckily my boss doesn't mind if I drink on the job, though noon might be a bit early, even by his standards.

Take care, Sly.

Gryffin

"Mr. Malfoy? Your personal owl is here for you, sir," Madge sounded slightly put out. "He won't allow me to take the package he is carrying."

Draco smiled. He knew his secretary was confused about why he would send his personal owl on an errand instead of entrusting it to her and one of the company's messengers or birds, but he didn't want anyone to know what was in the carefully padded package on Orion's leg.

"Thank you, Madge, I'll take care of it myself. Orion's just getting a bit possessive in his old age, I think," he said smoothly, striding out into the reception area and gently untying the burden from the owl's leg. He grabbed a few owl treats off of Madge's desk and tossed them to Orion, who caught them in his beak and immediately took off.

"Sir, is there something I can help you with?" Madge asked, eying the oddly-shaped package.

"No, but thank you, Madge. This was just a bit of personal business," he said, sounding as though he had never sent her or other employees on personal errands.

Madge narrowed her eyes. Just yesterday she had spent the better part of an hour at Young and Kentworth's waiting for her boss' new tailored robes to be finished.

"Leave it be, Madge-pie," Blaise said as he rounded the corner. Draco could have sighed in relief. "The boss-man must preserve some of his secrets, yeah?"

Madge gave Blaise – her favorite person in the office after Draco – a grudging smile.

"You're a peach, Madge-pie. An absolute queen among witches," Blaise said, batting his eyelashes at her coquettishly.

"Two sugars and a splash of milk?" she said dryly, her smile growing as she looked at Blaise's mock-innocent face.

"I'd love some! However do you know just when I need a spot of tea, Madge-pie?"

She laughed at his outrageously fake posturing. She went to fetch the tea – both Draco and Blaise thought tea tasted better brewed rather than Conjured – and Blaise followed Draco back into his office.

“Is that it, then?” he asked, pointing to the oddly wrapped package.

Draco cut his eyes toward the door, and seconds later Madge knocked and entered, Levitating a tea service for two in front of her.

“Thank you, Madge. Blaise is correct. You truly are a queen among witches.”

She blushed slightly, and Draco knew he had been forgiven. She closed the door firmly behind her as she left.

“Open it. I want to see what makes it so bloody fantastic that you had to comb every wine shop in London looking for it,” Blaise said, picking up his cup of perfectly made tea.

Draco pursed his lips, but decided not to answer. Instead he unwrapped the bundle, revealing a bottle of red wine. He turned the bottle slowly in his hands.

“You’ll be making something special for dinner, I wager, to go with the fancy new wine,” Blaise said, his eyes on his friend, wondering how a simple bottle of wine could give Draco such a wistful expression.

“Steak, with a creamy polenta, I think. It’s a spicy, full-bodied wine,” Draco said, distracted.

“Well, I’m in. Will Caleum be joining us? I haven’t seen him lately.”

“Hmm?” Draco looked up, unfocused. “No. He’s still in France at the moment. I’m rather anxious to see

him myself."

Draco's face broke into a large smile as he thought of Caleum.

"I don't think he'd mind missing out, though. Not a big red wine drinker, that one."

Blaise laughed and sat back in his chair, bringing his foot up to rest on his knee.

"The proposal for the warehouse in Diagon Alley should be on your desk in the morning," he said, switching easily back to work mode. "Theo's hoping to get everything finalized before the end of June."

Draco set the bottle of wine aside and leaned back casually on his desk, crossing his arms.

"We had dinner a few weeks ago at that new place in Hogsmeade. His wife was a much more charming than I remember her being in school, but Merlin, can that woman eat! I assume it's mostly the pregnancy, but still. It was more than a little revolting to watch her eat ice cream topped with cockroach clusters and mustard," Draco said with a slight shudder.

Back to Index

Chapter 3: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. Unfortunately, they aren't mine. *sniffs*

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Wednesday, May 14, 2008 1:15 p.m.

Re: Bold and spicy

Gryffin,

I can only hope that your taste in wine is indicative of your own personality. I tracked down a bottle of Australian Shiraz and served it with dinner Friday night. You were right; it was flavorful and spicy without being overpowering, bold and fruity without being sweet.

Let's see, another tidbit about me. I'm assuming from your last message that you're self-employed. I am as well, though my day seems a bit more structured than yours. As for my drink of choice on those tough days when tea just won't suffice, I generally turn to an oak-barrel aged Firewhisky. A shot or two to calm the nerves before a big meeting always does the trick.

Sly

Harry grinned, remembering Sly's words as he sipped a glass of Ogden's Finest in front of the fire. He'd been going back and forth with the man for more than a week now, their emails escalating to several a day. He'd developed an addiction to checking his email, unable to stop the zing of excitement that shot through him every time something new came in from Sly.

They'd shared a lot of mundane facts about themselves, arguing back and forth about wine and favorite foods, trading jokes and tidbits of their daily lives that wouldn't give them away. Harry was still laughing about the anecdote Sly had told him about his secretary last week – by all rights, it sounded like she ran the office, not the other way around. In turn, Harry had shared a few stories about working with

Hermione, though he hadn't named her. From his response, Sly had quite enjoyed hearing about the perils of working with one of your oldest friends. They'd both been careful not to divulge what they actually did for a living.

His head snapped up when he heard the soft alert that signified a new email, sitting his glass aside and pulling his laptop over to him from its resting place on the sofa cushion. Harry's grin grew when he recognized the email address.

A wave of disappointment so heavy it was almost palpable shot through him as he read the words on the screen – an apology from Sly, saying he'd be out of contact for a few days while out of the office on a business trip. Harry sighed, running a hand through his messy hair. He glanced from his laptop to the bottle of whisky, his eyes narrowed as he thought.

He had a deadline coming up, and he'd been too distracted by Sly's messages to really concentrate on it. Shoving the temptation to drink away his disappointment, Harry re-settled the laptop on his knees, his brow furrowing as he called up the document he'd been working on and began to write. Maybe this forced separation from Sly would be a good thing – he might actually get some work done himself.

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Sunday, May 24, 2008 7:15 p.m.

Re: Apologies

Gryffin,

I am being called away unexpectedly on business, and I doubt I will be able to get away to write while I am gone. I apologize for stalling our electronic courtship (especially when things seem to be going so well), but a good friend needs help starting up a new business and I can't say no to the venture. He has his reasons for being so rushed, and I respect them, though I do regret they will take me away from our scintillating daily notes. I really have enjoyed getting to know you so far, Gryffin, and I hope we can continue when I return.

I am sending a small token to you through the service. The owner has assured me it will get to you, and I hope you'll enjoy it during my absence and think of me.

Fondly,

Sly

Harry read the short email for the fourth time while sipping a gorgeous glass of Shiraz from the bottle Sly had sent. Pansy sent it over via owl earlier that day. Harry had been so excited he hardly knew what to do with himself. He'd never had such a thoughtful gift, not even from lovers he had dated for months.

While he wasn't pleased that business had taken Sly offline, so to speak, for the next few days, it did give him a chance to reflect on what he knew about the man so far, which was frustratingly little. Determined to find a way to expedite the process, he sat down with his laptop and his lovely glass of wine to compose another note for Sly.

Three days later, Harry was still waiting for his reply. Hermione's rational influence quelled his panic; surely Sly was still on his trip, and he would reply when he could. While Harry knew that was likely the case, he couldn't help but worry he had been too forward in his response. Sly's gesture with the wine had been so sweet, and Harry had admittedly imbibed several glasses before he hit send after writing his latest missive. Sly seemed sophisticated; maybe his sloppy approach had offended him?

Hermione clamped a hand over Harry's knee, which had apparently been bouncing madly as he once again ran through the list of reasons why Sly might be avoiding him.

“Harry,” she said sharply, squeezing his knee. “He will answer when he can. He warned you he would be out of contact for several days. Just relax.”

He sighed loudly, hitting the refresh button on his email once more. He had plenty of new messages in the inbox, but none from the only bloke he was interested in hearing from.

“I’ll take it away, if I have to,” Hermione warned, her voice stern.

“Then you’ll be the one to explain why I’ve missed my deadline when Abigail makes her angry Floo call,” he said flatly.

Hermione pulled his laptop over toward her side of the table, pulling up the document Harry had been working on all morning. It was nearly blank.

“I’d be happy to explain to Abigail that her bestselling author couldn’t meet the deadline for his latest book because he was going all emo about an email message sent to a man he has never even met,” she said frostily.

He slapped her hands away from his computer, scowling.

“It’s a process, Hermione. It’s all up here,” he said, tapping his finger to his head.

“Oh, you don’t have to tell me that, Harry. With you, it’s always in your head,” she said, smacking him over the head with a piece of rolled up parchment. “Get out of your head and stop obsessing over this man! He will email when he emails. He is working, just like you should be working.”

Harry’s dark mood lifted a bit as he was reminded of the revision tables and homework schedules Hermione used to torment him with in school. Things hadn’t changed that much. He supposed that was

the danger of having one of your best friends as your agent. He offered her a contrite grin of apology. She smiled sweetly back.

“Now get to work.”

***

Draco groaned loudly, falling backward into his bed fully dressed. He was absolutely exhausted. His business trip had gone fairly quickly, just as he had hoped. Blaise and Theo had dragged him to several wizarding clubs around England similar to the one Theo wanted to develop to help give Draco an idea of what they were trying to do. The trip had gone quickly – they’d only been gone one night – mainly because Theo was anxious to get back to Ginny. She hadn’t been too pleased about him leaving her so late in her pregnancy, and from what Draco understood, it was going to take a lot of wheedling and chocolate to get back into her good graces.

He’d barely been back in London for 20 minutes when an emergency Fire-call had come from France. Caleum had taken a nasty spill off a horse at the Malfoy chateau in Amboise where he had been staying. Draco hadn’t even wasted time packing; he’d simply jumped into the Floo to get to Caleum’s side as quickly as possible. That had been four days ago, and he was only now returning home.

Caleum was fine, thank Merlin. Draco insisted that he remain at the Amboise chateau, which was where he spent most of his time, despite the fact that he had begged to be allowed to come home with Draco. Draco wanted to keep him out of the papers, to keep their relationship a secret for as long as he could. He didn’t want to be associated with Caleum in the wizarding press, and he took all manner of precautions to prevent it. The chateau was Unplottable, and Caleum always used the Floo when he came to Malfoy Manor. Draco had managed to keep him a secret for five years, and he prayed to all the Gods each day that his luck continued to hold.

Blaise had Flooed to the chateau shortly after Draco, having stayed behind to take care of any pressing business matters that needed immediate attention. He was almost as fond of Caleum as Draco was; he generally tagged along whenever Draco visited France, and he was often present on the nights Caleum came to Malfoy Manor for dinner several times a week. After checking in with Caleum, Blaise had returned to London to oversee any problems that couldn’t wait for Draco’s return, much like he had

three years ago when Draco had taken a leave of absence to spend a year with Caleum in France.

Draco roused himself out of his near slumber, mindful that he was still fully dressed and hadn't responded to the rather large pile of urgent owls that had accumulated on his desk down the hall. He'd been up all night with Caleum, neither wanting to waste any of their precious little time together. He'd finally left him just before dawn, tucking the covers around him and kissing him gently before spending another hour giving instructions to the staff about how to deal with the mood swings and tempers he knew Caleum would have when he woke to find Draco had left.

He groaned, stretching as his body relaxed into the soft comfort of his bed. Caleum was a restless sleeper, but Draco hadn't been able to refuse when he'd asked him to stay with him the last few nights. He was away so often, it was hard for him to deny Cal anything when they were together.

Draco looked at his watch, groaning. It was nearly 9 a.m. He rubbed a hand briskly over his face, debating taking a short nap before his noon appointment at the office. He tried to visualize the work waiting for him, wondering if any of the correspondence was important enough that it couldn't wait a few more hours. And that didn't even take into consideration all the emails he'd have. Draco jolted to full wakefulness with a start. Emails. Gryffin. Mother of Merlin, he hadn't told Gryffin his trip had been extended. What must the other man be thinking? Draco nearly kicked himself. Things had been going so well, but he hadn't even given the other man a thought while he had been in France tending to Caleum.

He hurried down the hall to his office, almost afraid to check his email. He expected a few angry missives – surely Gryffin wasn't so patient that he'd let a five-day absence go unchecked, especially since Draco had promised he'd only be out of contact for a few days at most.

He scanned through the emails in his inbox, scrolling down until he found one from Gryffin. Curious, he thought. There was only one, and it was dated the day he left. He opened it quickly.

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Sunday, May 25, 2008 11:42 p.m.

Re: Thank you, thank you!

Dear Sly,

The wine was absolutely lovely. How kind of you to remember it is my favorite. I enjoyed it with a creamy mushroom risotto, though I may have had too many glasses since I ate alone and had no one to share it with.

I'd like to expedite the process as well. I was thinking of you tonight, and I realized that although we've exchanged several emails I still don't know anything about what you do or the things that are important to you.

I am a writer. A mystery writer, to be exact. I've published several successful novels, and I'm working on another. (Or rather, I'm supposed to be working on another. I've found it hard to concentrate lately. Whenever I'm at my computer I find myself wondering about you, not writing as I should be.)

I live alone in a rambling old townhome in London that is far too gloomy. Contrary to the gay stereotype, I have no decorating talent, nor any wish to take charge of that sort of thing, even in my own home. I'm a rather hopeless case, I suppose, surrounded by ugly inherited furnishings and moldy portraits that hate me. I suppose I've not gotten rid of the portraits because their insults are almost comforting; they remind me of my childhood.

I've definitely had too much of that gorgeous Shiraz, as I've quite obviously passed into maudlin territory. I'd better close before I say something even more embarrassing.

Anyway, here's my idea. Let's do some word association. I'll email you a few words and you reply with what immediately comes to mind. No self-editing, no worrying about offending each other. Deal?

Let's get started.

Argyle. Potions. Wrackspurts. Christmas.

I hope your business trip went well. I'll be eagerly awaiting your return.

Gryffin

Damn it, Draco thought, reading the email through a second time, I wonder if I've completely blown it. He hesitated, unsure of what to do. Should he email Gryffin with his apologies, telling him about the unforeseen personal crisis that kept him away? No, Draco decided. He couldn't tell Gryffin about Caleum; he had no idea how the other man would react, and he didn't know him well enough to risk it. Caleum was an absolute in Draco's life; nothing would ever come between them. To accept Draco would be to accept Caleum. He was the reason Draco had ended all of his previous relationships; he'd never gotten close enough to any of them to tell them about Caleum. He'd come close, once, but Blaise had intervened and advised him not to. He had been right. It turned out the man had a sister who worked for the Daily Prophet – Draco was sure the temptation to sell Caleum's identity and his relation to Draco would have been too much to ignore for him.

He was too tired to think straight, so he was clearly in no condition to respond to Gryffin's email. But the man had been waiting nearly a week for a reply, and it seemed unconscionably cruel to put him off any longer. Besides, Draco's exhaustion leveled the playing field; it made him nearly as vulnerable as Gryffin had been when he wrote his last email half-drunk.

Draco called for a house-elf to bring some strong tea and sat down to start writing.

Back to Index

Chapter 4: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They aren't mine.

***

Harry woke cranky. There had been no word from Sly for days, and on top of that Hermione was pushing him to meet his latest deadline.

"James Evans does not miss deadlines, Harry!" she had said, standing over him and shaking his mostly finished manuscript for emphasis.

"Are you this much of a tyrant with your other clients?" he asked petulantly, grabbing the stack of paper from her hands and slamming it down on the desk.

Hermione's gaze sharpened, and Harry knew he was in trouble.

"As a matter of fact, I am much stricter with my other clients, Harry. I've tried to coddle you lately, since I know you're excited about this mystery man and the anonymous relationship you two seem to be starting. But it can't interfere with your work – I won't let it. You have a deadline next week, and you still haven't finished the manuscript. I know you have three best-sellers under your belt, Harry, but Abigail won't wait."

Harry had been writing his wildly popular Auror series for three years. He started after a bad injury in the field had shaken him up enough to quit the Auror division. Ron thought he was mental; they'd wanted nothing more than to be Aurors for years, and after only five years – two of those spent in training – Harry was walking away.

It hadn't felt like walking away to Harry, though. It had felt like walking into a new beginning, one where he could do whatever he wanted and be judged on the merit of his work instead of the scar on his forehead. And so James Evans was born, along with a crack team of fictional Aurors who solved wickedly complicated crimes in 300 pages or less.

Hermione had been the one to suggest he start writing, though her original idea had been a set of memoirs. Harry had no interest in rehashing his past for all the world to see, though Merlin knew enough unauthorized biographies of Harry Potter had cropped up after the end of the war. He had been intrigued by writing about some of the odder crimes he had worked on as an Auror, which had led to the idea of a series about Aurors who specialize in hard-to-solve cases and tricky spell work. Hermione had been working in an unfulfilling job at a wizarding publishing house, languishing in its textbook division. They made the decision to set up shop on their own, and both had been successful ever since. Hermione now represented dozens of authors, making a tidy commission off of all of them, most of all Harry.

Whatever Harry had been about to say in his own defense was stopped by the faint ping that accompanied a new email. His gaze dropped to the screen, and he nearly shouted when he saw an email from Sly.

Hermione immediately softened when she saw his expression. He really was hopeless, she decided.

"Fine. Read it. But then you owe me three chapters, Harry Potter. You won't leave this house until I have them."

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Friday, May 30, 2008 9:15 a.m.

Re: Sorry, sorry, sorry

Gryffin,

I can't apologize enough. I've been away longer than I expected, and I really should have found a way to let you know my return had been postponed. I have no defense; I can only offer you my apologies and promise you that I feel absolutely horrid about my lapse.

Supposing you still want to continue our communiqués after my atrocious behavior, I'll answer those questions you posed. The word association is a little Rorschach, but I'm game.

Argyle. Well, most people probably think of socks, but the word brings to mind my first real pet, a purebred Crup named Argyle Hestid Artemus III. I called him Argie. I had him until I went to Hogwarts.

Potions. I was a Slytherin. Need I say more?

Wrackspurts. I hope this doesn't mean you are a Quibbler subscriber. We might have to call this quits if you are. Seriously, Wrackspurts?

Christmas. Underneath my hard Slytherin exterior beats the heart of a true Christmas sap. I love Christmas with all the traditional trappings.

My turn, then? That is, if you're still speaking – or writing, I should say – to me. We've been so above-board up until now, but I think I'd like to get to know another side of you. So … treacle tart, house-elves and wanking. Those are your topics.

I'm sending you something as a bribe for your forgiveness. Don't make plans for dinner tonight, and look for a delivery from the agency.

With heartfelt apology,

Sly

Harry felt like he was on an emotional rollercoaster. He'd initially been giddy to hear from Sly, then angry that the other man hadn't had the consideration to email him when his trip was extended. That segued into the warm, fuzzy feeling he got while reading Sly's playful answers to his questions, which became a slight tingle of anticipation and desire when he read Sly's questions. And then, of course, irritation, since Hermione came back 10 minutes after Harry had finished reading (and re-reading) Sly's message and forced him to close down his email altogether so he could write without distraction.

"I'm glad he hasn't fallen off the face of the Earth, Harry," she said slightly condescendingly. "And you're right; he was terribly rude to leave his response this long. Now shut the bloody hell up and get to work!"

That had been an hour ago, and Harry was still no closer to finishing the chapters Hermione had demanded before making a dramatic Floo exit. He sighed, rubbing his face with his hands. His band of streetwise and hardened Aurors were stuck in a warehouse in Kent that had been struck by Fiendfyre; they had to find their way out without using magic, which would trip the wards left by the evil wizards they were chasing. The characters had been on the brink of death for weeks; Harry had tried writing the last three chapters of the book over and over again, but nothing worked.

He stood, pushing his chair back and making his way into the kitchen to brew some coffee. He loved tea, but situations like this one called for coffee, he thought. He was two days out from his final deadline, and he had no clear plan of attack. He couldn't focus. His mind slipped back to Sly's latest email, and Harry laughed as he pictured a pre-teen Sly with a loyal Crup tagging along behind him. He had no way of knowing what Sly looked like now, let alone then, but his imagination was rich.

He measured out the coffee, finding comfort in the ritual. Harry leaned against the counter, toying with a magnet shaped like a Snitch he had taken off the refrigerator, while he waited for his coffee to brew. The thought of Sly having a beloved childhood pet made him even more attractive, though Harry couldn't work out why. He guessed it was because it made him sound so normal – Harry's first pet had been Hedwig, and Merlin knew there had been no normalcy in his childhood.

His body tensed as pieces started falling into place – his thoughts of Sly and his childhood Crup had somehow led Harry straight to the answers he needed to finish his book. Coffee forgotten, Harry dashed back to his laptop and began typing furiously, grinning as he immortalized Sly's Crup in the pages of the

latest James Evans novel.

***

“They’re saved by a Crup?” Hermione asked, her brow raised skeptically.

“Just read it, Hermione! The Aurors are found by this Crup, who leads them safely out of the building. After that it’s simply a matter of a few diagnostic spells on the wards, which help the team figure out where the baddies are hiding so they can arrest them. Another perfectly cut-and-dried ending for James Evans and his Aurors,” Harry said with a smile.

Hermione accepted the mug of coffee Harry extended toward her, folding her legs beneath her as she sat in the large, comfy chair he offered. She pulled his computer into her lap, balancing the mug on the arm of the chair.

Harry sat across from her, his elbows on his knees, studying Hermione’s face as she read. She was his agent, but more than that she was his biggest fan, and his toughest critic. If the ending was pants, she’d let him know. Hermione’s lips pursed in concentration as she scrolled through the last three chapters of his novel, occasionally reaching out for her mug to take a sip of the strong, sweet coffee Harry had given her. He was just about to jump out of his skin when she finally looked up with a huge smile.

“I’d say James Evans has done it again. A Crup, though? Where in the world did you come up with that?”

Harry released a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. He gave Hermione a lopsided grin, his cheeks pinking slightly in embarrassment.

“You’ll never believe this, but I got the idea from Sly. We’ve been trying to get to know each other, and it turns out he had a Crup named Argyle when he was a boy,” Harry said sheepishly. “I was thinking about him when this ending just fell into place.”

Hermione sent him a stern look that was entirely ruined by the twinkle in her eyes.

“I thought I told you to stop thinking about that man so you could focus on your writing, Harry James Potter,” she scolded, waggling an index finger at him. “I suppose I’m glad you didn’t, or we might still be waiting on the end of your novel. It’s brilliant. I’ll take the draft over to Abigail in the morning.”

Hermione stood, transferring the laptop back to the table. She picked up her mug, taking one last swallow of now-tepid coffee, and carried it into the kitchen to place in the sink. Harry rifled around on his desk until he came up with the disc, which he held out for her.

“Really excellent work, Harry, truly,” she said, kissing his cheek and taking the disc. “I’ll Fire-call you tomorrow after I meet with your editor.”

Harry waved as Hermione stepped into the Floo, headed home. He stared at the green flames for a second before walking back to the kitchen, wondering what Sly had meant when he had told Harry not to make plans for dinner. He knew it was still too soon for the two of them to meet, and the agency wouldn’t give out his identity without his permission. He had just poured himself a glass of wine when a knock sounded at his door.

Pansy held up a wicker basket when Harry opened the door. He was surprised to see her on his doorstep, and she looked a little uncomfortable being there herself.

“I have a delivery from another one of my clients. We’d usually send something like this via owl, but the basket is rather heavy,” she said, shifting her grip on the handle. Harry reached out without thinking, taking the basket from her to ease her burden. She sighed in relief.

“Obviously, I can’t tell you who sent the gift, but he said you were expecting it,” she continued, searching Harry’s face for confirmation.

“Oh, yes. He said he’d be sending something through the agency today, though I have no idea what it is,”

he said, lifting the flap on the basket curiously. Harry gasped when he saw what was inside; the small basket was obviously magical, since the interior held what looked like a several-course meal big enough to feed a small army.

“That’s why he said not to make plans for dinner,” Harry said softly, stepping back into his flat and placing the basket on the dining room table.

Pansy lingered in the doorway, unsure of what to do. Unlike Harry, she knew exactly who had sent that basket. And unlike the sender, she also knew exactly who it had gone to. Could Draco really be falling for Harry Potter? It must be serious if he had cooked for him; Draco was a fabulous cook, but he only bothered to share his gift with those he truly cared for.

Harry belatedly realized Pansy was still in the doorway, and he gestured for her to come in as he began to explore the contents of the basket. The food had Warming and Preservation charms on it, which meant it would taste as fresh as it had been when Sly prepared it earlier that day. Harry smiled.

“It looks like he’s made more than enough for one,” Harry said, looking up at Pansy. “Would you like to join me?”

Pansy gave him a small smile. If Draco really had made that food, there was no question it would taste marvelous, and she’d bet her company that there were a few bottles of excellently paired wine inside that seemingly bottomless basket as well.

“No, thanks, Harry. I have to get home,” she said, nodding. “I hope your experience with the agency is going well. Please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you need anything.”

Harry grinned. Things were going fabulously well, if this basket was any indication.

“I’m pleased so far,” he said. “Thanks again for bringing this by.”

***

“I take everything back I said about this internet dating thing, Harry,” Ron said, sighing in delight after finishing his second piece of Pavlova, a large meringue shell that had been filled with fresh raspberries soaked in Framboise.

Harry had passed on the dessert, choosing instead to have a third glass of the smoky Pinot Noir Sly sent to accompany the meal. It paired perfectly with the tender grilled salmon with a slightly spicy chili Hollandaise sauce that had been the main course. The meal began with delicate buckwheat blinis piled with caviar and crème fraîche, the perfect combination of salty and creamy, followed by a rich leek soup. Sly’s choice of Pinot Noir had gone perfectly with each course, surprising Harry. The light-bodied wine was one of his favorites, but he had never paired it with fish before. The smoky spiciness of the wine had been the perfect complement, however, and Harry let his mouthful of wine rest of his palate for a moment before swallowing, picking out notes of tart cranberry and spicy clove.

“Did he cook this himself?” Hermione asked, nibbling on the crunchy meringue.

Harry smiled wistfully. Sly had included a note in the basket – which, in addition to the food, had also included a full table service for four, complete with silver candlesticks, tapers and a bouquet of gorgeous magnolia blossoms.

“He said he did. The flowers are from his greenhouse, too. He said he has several magnolia trees there, and he uses a Stasis spell to keep them blossoming all year round because he loves the lemony scent so much.”

Harry looked up, suddenly aware that both Hermione and Ron were staring at him.

“What?”

Hermione shook her head, her warm brown eyes unsure.

“It sounds like you’re falling for him, Harry,” she said carefully. “We’re just worried that you’re going to get hurt. This is hardly conventional, you know. You’re becoming attached to someone you’ve never even met.”

Harry took another swallow of wine to curb his sharp retort. He knew Ron and Hermione were only looking out for him, but he didn’t want or need their advice on this. It felt right; he couldn’t describe it, and he didn’t want to sully it by trying.

“I appreciate that, I do,” he said, holding up a hand to prevent Hermione from interrupting him. “But I’m hardly a conventional bloke, am I? I’m enjoying myself. I’ve never had the chance to get to know a potential partner slowly like this; they always know everything about me before I know anything about them.”

He shook his head ruefully, standing and starting to clear the table. The china Sly had provided was rimmed in platinum. He ran a finger around the edge of the plate, wishing he was touching Sly instead.

“Whatever happens, happens. We’ve made no promises to each other, aside from discretion. It was just dinner, Hermione, not a marriage proposal.”

She frowned, collecting the crystal stemware Sly had sent along with the wine. She and Harry cleared the rest of the table in silence, carrying it all to the kitchen. Hermione looked around, watching as Harry discretely fingered the delicate neck of a wine glass. Sighing, she aimed her wand at the sink and filled it with hot, soapy water.

Harry looked up, surprised. Hermione shrugged, picking up a stack of plates and moving them to the sink.

“This is bone china and crystal, Harry,” she said, shaking her head and plunging her hands into the suds. “Scourgify is too rough for delicate pieces like these. You obviously want to keep them, so that leaves the

old-fashioned way."

Ron sidled up to the sink holding a dish cloth, drying the pieces Hermione handed him without a word. Years spent in his mother's kitchen had trained him well. Harry beamed at his two oldest friends, wondering if life really got any better than this.

***

Harry snuggled down further into the bedclothes, pulling the duvet up higher on his chest. He'd climbed into bed with his laptop to respond to Sly, but he wasn't sure what to say. The dinner he had sent over had been an incredibly sweet gesture, as had the hand-written note that had accompanied it. Harry reached across his pillow to grab the now-wrinkled note, written in firm, neat strokes on heavy cream parchment.

My dear Gryffin,

Words cannot express how sorry I am to have caused you distress, but food can. We both have a weakness for fine food and wine, so I hope you will accept this meal in the spirit it is meant: Abject groveling.

It is my hope this will be the first of many meals we will share, even though we are not partaking in it together. I am also enclosing a bouquet of magnolia blossoms, grown in my own greenhouse. The lemony blossoms remind me of the fresh, new starts of spring; I hope we can have a fresh start too. Someday we'll have a picnic under the trees these came from, which are perpetually in bloom thanks to a Stasis charm my favorite Herbologist taught me. He has warned me repeatedly that living things need to cycle through all of their life stages to thrive, and by keeping these trees at the height of their fragrant blooming period I am preventing them from growing and maturing into the strong, sturdy trees they are meant to be.

I suppose he meant it not only as a horticultural lesson but also as a metaphor for life in general. I've spent the last few years in stasis, afraid to move forward in any of my relationships because of the risks

that entails. It's too early to say something like this, especially since we haven't even met, but Gryffin, I think I could come out of stasis with you.

I remain your faithful servant,

Sly

Harry smiled sleepily, pushing his computer to the far side of the bed and allowing the letter to settle on the bed. He was too tired and wrung out from finishing his novel to answer tonight, he decided. Sly had given him a lot to think about.

Back to Index

Chapter 5: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. Unfortunately, they don't belong to me.

***

"I know you want to come back to Wiltshire, but I need you to stay there, Cal," Draco said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

He was crouched uncomfortably in front of the fire in his study, trying to reason with an increasingly hysterical Caleum.

“I want to be there. There’s nothing to do here. Why can’t I be there with you?”

“Caleum,” Draco said sternly, “We’ve discussed this. It’s better for you to remain in France where you won’t be constantly hounded by reporters. You know I love having you at the Manor, and I hate when I have to leave you, but it’s for your own good.”

Cal’s lip trembled, his boyish pout softening Draco’s resolve. He knew he didn’t see Caleum enough, but it was just too risky have him here in England where they could be seen together.

“Listen, Cal, how about I bring Blaise when I come for lunch today? We’ll have the house-elves pack us a picnic to take down to the vineyard.”

Draco pulled his head out of the fire when he heard a noise behind him. Blaise had entered the room and was crouching down next to him.

“Hey, Cal! What’s this I hear about lunch?” he asked, watching as Caleum’s grin returned.

“Uncle Blaise! Dad said we can have a picnic! Can we eat on a blanket and everything?”

Draco smiled at his son’s one-track mind. Not two minutes ago he had been begging to leave France, and now he was content to stay so long as he got to eat on a blanket.

“Whatever you want, Cal. I’ll have the house-elves make us some of your favorites, and we can go riding afterward. Alright?”

The boy nodded, disappearing without saying goodbye. Jumping up to go harass the house-elves into making his favorite puddings, no doubt, Draco thought dryly.

Draco and Blaise drew back out of the fire, brushing the ashes off their robes as they stood.

“Crisis averted, then?” Blaise asked, his eyes crinkling merrily as he smiled.

“So it would seem. You are free for lunch, aren’t you?”

Blaise nodded, taking a seat in the chair across from Draco’s desk. Caleum’s obvious desire to live with Draco full-time was troubling. He’d seen it coming for months; the boy was no longer content to see Draco a few nights a week or on the weekends. He wanted to be able to go out in public with his father, to be able to live where he rightfully should be, at Malfoy Manor. Blaise knew Draco felt torn about it as well. It killed him to be away from his son so much, but at the same time, Caleum could be in danger if the wizarding world knew he was Draco’s son.

Draco gave money to all the right charities, attended all the right functions and supported the Ministry in all the right ways. But at the heart of it, he was still the son of one of the most notorious and blood thirsty of all the Death Eaters, suspected of Dark activity himself. He’d been cleared of all charges after Harry Potter, of all people, had testified at his Wizengamot hearing after the war, but Draco was still something of a social pariah, admired for his looks and money but still not completely accepted. His father had died in Azkaban years earlier, and Narcissa was living in France taking care of Caleum at the Malfoy chateau in Amboise. He was the only Malfoy left in England, which meant he was the only target for peoples’ disdain for his family.

Draco’s wife had divorced him when Caleum was two, tired of essentially living in hiding with the boy. He’d paid her a substantial sum to take an Unbreakable Vow to keep Cal’s existence a secret, and she’d left without so much as a goodbye to her son.

Caleum barely remembered her, but Blaise thought her abandonment might be behind the 6 year old’s sudden clinginess. Poor kid probably worries his father will simply decide not to come back one of these times, too, Blaise thought, his throat tightening at the idea of his sweet little Godson worrying about nonsense like that.

“I wouldn’t miss a picnic dinner and horseback riding for anything,” Blaise said with a wink. “Picnics are

very en vogue at the moment, didn't you know?"

Draco rolled his eyes, but his mind wandered to Gryffin, another person he'd promised to take on a picnic. He hadn't heard from the man yet this morning, but he was confident he'd be forgiven. His buckwheat blinis were irresistible.

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Saturday, May 31, 2008 10:26 a.m.

Re: Apology accepted

Dear Sly,

I'd have written earlier, but I only just roused from my food-induced coma. Dinner was amazing; consider yourself forgiven.

I find your emails addicting, but crafting witty responses takes up entirely too much of my day. So let's do this speed-dating style, shall we? Just the questions and answers. Same rules as before.

Treacle tart. The best pudding ever invented.

House-elves. Barmy creatures. (I grew up among Muggles, remember?) One of the finest beings I ever had the pleasure of knowing was a house-elf. He died in the war.

Wanking. Very much in favor. Though no substitute for actual human contact, which I'm sorely missing right now.

And now for you. Let's try: Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans, mystery novels, bondage.

Gryffin

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Sunday, June 1, 2008 7:15 a.m.

Re: Things are heating up, eh?

Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans. Yuck.

Mystery novels. Currently obsessed with the Auror series by James Evans. I tried to get my copy of his last book signed, but the line was around the block. Now you know my dirty little secret.

Bondage. Ooh, yes please. Being tied up is sexy; tying someone else up is even better.

Muggle films. Brunch. Kids.

Sly

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Sunday, June 1, 2008 4:32 p.m.

Re: Films?!?

Muggle films. Muggle films are my guilty pleasure. Even my best friends don't know I'm addicted to romantic comedies. I love sitting in a dark theatre with buttery popcorn and a larger-than-life love interest on the screen.

Brunch. Not a fan. The mixing of breakfast and lunch foods seems unnatural. Gah.

Kids. This is starting to get heavy. I love kids, but I don't have any of my own. Yet.

Kids. Pop music. Hugh Grant.

Gryffin

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Sunday, June 1, 2008 11:26 p.m.

Re: Hugh bloody Grant?!?

Kids. I love kids, too.

Pop music. I assume you mean the Muggle variety, not the wizarding variety. I hold both in low regard, at any rate.

Hugh Grant. The epitome of boyish good looks. If his movies are the ones you sneak out to see, I'm sure we've crossed paths in those darkened theatres. I'd have been the one eating malted milk balls.

Polo shirts. Iced coffee. Kingsley Shacklebolt.

Sly

***

"He's going to be embarrassed he told you that, Harry, when he finds out you are James Evans," Hermione said, her voice a bit scolding.

He and the mystery man had been corresponding with increasing frequency over the last three weeks, shooting questions back and forth all day (and night) long, and they still hadn't come any closer to revealing their identities.

Harry had learned that the other man worked in the corporate world and that he was secretly obsessed with Muggle cuff links and had more than 40 pairs, but nothing that would identify him. Likewise, Harry had told him a lot about himself, but nothing that would give away who he was. His favorite bit of information so far, though, had been Sly's revelation that he loved James Evans a few weeks back.

That couldn't be a bad thing, right? Harry wondered, frowning as he wondered if Sly thought the author was attractive. He used an extensive glamour for his publicity shots and his book tours, changing everything about himself. James Evans was his height and weight, since those were beastly to change, but he was blond, with grey eyes and striking features. A bit like Draco Malfoy, Harry thought with a laugh, looking at the latest photo of the reclusive aristocrat on the front page of the Prophet. He didn't bother reading the article – likely more drivel about who the slimy Slytherin was dating now.

"You really seem to like him, Harry. You should come clean about who you are," Hermione said, tapping her quill against the parchment she was poring over absentmindedly. She was in the middle of a tense contract negotiation with one of her other authors, and Harry doubted she was really that engaged in their conversation.

"I suppose you're right, Hermione. I could send him a few naked pictures of myself in my next email; that would clear things right up," he said, testing his theory.

Hermione didn't raise her head, but Harry jumped when the mild Stinging Hex hit him. So she was listening, then.

"Some of us are capable of doing more than one thing at once," she chided, turning the page of the contract. "I'm paying attention, but I'm not sure you are. I've been giving you the same advice for two weeks now, and you keep asking me the same questions."

It was true. Harry wanted to get to know the real Sly, but he was having a good time exchanging emails and gifts with him, and he didn't want that to end. What if they didn't get along in person? Harry rubbed a hand across the back of his neck, gently squeezing try to dispel the tightness there.

"I know, and I'm sorry, Hermione. You must think me daft, to keep going round and round about this. But I really think there could be something here, and I don't want to muck it up. I hardly have a great track

record, you know," he said, fidgeting with a paperweight as he perched next to Hermione on the desk.

Hermione looked up, the frown she'd been wearing while reading easing. She stood and put her arm around Harry's strong shoulders, leaning in to him.

"Life's about taking chances, Harry. You could bollocks it up, or you could meet the love of your life. It's a risk you've got to be willing to take."

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Friday, June 20, 2008 2:26 a.m.

Re: Amazing!

Sly,

Sorry I didn't get a chance to email earlier today, but I've been at St. Mungo's with a friend all day. She's been in labor for hours, and the Healers are talking about doing some Muggle procedure called a C-section if things don't progress soon.

I'm just home for a quick change of clothes before heading back. The waiting room is a bloody uncomfortable place, but I suppose it's a damn sight better than what's going on in that room. I wish I could take my laptop with me, but all the spell work at the hospital – not to mention the Floo ride – would fry it for sure.

Oh! Her husband just Fire-called. Things are getting close. I'd better get back. Before I go, though:

American football. Never saw the appeal. I know some people complain because Quidditch games can last days, but American football is worse. It's over in three hours, but it still feels like it's been going forever.

Pedicures. To be honest, I haven't ever had one. They sound heavenly, but my feet are – well – sensitive. I can go from 0 to 60 in about 20 seconds if someone caresses my feet just right.

Cock rings. They kind of scare me. What if it gets stuck?

I got a few strange looks in the waiting room, laughing to myself about your last question. If it's something you highly recommend, I suppose I'd be willing to try it. What do you say, Sly? Should we?

Not sure when I'll be back in touch – depends on how my friend's labor goes.

Rimming. Discos. Marriage.

Gryffin

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Friday, June 20, 2008 8:47 a.m.

Re: Best wishes to your friend

Gryffin,

Hopefully your friend has had her baby already. From what I've heard, labor can be grueling. Kind of makes me thankful I'm a bloke.

Rimming. Makes me really thankful I'm a bloke. If you're serious about meeting soon, this will definitely be on the agenda.

Discos. Funny you should bring this up now. I'm in the middle of a closing on a building that will become a club soon, if we play our cards right. I'm not big on discos myself, but I trust that the guy I'm investing in knows what he's doing.

Marriage. I debated not telling you this, but I think things are going well, and I'm rather anxious to meet you in person soon. So here goes. I've been married. (And am now divorced.)

How about we meet up next month? My schedule is horrible through the rest of June, and I have a commitment the first week of July, but I'm relatively sure I'm free that second weekend. Want to make it a date?

Guinness. Opera. Handcuffs.

Sly

***

Harry knocked on the door quietly, worried about waking Ginny if she was sleeping. She called out cheerily, so he opened the door and rushed over to her bed, grinning from ear to ear.

“She’s just brilliant, Gin. Well done!” Theo had caught him on his way to the room and taken him to the nursery to see their daughter, Fredricka. Harry could hardly believe how tiny she was.

“Been waylaid by Theo, have you?” she asked with a grin. She was absolutely glowing. “I can’t get him to come away from the nursery. I’m surprised the mediwitches haven’t kicked him out!”

“He said you were resting. I’m not bothering you, am I? I can come later,” Harry said, unsure of what the protocol for visiting new mothers was.

“I’m fine. We’ve had Freddie in here with us, but I think Theo just wanted some time alone with her,” she said, her eyes sparkling at the thought of her husband bonding with their daughter. “He had to dash out just after she was born for a business meeting, and he felt terrible about that.”

“Everything go alright?” Harry asked, wondering what could possibly have taken Theo away from his wife’s side after her complicated birth.

Ginny smiled and nodded, her eyes traveling to the door when it opened. Harry could literally see her joy when Theo entered, cradling a tiny dark-haired baby in his arms.

“Fine,” she said absently, holding her arms out for Freddie. “Just signing some papers to close a deal on a building.”

Back to Index

Chapter 6: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They belong to JKR.

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@]MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Sunday, June 22, 2008 12:17 p.m.

Re: Yikes

Sly,

Sorry I disappeared on you – my friend did have the baby, and both mother and daughter are doing gorgeously. I had an emergency business meeting yesterday afternoon – I swear, sometimes the things they expect of me are ridiculous – and then I crashed for a few hours. Meeting up in July sounds good – I'm so anxious to finally see you, but I suppose another month won't kill me. I definitely have something that first weekend, so let's plan for the next. That's July 12. Lunch? Dinner? Museum? Film? A bed and a bottle of wine?

Guinness. Not a fan. I have a friend who thinks it's more necessary than air, but I find it too heavy, and the creamy texture is off-putting in a beverage. I call it a beer-shake.

Opera. I admit I'm a bit of a novice, but I like what I've seen. Tales of Hoffman was the last one.

Handcuffs. I prefer a well-cast Incarcerous. Ropes are much sexier than metal.

Curry. Iago. Cake.

Gryffin

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@]MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Sunday, June 22, 2008 1:26 p.m.

Re: All of the above?

Gryffin,

A bed and a bottle of wine sound superb, but it doesn't rule out the other suggestions. How about lunch and a film first, and the rest later if things go well?

I've never put Incarcerous to that use before, very inventive. I'd love to see the look on Flitwick's face if he knew what his former student was using the handy spell for now. I'm not wrong, am I? You did have him at Hogwarts, yes?

Curry. I may be brought up on charges of treason to admit this, but I've never found a curry I particularly liked. The flavors are too jumbled. I'm open to try again, however, if you've a suggestion for

one I might like.

Iago. I hope he made the list because you like him. Most people hate his character, but I sympathize with him. Yes, he's dark, selfish and cruel, but I still think he's the best character in Othello. I'm always drawn to brooding characters with shadowy motivations – it's why Heathcliff is a favorite as well. What does that say about me, I wonder?

Cake. Again, not a big fan. We never had it growing up, since my parents preferred more sophisticated desserts.

Floo travel. Horses. Exhibitionism.

Sly

***

"He's amazing, Blaise," Draco said earnestly, his slender fingers stroking the stack of papers that sat on his desk. "Did you see this? I told him I liked James Evans in passing, weeks ago. Yesterday he sends me this – it's James Evan's newest book, not even on the market yet!"

Draco's eyes were alight, and he gestured animatedly as he spoke. Blaise grinned; it was a real treat to see his best friend so happy.

"It's not even to be released until August, and Gryffin manages to get me a copy!"

Blaise nodded, schooling his features into an appropriately awed expression. He actually had no idea

who James Evans was; he assumed he must be an author of some sort, obviously one Draco was fond of.

“And last week he sent me a bottle of cask-aged Balsamic Vinegar of Modena,” Draco continued, oblivious to Blaise’s blank look. “Just because I said I liked a good aged balsamic on strawberries.”

This gushing, ebullient side to Draco wasn’t one Blaise had ever seen before, but his amusement was tempered with caution. He could tell Draco was getting emotionally invested in this Gryffin – something he almost never did.

“He seems brilliant, Draco. Have you made plans to meet yet?” Blaise knew full well they hadn’t, but he’d been nudging Draco in that direction for weeks

“No, not yet,” Draco said, frowning slightly. “I’m not sure I’m ready, Blaise. What if he has a horrid reaction to my identity? I just don’t want to lose whatever it is that we’ve got going on.”

Blaise’s mouth tightened, but he didn’t rush to reassure his friend. They both knew Draco’s worries were valid; many people harbored distrust or even outright hatred toward him, despite the fact that he’d been cleared of any wrongdoing after the war. Hell, Blaise thought, just look at how he keeps his son cloistered away from the public. No one but Draco’s closest friends even knew Caleum existed.

Draco’s need for privacy was more for his son than for himself; the first – and last – time a reporter took a photo of Caleum out in public Draco had snapped, very nearly broken the man’s neck, not just his camera. He’d let him go with a simple Memory charm and a smashed camera, but he’d taken extra precautions ever since. Blaise understood Draco’s reluctance to take things further with Gryffin. Though they hadn’t even met yet, the relationship between Draco and the mystery man was already deeper than any he’d had with his other lovers.

Blaise thought about the last few men who Draco had taken into his bed, which was how he always thought of it. They certainly weren’t part of Draco’s life – not the way Gryffin had become. He wondered briefly how Cal would react to the man, if it ever got that far, grimacing as he compared what he knew of Gryffin to the host of other partners Draco had been through. The thought of his Godson being raised by any of Draco’s old lovers was abhorrent.

“How does he feel about kids?”

Draco smiled slightly, his hands brushing the manuscript on his desk again absently.

“He says he wants a family,” Draco said, his tone wistful, but slightly sad. “He seems different from the others, but I still wouldn’t tell him about Cal until after we’d met.”

Draco frowned, his eyes moving from the stack of papers to Blaise’s concerned face. As much as he was interested in Gryffin – and Merlin knew, he really wanted this to work out – he wouldn’t do anything that risked Cal’s safety.

“Maybe not even then.”

***

Hermione fussed with Harry’s newly lightened and lengthened hair, tucking it behind his ear and then changing her mind, roughing up the blond strands.

“Stop it,” he snapped, pushing her hands away. He hated wearing his glamour, but he knew it was necessary. Still, couldn’t the publisher just use his old photo? Did he really need to have new shots taken? He’d argued for a good half an hour at the emergency meeting he’d been summoned to a few days earlier, finally giving in so he could get back to St. Mungo’s to see how Ginny was progressing. “And I want it shorter. This looks ridiculous.”

Hermione frowned, squinting at Harry’s image in the mirror in front of them. The stylist hovered nearby, scissors raised, waiting for the verdict.

“The publishing house asked for a more youthful look,” she said, biting her lip as she studied him carefully. “They wanted this latest photo to be hip and sexy.”

Harry snorted, rolling his eyes. The expression in the mirror looked vaguely familiar, though he couldn’t figure out why. He usually avoided catching a glimpse of his alter ego while wearing the glamour – it was disconcerting to see himself wearing a different face.

“Alright,” she said, throwing her hands up in the air. “Shorter, then. Tousled, though. Sexy.”

The stylist nodded, shortening Harry’s blond hair with a few deft snips. Flaxen strands fell to the floor, the uneven cut transforming Harry’s face. He watched, fascinated, as the shape of the new cut emerged. He did look sexier.

“Excellent,” Hermione said, narrowing her eyes to take a critical look at Harry’s new haircut.

“It’s all the rage right now,” the stylist said, grinning as she made another pass over Harry’s head, making sure the newly shortened locks were artfully arranged. “Especially with blonds.”

“Really?” Harry asked, turning his head to get a better view. The cut was flattering and attractive, but hardly something he’d have requested.

“Yes,” she giggled, spraying Harry’s hair with a potion that would keep it in place for the photo shoot. “It’s called the Draco.”

Harry choked on the water he’d just taken a sip of, his wide eyes meeting the stylist’s in the mirror.

“The Draco?” he asked, incredulous. He only knew of one Draco. Bloody hell, he thought, taking another close look at himself in the mirror. Draco sodding Malfoy?

“It’s how Draco Malfoy wears his hair,” the stylist simpered, confirming Harry’s fears. “It’s a shame, really. All the good ones seem to be gay.”

Malfoy is gay? Harry wondered, turning his head again to study his reflection. He’d never noticed before, but his glamour did look a bit like the Slytherin git. Last he’d heard, Malfoy had been married, but apparently that had changed. He couldn’t say he blamed the poor woman – being shackled to Malfoy for the rest of your life had to be a hellish proposition. Suddenly, the photos he’d seen of Malfoy with a host of other men in the pages of the Prophet for the last few years took on a new meaning. He’d assumed it had been speculation and gossip, but maybe not. Not that it matters to me, he thought dismissively, squinting at his reflection. He hated wearing contacts.

“All finished, Mr. Evans,” the stylist chirped, blushing as he smiled and thanked her.

“Let’s get this over with,” Harry sighed, following Hermione’s lead toward the studio.

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@]MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, June 24, 2008 11:47 p.m.

Re: Delicious

Gryffin,

I stand corrected. I’ve eaten every bit of the amae-thar-hin you sent over earlier. My deeply ingrained sense of propriety is the only thing that held me back from licking the plate. It was delicious. You were right – I’d never tried a Burmese curry. You’ll have to give me the recipe, or – dare I hope? – make it for

me again sometime, in person.

Thanks for the advance copy of James Evans' newest book as well. I don't know how you managed it, but it was as hard to put down as the curry. I've had a wonderful evening, curled up in front of the fire with the manuscript and dinner. I have a bottle of wine from a small label in France to send to you, but I think we should wait a few days – the messenger from MDO was a bit put out by two deliveries from you in as many days.

Sly

***

"He liked it," Harry said, grinning like an idiot.

Hermione sighed at the disembodied green head currently filling her Floo, shaking her head.

"I can't believe you sent him the manuscript, Harry," she chided, her voice stern. She really didn't like where this was heading – if Harry didn't fess up to his identity soon, this Sly person might never forgive him. "You should have told him you are James Evans. He's going to be mortified that he's gushed over it when he finds out Gryffin wrote it."

Harry's smile faltered slightly, and Hermione's heart lurched. She wanted this to work out so badly for her friend – he deserved someone who was as sweet, kind and caring as this internet pen pal seemed to be. That was the problem, though. He might be none of those things in actuality, which was the reason she was pressing for a meeting between the two of them.

“You think so?” Harry asked, his voice crestfallen. He’d just read the glowing email from Sly, excited that the man had spent the evening curled up reading his words and eating his food. It was almost as if they’d spent that time together.

“Oh, Harry,” she said, her tone exasperated. “Budge over. I’m coming through.”

Hermione’s head disappeared for a moment, and Harry could faintly hear her yelling something to Ron about popping out for a bit. Seconds later, the green flames leapt, and Hermione stepped out into Harry’s study.

“I don’t think he’ll be upset that you’re James Evans, exactly,” she said carefully, picking up their conversation seamlessly as she settled on the comfortable sofa. Harry followed her lead, perching in a chair and leaning forward. “But you should have told him immediately when he told you he liked the books so much. He’ll be mortified, don’t you think?”

Harry was silent for a moment, finally nodding with a heavy sigh. Hermione was right. He hadn’t done it to intentionally embarrass Sly, much the opposite, in fact, but she had a point.

“Do you think I should tell him now?” Harry asked, his fingers absently worrying the fraying fabric on the arm of the chair.

“Could you mention it casually?” she asked hopefully, her eyes traveling to Harry’s laptop on the desk, seeking permission. He nodded, and she jumped up, eager to read the latest missive from Harry’s anonymous suitor.

Harry watched the smile play across her face as she read Sly’s words, knowing she’d reached the part hoping for a face-to-face meeting.

“We are meeting, you know,” he said, smiling shyly when her head snapped up, eyes wide. “The weekend after your wedding. It’s the earliest time we’ve both have a day free.”

Hermione calculated dates in her head, trying not to panic when thoughts of her impending wedding – and the giant list of things she had to do to prepare for it – popped into her head.

"That's nearly three weeks from now," she said, her lips pursed. "Couldn't you meet for coffee some night? Does it really have to be all day?"

Harry laughed, a fond grin spreading across his face. With everything they'd shared over the last month and a half, he felt like he knew Sly very well. He didn't think either of them would be satisfied by a quick coffee.

"I'll take that as a yes," Hermione said, fighting a smile. She really did love seeing Harry so excited, even if it was tempered with concern that this entire online dating thing could blow up in his face rather badly. Her eyes narrowed as another thought occurred to her. "You won't be distracted during my wedding, Harry Potter! You're the best man, and you've got to be –"

Harry rolled his eyes, shaking his head.

"I've got responsibilities, yes. I know, Hermione. Namely getting Ron there on time with his robes on the right way. Everything will go beautifully," he said, ducking when she threw something at him. The Muggle pen bounced off the wall, skittering across the floor.

"It will," he said, serious now. "You and Molly have done a fabulous job, and Fleur will be there directing everything. The dress is gorgeous, and you'll be stunning. You know Ron's just as excited as you are."

She nodded, her cheeks flushed.

"Besides, what's the worst thing that could happen? You've planned for every possible contingency," he joked, stretching to pick up the pen. After all these years, he still preferred them to quills. "What are you so worried about? The best man getting into a brawl with one of the guests?"

He grinned cheekily, holding his fists up and waving them menacingly. She laughed at the ridiculous picture – Harry hated violence. It was one of the reasons he'd been injured so badly before he quit the Auror department – he rarely used spells that could do any real harm, even when others weren't holding back against him.

"Yes, that's it exactly," she giggled, closing Harry's laptop and heading back toward the Floo. She'd left Ron alone in the kitchen, which meant breakfast was probably a disaster. "I'll see you later, Harry. Think about what I said, alright? You should tell him who you are – or at least that you're James Evans – before you meet."

***

To: All Magical Dating Online clients

From: Director@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Wednesday, June 25, 2008 8:01 a.m.

Re: New services

Greetings to all our faithful clients,

We at Magical Dating Online thank you for making us one of the top magical dating agencies in Great Britain. It is our belief that everyone's true match is out there somewhere, and we are confident we can help you with all your magical dating needs.

As part of our quest to serve you better, we have added a chat feature to our web site. Many clients have requested this service, and we are happy to announce it is now live. Detailed instructions can be found on the Magical Dating Online FAQ page.

We at Magical Dating Online wish you the best in your search for love.

Thank you for your patronage, and remember, true love is only a click away.

Pansy Parkinson-Wood and the Magical Dating Online Web team

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@]MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Wednesday, June 25, 2008 9:42 a.m.

Fw: New services

Well?

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@]MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Wednesday, June 25, 2008 10:11 a.m.

Re: Fw: New services

Tonight? I'm free at 9 p.m.

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@]MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Wednesday, June 25, 2008 12:01 p.m.

Re: Re: Fw: New services

It's a date.

Back to Index

Chapter 7: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. I don't own 'em, I just play with them from time to time.

***

Harry sank into his desk chair, exhausted from a full day of editorial meetings for his latest book. The publisher had been pleased with his new photo for the book jacket, but now the publicist wanted him to agree to a three-week tour and media junket.

Sounds lovely, he thought, popping open a bottle of Butterbeer. He'd prefer something stronger, but he wanted all his wits about him when he spoke with Sly online. Harry perked up at the thought, taking a long draw from the bottle as he booted his laptop.

He knew Hermione would do her best to negotiate a shorter tour, knowing that Harry hated public appearances. Keeping up the glamour was draining, and he disliked being in large crowds. He hadn't been comfortable as the center of attention years ago, and he still wasn't now. Wearing a face that wasn't his made it somewhat easier, even though he'd recently begun to wonder why he'd chosen the features and coloring he had. Some strange coincidence, he assured himself, his brow furrowed as he tried to remember why if he'd actually modeled the glamour after Malfoy, or if it had just been a fluke.

The bottle clinked against the desk as he put it aside, eager to log in to the Magical Dating Online web site. His day had been even more intolerable because of his eagerness to chat with Sly, making already interminable meetings seem even longer. He had more ahead of him tomorrow, but he couldn't bring himself to care at the moment, since he was so focused on finally chatting with Sly.

MustLoveQuidditch is available for chat.

Harry wrinkled his nose, clicking around to see if there was a way to disable the notification. He wasn't technically available for chat – he only wanted to talk with Sly. He'd arrived in the chat room a few minutes early, and he wondered if that had been a mistake.

Chat request from Hardbody08: red ur profile, wnt 2 chat?

Harry hated Netspeak. Why would I want to talk with you, someone I don't know? he thought uncharitably, closing the window without responding. Bad grammar and spelling should not be rewarded.

Chat request from Daddyto2doggies: Tell me about yourself.

Harry closed that window, too, quickly growing annoyed with the site. If you wanted to know about me, you should have read my profile, nitwit, he thought, his teeth clenched as three more chat requests popped up, none of them from the one user he wanted to talk to, each of them cheesier than the last.

Chat request from IntrospectiveIntellectual: Hey baby, want to cook up something magical with me?

Harry very nearly closed the window, growling out loud at yet another attempt to get his attention with a lame pick up line. At least this one read my profile first, he thought, his eyes scanning the screen as he looked for any sign of Sly. It was several minutes past 9 p.m. – maybe he'd gotten delayed.

Chat request from IntrospectiveIntellectual: Gryffin? You there?

Harry grinned, finally realizing who had sent the last request, clicking away so he and Sly could chat in private.

MustLoveQuidditch has left the room.

IntrospectiveIntellectual has left the room.

MustLoveQuidditch: Sorry, Sly. Didn't notice it was from you.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I thought perhaps you'd reconsidered, turned off by my pick up line.

MustLoveQuidditch: No, it would take more than that to turn me off from you. It just blended in with the rest of the lines that were coming my way. It was worse than the Leaky Cauldron on Singles Night in there.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Don't tell me you've been to the Leaky for that?

MustLoveQuidditch: Only once.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Merlin, that's all it would take, I'm sure. I've never been, but a friend of mine goes regularly.

MustLoveQuidditch: Regularly?!?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: He's a real player. Different witch every week.

MustLoveQuidditch: That explains it, I suppose.

MustLoveQuidditch: So, fancy meeting you here.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Sorry I'm late. We'll have to find out if there's a way to log in directly to the private chat rooms.

MustLoveQuidditch: Merlin, yes. You left me to the wolves out there.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Not for long. And Quititchlvr69 seemed lovely.

MustLoveQuidditch: Yes. I quite like it when a bloke starts off a conversation by asking after the length and girth of my prick.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I notice you didn't answer him.

MustLoveQuidditch: I didn't want to embarrass the room – make them all feel inadequate.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I have no qualms. I'm sure you'll find me more than adequate.

MustLoveQuidditch: A bloke has to have some secrets, after all. Let's leave the show and tell for our real meeting.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: As you wish.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: What do you want to talk about? More word association? I rather enjoy that.

MustLoveQuidditch: I do, too. Maybe later? I have something I need to tell you, something I should have told you earlier.

MustLoveQuidditch: Are you still there?

Introspective Intellectual: I'm here. Are you married?

MustLoveQuidditch: Merlin, no. It's nothing like that.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Diseased?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Dying?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Poor?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Ugly?

MustLoveQuidditch: Stop! You're making it hard to type! Stop joking around. I'm serious.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I've listed the things I couldn't abide – anything you say can't be worse than being ugly or married.

MustLoveQuidditch: Well, remember you said that, yeah?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: You're making this worse, you know. I was a Slytherin. You can't even begin to imagine the things I'm envisioning.

MustLoveQuidditch: Well, then here goes. You know the manuscript I sent you?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: The James Evans book? It's brilliant. I still want to know how you got it. Did you have to sleep with him or something?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: That was a joke. You really didn't sleep with him, did you? Recently, I mean?

MustLoveQuidditch: Something like that.

MustLoveQuidditch: I am James Evans.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Just tell me what it is, Gryffin. Really, it can't be that bad. Stop making things up and just tell me. Do you not want to meet? Do you need more time?

MustLoveQuidditch: No, I really am James Evans. Or rather, James Evans is me. It's a penname.

MustLoveQuidditch: Sly?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: You're James Evans? Fuck. I feel like an idiot.

MustLoveQuidditch: Don't! That's why I didn't want to tell you. I'm glad you enjoy my books.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I can't believe you let me go on like that.

MustLoveQuidditch: No, really. I didn't tell you because I wanted to avoid this.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Well, I'd have figured it out eventually. When we met, at least.

MustLoveQuidditch: Actually, you wouldn't have. That's not what I really look like. It's a glamour.

MustLoveQuidditch: Sly, are you still there?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Yes, just went to get a copy of one of your books. It's a glamour, then?

MustLoveQuidditch: Yes. I'm the same height and build, but other than that I look nothing like James Evans.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Why the cloak and dagger act? Why not put your real name and face on the books?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Gryffin?

MustLoveQuidditch: Still here. I don't know. Just looking to be appreciated on the merit of my writing instead of who I am, I suppose. I'm famous for something I had no control over, and I didn't want that to color the book sales.

MustLoveQuidditch: Plenty of people would buy them just because of who I am, and I didn't want that.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I see. I should go.

MustLoveQuidditch: Sly, wait! I apologize for not telling you sooner. Please don't let this stop what we have going here. I really do want to meet you eventually. It's why I told you in the first place.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I'm sorry too, Gryffin. I need some time to think this over. I'll email you.

IntrospectiveIntellectual has logged out.

Harry sat back, his jaw clenched. Fuck! he thought, closing the web site and shoving the computer roughly away from him. Hermione had been right – as always. He should have warned Sly that he was James Evans when it first came up.

He glanced at the now-warm bottle of Butterbeer on the desk, condensation beading wetly on the outside of the dark glass. He picked it up, throwing it into the fireplace. The resultant crash made him feel slightly better, as did the decision to head to the kitchen to seek out something harder to drown his sorrow.

***

“I think I fucked it up,” Draco said, his head buried in his hands. Blaise crossed his legs, waiting for the blond to explain. “He told me he’s James Evans, and I freaked out.”

The name niggled at Blaise’s mind, but he didn’t know why. Did they know a James Evans? Someone from a younger year at Hogwarts, maybe?

“The author, Blaise,” Draco snapped, lifting his head. Blaise could see the dark smudges under his eyes, his pale skin even chalkier than usual. All the signs of a sleepless night.

Great, Blaise thought, standing to go ask Madge for some tea. Draco was in a mood, which meant it was going to be a long day.

***

Hermione wrinkled her nose as she stepped out of the Floo, the smell of stale whisky immediately evident. She stepped around what looked like part of a broken bottle of Butterbeer, careful not to touch it – or the puddle of liquid next to it – with her shoe.

“Harry?” she called, annoyed that he had missed his appointment earlier that morning. The publishing house was going over final edits to his latest book, and he really needed to be there.

She picked her way through the study, stepping over the scattered pages of Harry’s manuscript, which blanketed the floor. From the looks of it, he’d attempted to review some of the edits and gotten frustrated at some point last night.

“Harry?” she called out again, starting to get worried. It wasn’t like Harry to miss meetings, even ones he didn’t want to attend.

She heard a low groan from the kitchen, quickening her pace until she found the source – Harry, head down on the table, a mostly empty bottle of Ogden’s Best and an overturned glass next to him. Her concern turned to anger, her lips tightening as she took in the scene in front of her.

“Harry James Potter!” she yelled, a small satisfied smile curving her lips when she saw him flinch at the tone and volume of her voice.

He raised his head, regarding her with bleary eyes. He absolutely stank – the sour smell of whisky fairly emanating from his pores. Harry didn’t have a high tolerance for hard alcohol, so she doubted he’d actually finished that much of the open bottle – a suspicion confirmed when she noticed several pools of amber liquid dripping from the table onto the floor.

“‘Mione?” he croaked, blinking as he searched the table for his glasses, not realizing they were still on his face. He swallowed, grimacing at the taste in his mouth, and rubbed his eyes, the action pushing his glasses aside. He took them off, regarding them with surprise before replacing them and clearing his throat. “Hermione.”

She glared at him, crossing the kitchen – skirting the spilled Firewhisky – to get him a glass of water,

which he gulped gratefully. She started a pot of coffee – it clearly wasn't the time for tea – and threw some bread in the toaster, figuring he wouldn't be able to stomach much more than that.

"Hermione, what are you doing –" he broke off, his eyes widening as he took in her formal robes and high heels, "– the meeting. Fuck. I'm sorry."

She nodded, her expression still severe even as she buttered his toast and sat the plate in front of him. He gave her a weak smile, reaching instead for the cup of black coffee she'd put down as well.

"Eat. You need a shower, and we only have a few minutes," she said, crossing her arms as she leaned against the counter, watching him with narrowed eyes. "I told Abigail you had an emergency, but she expects us there this afternoon."

He looked at her blankly, his eyes traveling around the kitchen until he found a clock. Afternoon? he wondered, blinking in surprise when the clock showed it was already after 1 p.m.

"Shit. I'm sorry," he groaned, rubbing his hands briskly over his face. He needed to wake up.

Hermione's expression softened slightly. "I'll pick out some clothes for you. We're leaving in 15 minutes, so you'd best hurry."

Harry nodded, snagging the last piece of toast as he stood, hurrying upstairs to his bedroom. Hermione followed, giving him a chance to get into the shower before entering the room and rifling through his closet, looking for something suitable for the business meeting. Harry preferred casual Muggle clothes to wizarding robes, but James Evans was always decked out in fashionable wizarding wear when he went out in public. It was yet another distinction that helped Harry glide from one personality to the next – a way to ensure he never slipped up and forgot which face he was wearing in public.

She heard the water shut off as she dug around for a pair of socks in his bureau, her curiosity raging. What could have upset Harry so much? She had a sick feeling it had to do with Sly, and Harry's confession. Had he told the man everything, or just that he was James Evans? Guilt nagged at her. After

all, she'd been the one to insist he come clean.

Harry padded out into the room, a towel wrapped around his waist. He looked much better after the shower, Hermione noted, watching as he briskly rubbed his hair with another towel as he walked blindly through the room. She tossed the socks on the bed, bracing herself on his wet shoulder so she could reach up to kiss him on the cheek. His skin was smooth and smelled slightly woodsy, and she was glad he'd taken the time to shave. The glamour would have hidden his stubble, but she knew he hated being unshaven. He must be feeling better, she thought with a smile as she squeezed his shoulder and stepped back, intending to leave the room so he could change.

"Wait," he said, catching her hand as she pulled away. He nodded toward the bed, and she sat, openly curious now.

She closed her eyes as he dressed, and they chatted about the book and the changes Abigail had proposed. She questioned him about the scattered manuscript, relieved to hear he'd tripped and knocked it off the desk, not thrown it in anger as she had assumed. It was believable – Harry was a very clumsy drunk.

"So why were you drinking?" she asked, opening her eyes when he'd pulled his robes on. She handed him the socks, watching as he finished dressing and cast the glamour on his face and hair.

He combed the blond locks, spritzing them with the potion the stylist had given him. Harry never took this much care with his own appearance, but James Evans was a different matter.

"The dating site just added a chat function," he said, startled when he saw remorse and sadness in the grey eyes in the mirror. He'd been using the glamour for years, but he'd never seen that expression on the now uncomfortably familiar features. "I told him who I was – that I was James Evans, at any rate."

Harry snorted, shaking his head. "Glad I left the Harry Potter part off, since his reaction to James Evans was bad enough."

Back to Index

Chapter 8: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. I love them like they were my own, but unfortunately, they're not.

***

Draco kicked at the fertile soil, the loamy mixture covering the tip of his dragon hide boot. It was a comforting sight – it made him think of the year he'd spent here learning the ropes of the winery business while taking care of his son.

"It's not as bad as all that, surely," a disembodied voice called out, startling Draco from his reverie.

He looked up, searching through the fog that had settled over the vineyard, his head turned toward the deep, familiar voice. He couldn't see further than the vine in front of him – he had no idea how the man even knew he was out here.

"Wards," came the answer to his unvoiced question, the voice becoming louder as the man approached. "You triggered them when you entered the vineyard."

"Isn't that a bit much?" Draco asked, a smile lighting his face when the tall, dark-haired man came into view.

"Not at all," Neville answered, swinging an arm around Draco's shoulder in easy camaraderie. "It's completely necessary. The wards monitor the temperature, so I have enough time to cast the

appropriate shielding spells in case of frost."

They'd lost an entire crop of grapes their first year, thanks to inexperience and an unseasonably cool spring with a late frost. Neville had researched like a madman after that, even more determined to make the winery a success after the initial setback. And he had.

"And alerting you to my presence?"

Neville grinned, shrugging. His confidence had blossomed in the years since the war, and he'd grown into a self-assured – even cocky, at times – man. Especially when it came to things he was an expert in, namely plants and his friends.

"Why not add a few extra precautions, since I was setting extensive wards anyway?" Neville just shook his head at the fond smile Draco gave him, squeezing his shoulder in response.

It was true, partially. The wards needed to monitor the health of the grapes had been extensive, and it hadn't truly been much more work to embed a few additional spells that would alert Neville or one of the others in the big, rambling chateau to trespassers. In his own way, Neville was as fiercely protective of Cal as Draco and Blaise were. He did everything he could to safeguard the boy, knowing Draco trusted him to watch over both Caleum and Narcissa when he was away.

"Thanks, Nev," Draco said, momentarily shaken by the level of devotion and loyalty that fairly emanated from the Gryffindor. The man's calming presence was exactly what he needed when he was feeling like this. Draco wondered if that was why he'd come here, unconsciously seeking Neville's company.

Neville released him, joining Draco on his slow walk through the rows of grapevines. He understood why Draco would come here to think – he often wandered these same rows when something was bothering him. The two of them – with Blaise's occasional help – had nurtured the land, spending hours returning the ailing vineyard to its present state of health and fertility. Draco had struggled in those two years after Patrizia left him. He'd suddenly found himself questioning everything about his life – his sexuality, his place in society, his worth as a father, his decision to hide Cal away from the world. The winery had been his salvation, giving him an outlet to pour all of his anxious energy into.

“How’s Daph?” Draco asked, trailing his fingers absently through the grape leaves.

Neville grinned, his eyes lighting.

“She’s brilliant,” he said, leaning in toward Draco. The pair stopped, Draco’s grey eyes curious as he saw Nev’s goofy smile. “It’s a bit early to tell anyone, but I can’t stand it. She’s pregnant!”

Draco didn’t even pause to think before enveloping the larger man in a tight hug, squeezing him hard.

“I’m not just anyone, and that’s fabulous,” he said, truly happy for his friends. Neville and Daphne had married less than a year after he had. Initially, Draco had questioned his friend’s decision, but as he got to know Nev, he began to see the same brave, beautiful, courageous man Daphne did. “Really. I’m thrilled for you two. When is she due?”

Neville smiled, returning Draco’s hug. “January.”

“We should tell Cal today,” Draco said, pulling back from the embrace, but leaving his arm around Neville’s shoulders. “He’ll be over the moon at the thought of having a cousin!”

Nev nodded, his eyes sparkling with excitement even as his mind whirled. As happy as he was to have shared his news, he wasn’t about to let Draco distract him from his original purpose – to find out what had the blond so upset. Blaise had Fire-called an hour ago to let him know Draco was on his way to France, apparently disturbed over something his online mystery man had said the night before.

“Not that I’m not thrilled to see you, because I am,” he said carefully, squinting as he watched Draco’s eyes shutter, all emotion gone, “but why are you here?”

“Blaise called.” It was a statement, not a question. Draco could read it in Neville’s concerned features.

“He did. He’s worried, and so am I. He said something happened with Gryffin?”

Draco ignored Neville’s prompt, setting off down the row again. Neville followed, his arm still firmly clamped around Draco’s shoulders. He knew Draco would rather gnaw off his own foot than talk about anything that even touched on emotions or feelings, but this was a conversation someone needed to have with the blond. Lucky me, he thought wryly, mentally berating Blaise for being as emotionally closed-off as Draco.

“Come back to the house. We can have some tea,” Neville said, his arm forcing Draco to stop.

Draco sighed, narrowing his eyes as he looked at the man who, against all odds, had become one of his closest friends. “Fine. Firewhisky, though.”

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Thursday, June 26, 2008 3:42 p.m.

Re: Please

Sly,

I’m so sorry I kept my identity from you. I know it was wrong, but I wasn’t ready to tell you when you mentioned you liked James Evans.

I’m going to spend this evening logged in to the dating site’s revolting chat site, hoping you’ll show up

as well. I have a few more errands this afternoon, but I'll be there after 8 p.m. It has only been a day, but I miss you, Sly. I miss how easy it is to talk to you – so easy that I find myself telling you things I've only ever told my best friends. Ironic, isn't it? That I can be so open with you, yet you're angry with me – legitimately – for not telling you something important.

Please give me a chance to make this right. I feel like we've found something really special, Sly, and I want the chance to let it develop. I'd tell you my real identity in a heartbeat if I thought it would make this right, but I'm afraid at this point it might only muck things up more.

You were upset because you were embarrassed that you went on about how you liked my books, not knowing it was me. How about I even the score? Tell you something mortifying from my own life? It's not the same, I know, but it's the best I can come up with.

When I was in school, I had a horrid, awful, nasty professor. He taught the class I hated most, and he picked on me mercilessly. It didn't help that he was the head of my rival house, either. Sometime around fifth year, though, something changed. Even though he was still an absolute arse, I started responding to the sound of his voice. It was silky, smooth and threatening, and I swear most of the time it was like it was connected directly to my cock. I failed most of my potions that year, simply because listening to him lecture or read ingredients caused all the blood to rush south, leaving me dizzy and desperate to sneak off for a quick wank.

Everything was fine until he caught me furiously stroking myself in a hidden alcove near his classroom. The sight of him sent me over the edge, and I blurted out his name as I came. He docked me 50 points for wanking in the corridor, and then awarded me 25 points for living up to the gossip written on the bathroom stalls. I believe you asked me about exhibitionism a few weeks ago – that was my first taste of it.

I've never told anyone – not even my closest friends – about that. It was mortifying, and if anyone knew I'd likely die of embarrassment. Can we call it even?

Please, Sly. Let me make this up to you somehow.

Gryffin

***

“Wait – you said Gryffin confessed he’s actually James Evans?” Neville asked, his voice rising.

Draco didn’t notice, focused on the glass of Firewhisky he held cradled in his hands. He shrugged, blowing out a breath in frustration.

“He is, but James Evans is a penname,” Draco said, twirling the glass absently on the table. He didn’t notice Neville’s eyes close, or the way the Gryffindor swallowed convulsively. “He uses a glamour, so the photo in his book isn’t really him.”

Neville sighed, wondering how Harry managed to get into situations like these. He didn’t need Draco to tell him that James Evans was a penname – he was one of only a handful of people in the world who already knew that.

Harry and Draco? he wondered, the large sip of Firewhisky he took burning a path down his throat. Once he managed to get past his initial reaction – horror – he could see it. They were different, but in complementary ways. They both hated large crowds and tried to stay out of the public eye, happy to stay in reading or watching a film. They both loved wine and gourmet food. They were both well-known in the wizarding world, and both shunned their fame. Draco doted on his son, and Harry wanted a family.

“So, what happened?” Neville asked, hoping Draco couldn’t hear the tremor in his voice.

“I acted like an idiot,” Draco snorted, spinning the nearly full glass again. He’d had his fill of Firewhisky the night before, but the conversation seemed to demand it. It wasn’t something to be discussed over tea. “I’m not sure he’ll forgive me. I just left him there – logged out.”

Neville watched Draco, studying the expression of remorse on the blond’s face. Yes, he thought, his

internal struggle finished. It could work. I don't know why I never saw it before – they're actually perfect for each other.

"I mean, it's not like he told me he was Harry bloody Potter, for fuck's sake," Draco said, shaking his head. "James Evans. Really. I still can't believe it."

Draco stood, not noticing the gobsmacked expression on Neville's face.

"I'm going to go email him, apologize," Draco said, smiling slightly for the first time since they'd come inside. He grinned as he left the room, laughing at his own joke. "Harry Potter. Ha!"

Well, shit, Neville thought, pouring himself another shot of Ogden's.

***

"Draco?" Pansy's voice called from the fireplace, her disembodied green head peering around the room.

"Pans?" Draco asked, sticking his head into his study, wondering what would be so important the witch would Fire-call France looking for him.

"Oh, good. Blaise said you were there, but I didn't believe him. Is Cal alright?" she asked, puzzled as to why Draco would be in France on a weekday.

"He's fine. I just needed to clear my head a bit," Draco said, suppressing the urge to question Pansy about Gryffin's identity. He knew it would do nothing but frustrate both of them – she'd sworn an Unbreakable Vow. She couldn't tell him if she wanted to.

“I have a delivery for you. A bottle of wine with a note. Shall I send it through?”

Draco swallowed, his lips curving into a grin against his will. He thought he saw Pansy’s eyes flicker, but he wrote it off as a trick of the fire light.

“Yes, please.”

He reached out, taking the heavy bottle of red wine from the fire. Draco turned the bottle, his grin growing when he recognized the label. It was a bottle of Pécharmant, a red wine produced in southwestern France.

“Thanks, Pans,” he said, his fingers itching to open the sealed note that was attached to the bottle.

The witch watched him warily, having already been read the riot act by Blaise earlier for refusing to disclose Gryffin’s identity. Unlike Blaise, she knew exactly how this would end – she knew who this mysterious Gryffin was.

“How are things working out?” she asked, hesitant. The boundaries of the Unbreakable Vow would prevent her from saying too much, but she was curious about how one of her oldest friends was getting on with one of his oldest rivals. Blaise had mentioned a fight, but he hadn’t given her any details.

“A bit rocky, just now, but I think everything is back on track,” he said absently, a fond smile on his face as he studied the bottle. “He told me who he was last night, and I didn’t react well, I’m afraid.”

Pansy nearly swallowed her tongue – Harry had confessed who he was? And Draco was still accepting gifts from him?

“He- he did?” she stammered, shocked at how calmly Draco was relaying the news that he’d been corresponding with the Boy Who Lived for months.

Draco looked up, his expression slightly censorious, but lacking the venom Pansy was expecting.

“He did. I know you couldn’t have told me, Pans, but some sort of warning would have been appreciated. I mean, you know how I feel about him.”

She did. But she also knew how Draco felt about Gryffin – was their budding relationship enough to change Draco’s mind about Gryffindor’s Golden Boy?

“I mean, had I known, I could have saved myself some embarrassment. As it was, I went on and on about how much I adored his work – do you have any idea how bloody mortifying it was when I found out I’d been writing to him all along?”

Pansy’s brow furrowed in confusion. Draco had gone on about how much he admired Harry Potter? She honestly couldn’t reconcile the statement with anything she knew of Draco.

“You could have tipped me off to stay away from that subject or something,” he continued, oblivious to Pansy’s bewilderment.

“That subject?” she echoed, not following Draco’s line of thought.

He sighed, pushing his hair out of his face. It had gotten too long, but he was reluctant to cut it. A bunch of imbeciles had taken to copying his hairstyle, even going so far as to name it the Draco. He’d avoided cutting it ever since that development, hoping to deter his so-called fans, but it was becoming annoyingly unkempt.

“Pansy, you know he’s one of my favorite authors. You don’t have to play dumb – he’s already admitted he’s James Evans. You won’t be breaking the vow,” he said, exasperated.

Oh, she thought, her jaw clamping shut.

“Well, it was best you found out on your own,” she said, trying for a disaffected shrug. The movement was mostly lost in the green flames.

“I suppose,” he groused, waving the bottle of wine at her. “It looks like he’s forgiven me, at any rate. Thanks for this, Pans.”

She nodded woodenly, saying her goodbyes before extinguishing the fire. If Draco had reacted that badly to finding out his mystery man was James Evans, what in Merlin’s name would he do when he found out he was actually Harry Potter?

***

“Fu – sorry,” Harry yelped, grimacing when Madam Malkin glared at him, cutting him off mid-curse.

“If you’d stop moving, Mr. Potter, this would go much faster,” she said, her words distorted by the line of pins stuck between her lips.

He clenched his jaw, willing himself not to fidget so the witch could finish pinning his tuxedo. Hermione had chosen to go with Muggle dresses and tuxes for the wedding, since her family would be in attendance. They’d still marry under wizarding tradition – meaning a full bonding ceremony – but she thought dressing the wedding party in Muggle clothing might make her family feel more at ease. Most of their guests, of course, would likely still come wearing robes, but there wasn’t anything she could do about that.

He saw Ron wince in sympathy as yet another pin missed its mark, this one stabbing Harry in the ankle. He flinched, careful to keep his mouth shut this time. At least the inseam didn’t need adjustment, he thought dryly, his lips quirking at the awful image of Madam Malkin’s pins anywhere near his bits.

She pinned and measured for several more minutes, humming to herself to fill the silence. Harry just watched Ron, the two of them carrying on a silent conversation through their expressions. Ron knew exactly how Harry felt – he'd been standing on that stool only twenty minutes earlier.

"Dashing, Mr. Potter," the older witch said finally, nodding her approval. He glanced back to catch his reflection in the mirror, shrugging lightly. He looked like himself, in a tux. Nothing extraordinary.

"Just take that off – carefully!" she chided when he hurried to remove the jacket. "Mind the pins. The finished tuxedos will be ready for you to pick up next week."

Harry stepped down off the stool, retreating behind the make-shift curtain to change out of the stiflingly hot tuxedo. He made a mental note to check with Molly to make sure they were blanketing the park where the ceremony would be with Cooling Charms. He didn't want Ron sweating his way through the bonding, after all.

Fifteen minutes later, Harry was blissfully comfortable, back in his own clothes and enjoying a pint at the Leaky Cauldron. Ron had run off to find Hermione, who was discussing last-minute changes with the florist, and the two planned to meet him back at the pub for a quick dinner before Flooing home.

Harry grinned as he looked around the dingy bar, thoughts of his chat with Sly pushing to the forefront of his mind. He hadn't been lying when he'd admitted to coming to the pub for Single's Night, nor had he exaggerated how horrible the experience had been. Hopefully those days are behind me, he thought, allowing his mind to drift to Sly and their last conversation. It hadn't ended well, but Harry was confident he'd made amends, between sharing his own mortifying secret and sending Sly a bottle of truly excellent French wine. He knew how much the man loved the full-bodied red wines of the Dordogne region, which was why he'd Apparated there to buy the bottle. The label he'd chosen wasn't available outside the small town it was produced in, and he knew Sly would know that. Surely that would show how sorry he was?

"Hey mate," Ron said, slapping Harry on the back and drawing him out of his reverie. "Dinner, yeah?"

He grinned. Some things never changed, and one of them was the way his red-headed friend always

thought with his stomach.

“Yeah,” he answered, sliding off the stool and pressing a kiss to Hermione’s cheek as Tom led them to a booth in the back. After all, the sooner they finished their meal, the sooner he could check his email.

Back to Index

Chapter 9: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. Much as I love them, they aren’t mine.

***

Draco decanted the wine, letting it breathe awhile as he settled into a comfortable chair by the fire to read Gryffin’s note. He’d just tucked Cal into bed, and he still had an hour before Gryffin would be logged in to the dating site. He was glad of the time difference – it gave Cal time to settle in, ensuring their chat wouldn’t be interrupted.

He slid a finger over the heavy wax seal, smiling at its conspicuous blankness. It must mean that Gryffin was a member of one of the old families – sealing correspondence with wax was something only Lords and Ladies did these days, though they usually used their family crest. He shrugged, running the pad of his finger over the smooth surface of the satiny wax. Gryffin had mentioned he was a Muggle-raised half-blood, but he was obviously familiar with the customs of pureblood society. So Gryffin is the head of a powerful family. That narrows it down, I suppose, Draco thought, his mind flitting through possibilities. Though they were an elite bunch, there were still hundreds of families Gryffin could be from. Draco shrugged, letting his finger break the pristine seal. His lips curved in a smile as the wax broke apart, already looking forward to the missive inside.

His eyes widened in surprise when a nondescript cock ring fell out of the folded parchment, landing on his thigh. He reached for it, stroking the small leather band with his fingers while his eyes scanned Gryffin's now-familiar handwriting.

***

Sly,

If you've opened this, hopefully that means you've read my email and are willing to forgive me. I'll be waiting for you in the chat room tonight. Remember the embarrassing memory I shared with you? It gave me the most delicious idea.

I admit I've nearly wanked myself raw these past few weeks, imagining our first meeting. I know so little about how you look that my fantasies aren't very fulfilling, but one thing I do know is how marvelous your hand will feel when it finally strokes my aching cock. That's brought me to completion more times than I can count – pretending my own slightly callused palm belongs to you, Sly.

Back to my apology. I thought if I could find a way to show you how much you excite me – both my mind and my body – you'd understand how much I want this to work, and how sorry I am to have jeopardized our fragile relationship. Luckily, I have a business partner – though he's more like a brother to me – who is absolutely brilliant with Charms. He managed a Contages charm that links two objects. The cock ring I'm sure you're madly curious about has a twin – which I'll be wearing this evening. If you want to play, Sly, just wrap it around your cock and tap it with your wand. The incantation is Sensus, but don't use it until we've talked. I'll explain more if you choose to log in tonight.

I'll be waiting.

Gryffin

***

Draco stared at the letter in his now-trembling hand, the cock ring twined around his fingers.

“Holy shit,” he whispered, studying the plain leather band closely.

***

Harry tapped his foot impatiently, glaring at the clock on his computer screen. Still thirty minutes until it was time to meet Sly. He groaned, stroking his erection through the rough fabric of his denims. He’d been half-hard all afternoon, ever since he’d gotten the charmed cock rings from George. Harry grinned, releasing himself with a sigh. George, he thought fondly, shaking his head. Bless him. Didn’t even ask why I wanted something like this, just grabbed a book and started researching the charm. Of course, he had asked Harry if it would be alright for the shop to carry a similar product, since he figured Harry’s idea would appeal to more than a few wizards out there.

Harry blew out a breath, stepping into the kitchen. He pulled out a bottle of his favorite Shiraz, decanting it to let it breathe. He figured the wait would be easier with something to drink. He’d felt bold and daring while penning the letter to Sly, but some of that Gryffindor braveness deserted him now. What if he didn’t show up? Or worse, what if he showed up but thought Harry was some sort of perverted freak for suggesting the game?

Biting his lip, Harry made his way toward his bedroom. He’d promised to be ready and waiting by 8 p.m., and he thought it best to be naked, allowing unhindered access to his cock. His erection ached, pressing uncomfortably against the stiff fabric that had been its prison all day. He actually moaned as he unzipped the denims, his cock springing free, a shudder of desire and pleasure ripping through him as the cool air hit the fevered skin.

Damn, he thought, teeth gritted, as he wrapped the cock ring tightly around the base, his eyes sliding shut at the sensation. Sly had fucking well better show up.

***

“I’m sure you know why I’m here,” Neville said, his voice measured.

Pansy sighed, tucking her legs up underneath her.

“Figured it out, did you?”

Neville nodded, flopping down onto a chair near the sofa Pansy occupied. He was comfortable in her home – he’d been there dozens of times, though usually he was with either Harry or Draco.

“Is Ollie home?” Nev asked, looking around. He figured the fewer people who knew about this train wreck in the making the better, and he doubted Pansy had shared any information with her husband. Both Draco and Harry had told him about the Unbreakable Vow she’d sworn with them.

“He’s out with the team,” she said after a moment, her expression reluctant. She clearly didn’t want to have this conversation.

Bully for you, Pans, Neville thought brusquely, his mood dark. Neither do I.

“All healed up, then?”

Pansy shook her head, her mouth tight as they made their way through the small talk.

“Not yet, unfortunately. He may have to sit out the beginning of the next season as well. He’s devastated, of course, but it looks like Gin might take the opportunity to extend her leave. She’s absolutely in love with Freddie, and I think it’ll be hard for her to go back to work when the time comes.”

Neville nodded, smiling slightly at the mention of Gin and Theo’s daughter. He and Daphne had been out to see them the day before, and they made a perfect little family. He could hardly wait for it to be their turn, his stomach flipping at the thought of becoming parents.

“I can’t tell you anything, Nev,” Pansy said, her eyes darkening as she watched him.

“You can’t tell me anything, but you can listen to what I’m going to tell you, ” he said, snorting when her expression changed from wary to calculating.

“That’s a Slytherin way of approaching it, I suppose,” she said, leaning forward to encourage him to continue.

“I know Harry and Draco are corresponding through your dating site,” he said, settling back on the cushions. “And I know you’ve sworn a vow to both of them, so I won’t press you for more answers than you can give me.”

Pansy nodded, her eyes still locked on his.

Neville shook his head as though trying to clear it, blinking as he thought of his friends.

“Do you – do you think it’s wise? Letting them correspond like that?”

Pansy paused, waiting to see if the vow would let her answer. “I don’t really have a say in it,” she said carefully, sighing in relief when no buzz of pain wracked her skull.

“At first glance, I thought it was horrible,” Neville continued, laughing softly when Pansy nodded emphatically. “But then I really considered it, and it makes sense. They’re perfect for each other.”

Pansy’s brow furrowed, but she didn’t speak, apparently afraid she couldn’t without violating the vow.

“No, really. Just think about it, Pans. If they could just get past their rivalry – and if Draco and I could, how could they not? – they’d be great together. They’re both strong-willed enough to reign each other in, and they’re both capable of a tremendous amount of love and affection. It’s something neither had as a child, not really, and you know they both crave it. And Harry really wants children. I think he’d adore Cal.”

Pansy’s grimace softened as she considered Neville’s words, the possibilities becoming clearer. Neville did have a point. If they could get past their schoolboy hatred, which was a big hurdle. McGonagall had suspended the House system for the first few years after the war, forcing all the year-mates to room together instead of separating them out by House. The results had been a tentative truce between the returning seventh-year Slytherins and Gryffindors, which only solidified after they left school. Harry and Draco had never patched things up, though, despite the fact that they now shared a good number of friends.

“It was bad enough when he found out he was writing to –” Pansy broke off, her eyes narrowing as pain wrapped around her skull, a fleeting warning that she was nearing the boundary.

“James Evans, yes,” Neville said, realizing Pansy’s problem. “It got even worse. When he’d finally reconciled the fact that he’d been writing to his favorite author, he said ‘at least it isn’t Harry Potter’, or some rot like that.”

Pansy snickered, her chest shuddering as she tried to hold back more laughter.

“Alright, fine,” Neville conceded, grinning as well. “It was funny. But what are we going to do about it? They’re getting more and more attached, and it’s going to blow up in their faces when they find out.”

She frowned, nodding as she thought about the inevitable fall-out when they revealed their identities. She was sure to bear the worst of it, since they would both be aware that she'd known from the beginning. Pansy was sure Draco would find a way to hold that against her, Unbreakable Vow or not. I'll probably be able to salvage my friendship with Harry, though, she thought, biting her lip, already braced for the worst with the notoriously hot-tempered blond who likely wouldn't be as reasonable as the Gryffindor.

"There's nothing we can do. Or at least, there's nothing I can do," she said, rubbing her temples.

Neville watched her, frowning. He'd realized, of course, that it was up to him. He'd just hoped Pansy would be able to provide some sort of guidance or advice. On one hand, he didn't want his friends to get hurt, which was surely what would happen in the end if they were allowed to meet without any sort of warning. On the other hand, he really did think Harry and Draco could work as a couple, and if he intervened now, they'd never know. He could only hope that they'd become close enough as Sly and Gryffin to eventually get past their aversions to each other.

***

Draco took another sip of wine, savoring the way it rolled over his tongue as he swallowed. His laptop was open in front of him, waiting for him to log in to the Magical Dating Online site. He glanced at his watch – a few minutes after 9 p.m., which would be a few minutes after 8 p.m. in London. His balls tingled as he envisioned Gryffin waiting, trussed up in a similar cock ring to the one he was currently wearing, worrying if he would show up.

Draco grabbed his wand, reinforcing the Silencing and Locking charms on his study door and reassuring himself that he'd closed and locked the Floo. This wasn't something he wanted interrupted.

IntrospectiveIntellectual is available for chat.

Draco stroked himself, shuddering as his warm hand closed around his hard cock. His breath hitched when he saw Gryffin's words appear.

MustLoveQuidditch: Private room?

MustLoveQuidditch has left the room.

IntrospectiveIntellectual has left the room.

MustLoveQuidditch: I'm glad you came, Sly.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I haven't, yet. I assume that's part of your plan?

MustLoveQuidditch: I'm trying to apologize here!

IntrospectiveIntellectual: And I'm trying to skip to the more interesting part of the evening.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I should be the one to apologize, anyway. I shouldn't have reacted so badly.

MustLoveQuidditch: I'm still sorry. I should have told you earlier – or at least when I sent you the manuscript.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: You're forgiven, then. Are you going to tell me what's going on?

MustLoveQuidditch: A little over eager, are we?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I've been rock hard since I opened your letter over an hour ago.

MustLoveQuidditch: Poor baby. I've been hard all afternoon, imagining what it would be like if you actually showed up.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: What does the spell do?

MustLoveQuidditch: You're going to have to trust me. Let me know when you're ready, and we can cast it at the same time. Typing will be … difficult.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I like the sound of that. Should we stay in the chat room?

MustLoveQuidditch: Yeah. We can always talk … after.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Fuck. Alright, I'm ready. I'm about to say the incantation.

MustLoveQuidditch: Alright, go.

***

Draco gasped as he felt a hand firmly grasp his cock, his heart racing as an unfamiliar callused palm ghosted over the head.

Shit, he thought, his head hitting the back of the chair as the strokes became faster, more sure. He closed his eyes, remembering the words Gryffin had used in his letter about the cock rings being twins.

Tentatively, Draco grasped his own cock, only slightly surprised when he didn't feel the motion. His hand became a blur as he quickened his strokes, sure Gryffin was feeling the sensations, just as he was feeling Gryffin's hand as though it was moving over his own aching erection.

Sweet mother of Merlin, he thought, a low moan escaping his lips as he felt Gryffin's thumb drag against the plump vein along the underside of his cock, the friction almost more than he could bear. He pressed himself harder against the chair, his arm trembling as he mimicked the motion, hoping Gryffin found it as pleasurable as he did.

***

Fuck, Harry thought, his breath coming in ragged gasps as he continued to fist his cock, so caught up in the sensation of Sly's strokes that he could barely even groan. He quickened his own strokes, hoping Sly was as close to the edge as he was. If not for the restrictive cock ring, Harry would have come minutes ago.

His balls ached, already far past the need for release. He closed his eyes, biting his lip as he continued his ministrations. He only hoped Sly caught on soon – they would need to remove the cock rings to come, which would end the spell. As much as he wanted to come, he didn't want to end the sweet torture of this bizarre contact with Sly just yet. Soon, his mind screamed, his balls tightening painfully.

***

Draco was panting, his skin glistening with sweat. The effort of straining toward orgasm was almost too much, and he didn't know how much more he could take. He ran a hand down to his balls, squeezing them gently, hoping Gryffin would be able to feel it. An answering squeeze came in reply, and Draco sighed audibly in relief.

He slid a finger under the cock ring, releasing the clasp. Instantly, the sensation of Gryffin's rough palm against his rock hard cock disappeared. Draco moaned, fisting himself, his hand flying as he quickly sent himself over the edge, Gryffin's name on his lips as he came for what seemed like an eternity.

***

Oh, shit, yes, Harry thought, releasing the clasp on his cock ring. The odd sensation of his own hand on his cock was immediately noticeable, its slightly rough skin so much different from the softer, firmer grasp Sly had used. He barely had to stroke himself at all before he was coming, black spots bursting behind his eyes as he convulsed with the force of his release.

He sat back heavily, feeling utterly drained. Harry grinned as he realized he'd screamed Sly's name as he came, wondering if the other man had done the same.

***

MustLoveQuidditch: Fucking hell.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: We'll be doing that again soon.

MustLoveQuidditch: Not too soon. I'm half-dead.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Don't worry. I barely have the energy to type.

MustLoveQuidditch: That was – interesting.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: That was bloody hot, and more than a little perverted.

MustLoveQuidditch: Too much for you?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Fuck, no. I'm the one who suggested doing it again, remember?

MustLoveQuidditch: I can't believe we just did that.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I can't believe we waited this long to do it.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Didn't you say you got these from a friend? Tell him he has my gratitude.

MustLoveQuidditch: I thanked him in advance – I'll not be sharing details of our little encounter with him.

MustLoveQuidditch: He was already a little too interested as it stands.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I take it this means you're over your irrational fear of cock rings?

MustLoveQuidditch: No, not really. But I now have a very good incentive to use them.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: True. We'll have to do this again to help you conquer your fear.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: As much as I hate to come and run …

MustLoveQuidditch: Yeah, me too. I'm wiped, and I have an early meeting tomorrow.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Thanks for the wine … and the wank.

MustLoveQuidditch: Anytime.

IntrospectiveIntellectual has logged out.

MustLoveQuidditch has logged out.

Author's note Let me know if the formatting on the chat is too hard to read - is it alright the way it is, or do I need to be adding spaces between the lines? Lemme know ...

Back to Index

Chapter 10: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They belong to JKR.

***

“You look like you’re in a better mood,” Blaise said dryly, scowling when Draco merely grinned. He’d taken quite the tongue lashing the day before, and he was still a bit put out with the blond. “Care to share?”

Draco’s lips twitched again, his eyes losing focus slightly as he remembered his mind-blowing wank with Gryffin the night before.

“No.”

Blaise smiled, unable to stay angry with Draco for long. The blond knew it, too, and often used it mercilessly to his own advantage.

“Did you see Nev, then?”

“I did, and you’re lucky I’m not hexing you for Fire-calling him. Honestly, Blaise, I’m an adult. I don’t need looking after.”

Draco’s brow furrowed for a moment as he leafed through a large stack of parchment, messages Madge had given him the moment he entered the office. He’d missed several fairly important meetings yesterday afternoon, but he hadn’t been in any frame of mind to stay.

“There should be something from the Diagon Alley Zoning Board in that mess,” Blaise said, waving negligently toward the pile. “I took your meeting with the Director of Planning. He wasn’t pleased to be dealing with me instead of you, but I told him you’d definitely be at the board meeting Monday night.”

Draco nodded absently, locating the message from the stern wizard in question. Abraxas Wedgewick. The man was an absolute snob, and Draco had a feeling his family name was greasing the wheels for their proposal – a nice change, since usually it worked the other way around. He made a note to have Madge send the wizard a complimentary pass to his club, an exclusive society where the pureblood (and half-blood, as of a few decades ago) elite met to play cards and smoke. He never went there himself, and he only kept up his family’s membership for moments like these. He had no use for old fools who put too much stock in blood purity and old money.

“Will Theo be there?” Draco asked, still scribbling notes on a piece of parchment.

“He may be a bit late, but yes. Freddie has an appointment with the Healer, and he wants to be there for it,” Blaise said, smiling when Draco’s head raised, his brow furrowed. “Just a routine check-up. Nothing to worry about.”

Draco nodded, returning to his task. He’d met Ginny and Theo’s daughter a few days earlier when he visited them in the hospital. Draco grinned, remembering how silly he’d felt as he skulked around the

corridors of the St. Mungo's nursery, hoping for a glimpse of Gryffin. He knew the man had a friend in labor there as well, and he'd hoped their paths might cross. Of course, he'd had no idea what Gryffin looked like, or if the man's friend had still been in the hospital, but he'd hoped nonetheless. He'd worried that perhaps Ginny was the witch Gryffin had alluded to, but she had assured him her labor had been quick and easy when he'd asked. Nothing like the ordeal Gryffin had relayed.

"How's Ginny?" Draco asked, pressing a button on his desk to summon Madge. He had a pile of signed paperwork to be Owled.

"Great. I had dinner at their place last night. She just absolutely glows, and if Theo was any happier I think he'd burst," Blaise said, smiling fondly as he thought of the couple and their tiny, perfect daughter.

"Good, good," Draco murmured absently, his attention drawn to his computer screen. He'd promised himself he wouldn't check his Magical Dating Online email before he'd cleared the inbox on his desk, but he was having trouble fighting the temptation.

"The Stevens deal is being finalized," Blaise said, amused by his friend's obvious distraction.

Draco hummed his approval, biting his lip as he tried to decide what to do next. His regular email box was likely overflowing with messages, and some of them might well be urgent. He also had a few letters to read and respond to, and a dozen contracts that needed his attention before they could be sent out that afternoon.

"I talked to the supplier Theo wants to use, and it sounds like we'll get a good deal on the furniture you approved for the club," Blaise continued, swallowing a laugh when Draco abruptly turned in his chair, now facing the dark computer screen.

"That's good news," Draco muttered, booting the machine and anxiously tapping his foot as he waited for the monitor to spring to life.

"Of course, that all depends on getting that zoning change approved," Blaise said, not even bothering to

hide his grin, since Draco wasn't looking at him anymore.

"Of course," Draco said, his fingers flying across his keyboard as he logged in to his email, his eyes narrowing as he scanned the new messages for one from Gryffin.

Blaise snorted when Draco's attention became fully engrossed in the screen, correctly assuming the mysterious Gryffin had emailed.

"Just a few more procedural things about the Monday night meeting," Blaise said, his body tensed to flee as he forced his voice to remain calm. "Wedgewick has requested you attend naked. It's a formality, really. It will simply make it easier for you when you trade sexual favors for the votes you need."

Draco just nodded absently, the words not registering until Blaise had already jumped up from the chair. He nearly made it through the still-open door before Draco's mild Stinging Hex caught him on the arse, the slight pain not enough to wipe the smirk off his face.

Draco rolled his eyes, returning his gaze to the screen. "Prat."

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Friday, June 27, 2008 1:59 a.m.

Re: Thank you

Sly,

I should be in bed, since I have an early meeting in the morning – just a few hours from now, actually – but I can't calm my mind enough to get to sleep. I may need a Calming or Sleeping Draught to manage it, since every time I close my eyes I feel your palm against my cock.

It was amazing – every bit as wonderful as I've imagined it would be the numerous times I've wanked lately, pretending the hand on my cock was yours instead of mine. And tonight, it was. Shit. I thought if I emailed you it might help get you off my mind so I could sleep, but the opposite has happened. It's ridiculous, really, for a man of my age not have better control over his libido. I usually do, you know. You're the one responsible for these uncontrollable urges.

Nothing for it, I suppose. I'm off to employ my new favorite fantasy – a replay of this evening –as my wanking material. Sweet dreams, on the off chance you read this before retiring, and good luck, if you read it at the office. I'd apologize for the situation I hope you find yourself in, but I can't bring myself to be sorry if my words – and the thought of me wanking over you – makes you as hard as you make me.

Till next time,

Gryffin

***

Well, fuck, Draco thought dryly, the open door the only thing restraining him from rubbing his hand over his fully hardened cock. He sighed, glancing at his watch. He had a meeting in ten minutes, and Madge would be in momentarily with more paperwork for him to sign.

Grimacing, he grabbed his wand, casting a quick spell to rid him of his erection. The charm wouldn't last long, but it should get him through until lunch, when he could Apparate home to take care of the problem Gryffin had caused. Draco grinned, remembering the very uncomfortable evening years ago

when Professor Snape had called all the Slytherin first year boys together to talk to them about sex, even more mortifying for Draco since he'd been his godfather as well as Head of House. Severus taught them all the useful charm, which Draco had employed more than a few times in his early years at Hogwarts.

He groaned as thoughts of Severus led to thoughts of Gryffin's confession. He was fairly sure the professor who had so affected Gryffin was none other than Severus Snape, Potions Master extraordinaire. His erection surged with renewed interest at the thought of a younger Gryffin furiously wanking in some deserted alcove. Draco had never had any fantasies about the man, but he did concede that Sev's voice had definitely been wank-worthy.

Uncle Sev taught for what – 20-some years? Draco wondered, hoping he could redirect his thoughts enough to avoid using the spell again. It wasn't exactly painful, but it wasn't a comfortable sensation, either. So Gryffin can't be terribly older than me. He may even be close to my own age. That is, if he was talking about Sev. Draco sighed resolutely, lifting his wand to cast the charm again.

"Algo Pluvia," he said, wincing as the icy sensation served its intended purpose.

" – terribly sorry, but his absence was unavoidable yesterday." Blaise was just outside the door, his tone conciliatory and sincere.

" – an insult–" an unfamiliar voice was droning on, clearly upset. Draco strained, but couldn't make out the rest of it.

"And I do apologize," Blaise said, the underlying annoyance in his smooth voice audible only to those, like Draco, who knew him well. "But he does have a few moments now, if you'd like to see him. I'm sure Mr. Malfoy wouldn't mind. He has another appointment shortly, but he'd never willingly turn away such a valuable client as you, Madam Atalier."

Blaise rapped on the open door sharply, ostensibly announcing their presence. Draco knew it was a show for the woman he was leading in – Blaise was well aware of the Amplifying charms Madge had placed on the corridor so no one could sneak up on her boss.

Draco nodded, sending Blaise a silent word of thanks for defusing the situation and cluing him in to who the woman was – no doubt the fuming witch in front of him would be even angrier had he blanked on her name.

“Madam Atalier,” he greeted, standing to bow formally to the middle-aged woman before skirting his desk to press a kiss to her outstretched hand. She and her husband owned several large apothecaries around Great Britain, and Malfoy Industries had been advising them on real estate purchases and business investments for years. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

She softened visibly at his gesture, the tight lines around her grim mouth disappearing as she smiled girlishly at him.

“Madam Atalier’s son had an appointment with you yesterday, Mr. Malfoy,” Blaise said, his lips curved into a smirk only Draco could see, since he remained in the doorway. “Your cancellation was quite inconvenient for him, and Madam was kind enough to come in his place today to settle the matter herself.”

Blaise paused, striding into the room with a hefty file folder. Ah, Draco thought, his face still a mask of polite interest, she’s here about those flagging investments her idiotic son insisted on. He took the file, nodding curtly to Blaise, who mirrored his earlier actions, bowing to the witch.

“I am confident Mr. Malfoy will be able to help you, Madam,” he said politely, flashing her his most irresistible grin. “I’m so glad we had the chance to chat. He has a habit of monopolizing our most charming clients.”

She blushed under Blaise’s appreciative stare, absently stroking the back of her hand, still tingling from Draco’s kiss.

Blaise winked at Draco as he retreated from the room, pausing again to smirk as he pointedly glanced at Draco’s crotch, raising an eyebrow. The blond blushed, both embarrassed that the darker wizard had heard his earlier spell and grateful he’d had the sense to delay Madam Atalier in the corridor until it had time to work.

“You owe me,” Blaise mouthed silently before he left, making mock gagging motions as he rolled his eyes as the homely witch seated across from Draco’s desk.

***

“Oh, for the love of –” Hermione hissed, jabbing Harry in the ribs. He’d fallen asleep – again.

Harry’s head bobbed, his eyes snapping open. Hermione sighed, leaning over to turn several pages of the open manuscript in front of him. They were still going over edits – the final round, thankfully – and Harry had been dozing on and off for the last hour.

“You were the one who wanted this much control,” she whispered, her lips grazing his ear as he bent to accommodate her. “You were the one who fought to be so involved in the editing process. They don’t do this for most writers, you know. You could at least pretend to be interested.”

Harry blushed, reaching up to adjust his glasses, his hand faltering when he realized he wasn’t wearing them. He studied the pale hand in front of him, with its manicured nails and light dusting of blond hair. Right, he thought muddily, blinking to try to orient himself. His heart skipped when he realized he’d fallen asleep during the editorial meeting. Had his glamour slipped? His frantic gaze met Hermione’s, and she shook her head slightly, immediately understanding the reason for his distress. His shoulders relaxed slightly, his back still straight, now wide awake from the adrenaline rush.

“We’re about finished,” the dour woman seated down the table said, looking up at Harry. “Unless you have any objections, Mr. Evans.”

Harry glanced down at the papers in front of him, edits he’d already perused the night before. He’d been unable to sleep, even after his 2 a.m. wank, so he’d brewed some coffee and worked instead.

“Mr. Evans?”

Harry looked up, rubbing a hand over his face. He knew the glamour would cover it, but he was exhausted. He hadn’t fallen into bed until after 6 a.m., which left him less than two hours to sleep before he needed to wake for his 9 a.m. meeting. He looked at the long conference table, scattered with soggy boxes of half-eaten take-away, empty coffee cups and discarded parchment. They’d been at it all day.

“No, none,” he said, his voice a bit scratchy with disuse. He wasn’t allowed a very active role in the editing process. As Hermione had said, it was a miracle he was there at all, and only because she’d insisted. He hadn’t had the privilege the first few times around, but as a best-selling novelist, he had some pull now. “Thank you. It’s fabulous. Brilliant work, everyone.”

The tired editors and publicists glowed at the praise, some of them breaking into spontaneous applause. This was another reason he was allowed into their inner sanctum, a place most authors were refused entry – his charm and modesty. They all truly loved working with Harry, who rarely missed deadlines or threw fits over edits or publicity schedules. James Evans was a hard worker, a talented writer and an all-around nice man.

“Unnecessary, but thank you,” he said, unsure if the blush he could feel heating his cheeks showed through the glamour.

He stood when everyone else did, gathering up his notes and the dog-eared manuscript. He could tell he was in for a lecture from Hermione, since her back was ram-rod straight and her smile forced as she accepted thanks and congratulations from nearly a dozen different people as they made their way out of the publishing offices.

He watched her warily, knowing she’d wait until they were alone before laying into him. So he was surprised when she moved past him to step toward the Floo. He always went first to open the wards at Grimmauld Place.

“Aren’t you –”

“You need sleep,” she said shortly, rolling her eyes when his hands flew to his face again, checking to make sure the glamour had held.

“I don’t need to be able to see the effects to know you were up all night,” she hissed, leaning in closer so they wouldn’t be overheard. “Just what were you thinking? I don’t even want to know what you got up to last night, James, but I’m here to tell you that it very nearly cost you everything you’ve worked for!”

He swallowed heavily, knowing she was right. It had been incredibly foolhardy to venture out in his glamour today. It could easily have slipped half a dozen times today, when he’d dozed off or simply zoned out.

“I’m sorry –”

She snorted, rolling her eyes. “Don’t apologize to me. I’d make even more money if it came out who you are. You’re the one who wants to keep it a secret.”

He sighed, nodding. She didn’t understand why he insisted on keeping the penname, and he did feel a bit guilty about it. He didn’t need the money – not with the Black and Potter vaults and properties that had come to him when he came of age – but it would make a world of difference to her and Ron. James Evans was a well-known name, and a fairly big pull. But as Harry Potter, he’d easily double the profits the books made.

“You know I’d give you –”

Her eyes flashed, and he stepped back, an unconscious gesture of self-preservation.

“Don’t start,” she said, her voice low and dangerous.

They’d had this conversation many times, too. He wanted to compensate her for the lost income she surely suffered from not having Harry Potter as her client, but she wouldn’t hear of it. Hell, he’d love to

buy her and Ron a house or start a vault for them at Gringotts, but neither would even consider it.

"I'm going, before you say something that will make me angry," she said, her expression tight. "But I'm going to tell you this again. You need to meet this man."

Harry balked, but she held up her hand, stopping his protest.

"Don't. I know this has something to do with him. Every distraction or problem you've had over the last two months can be traced back to him," she said, her voice softening. "I know you think you know what you're doing, but you really need to meet him in person. Soon. Or at least find out who he is. You're in this too deep."

He opened his mouth, unable to find any words to refute her statements.

"You know it, too," she said, her eyes sad. "You're half-way to in love with him, and you don't even know who he is."

Harry nodded, shrugging. It was true. He knew how foolish this situation was – what if Sly ended up being some lothario? What if he wasn't anything like he seemed in his emails? He'd allowed himself to get emotionally entangled with a complete stranger.

"A few weeks," he said lamely, shrugging. Sly couldn't meet before then, and Harry was busy with things for the wedding and the book, as well. There would be no point in trying to move up their meeting.

Hermione braced herself on his shoulders, reaching up to kiss him. Her lips pressed against the stubble on his jaw line, hidden by the glamour.

"Get some sleep."

“I will,” he promised, returning the kiss before she stepped into the fireplace and Flooed away.

Back to Index

Chapter 11: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. Not mine!

***

Harry smiled, taking the parchment George shoved into his hands.

“I appreciate it, Harry,” the red-headed wizard said, smiling tightly.

“You’ve got to stop testing these things on yourself,” Harry chastised, his grin growing when George blushed even darker, his face and hair nearly indistinguishable.

“I have to ask,” he said, laughing when George grimaced. “Who had the other one?”

George sighed, pulling his robes around himself more securely. He cleared his throat, striving for some sort of dignity.

“Er, Angie,” he said, his eyes downcast.

Harry arched an eyebrow appreciatively, unsure how they'd managed that. If anyone could, though, it would be George.

"And the modifications?"

George bit his lip, grimacing.

"Went a bit awry. The sensitizing charm was … too much," George said, moving gingerly toward the Floo.

Harry tried to swallow his laughter, feeling sorry for his obviously hurting friend.

"Don't worry about this," he said, waving the small stack of parchment. "I'll take care of it. I'll send you an Owl after the meeting. You should go home, get some rest."

George nodded, stepping into the Floo in Harry's study and disappearing in a whoosh of green flame. His audience gone, Harry allowed himself to dissolve into giggles, laughing madly at the thought of George's modified cock ring causing his member to harden at the slightest touch, even after it had been removed. He was sure the poor man was practically in agony, but it was still amusing. And George had been reasonably sure the effects would wane within a few hours. He really needs to find a different way to test these things, Harry thought absently, settling into his chair to look over the Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes paperwork he'd brought over.

***

"No, you stay," Draco said, leaning in so he could read Theo's expression in the Floo. The Healer was concerned about something called jaundice, and Ginny was frantic. "I can take care of the meeting by

myself. You should have Freddie checked out."

"I appreciate it, Draco," Theo said, turning his head to murmur something to his wife.

Ginny's head joined his in the fire, her features drawn.

"Really, thank you," she said, smiling slightly.

"It's no problem," Draco assured them, rocking back on his heels. "Just do whatever you need to for Freddie. You'll let me know if you need anything?"

"Of course," Theo said, Ginny disappearing. Draco could hear the thin wail of a newborn and figured it must be time for Freddie to eat. "It's nothing serious. Just a precaution, really."

"I'll Owl you later to fill you in," Draco said, nodding to the wizard before he closed the connection. He had some paperwork he needed to look over if he was to present this himself.

***

"The meeting of the Diagon Alley Zoning Board will come to order," a pinched-face witch intoned, banging a gavel against the heavy wood platform she and four others were seated behind.

Draco recognized Wedgewick and two others, since he'd had a few dealings with the board before. The witch was a new addition – recently elected, he'd heard, replacing a man who had apparently moved away.

"Abraxas Wedgewick, president of the board, will read the agenda," she said, folding her hands primly in

her lap as she discarded the gavel.

Draco hid his grimace when the stout wizard stood, ridiculously overdressed in ostentatious robes better fitted to a ballroom than a planning board meeting.

“We have several appeals of previous rulings on our agenda tonight,” he said, his voice smug as he surveyed the irritated row of witches and wizards Draco assumed must be the petitioners. “We also have two items of new business, which we will discuss first.”

The assembled crowd groaned, so Draco figured they were there to support the petitioners. Good, he thought, allowing himself a confident smile as Wedgewick’s gaze fell on him. Hopefully they won’t have any comments on the zoning issue. He was well prepared to present their case for the zoning change, which would allow the warehouse to become a club, and the alcohol permit, but he didn’t want to engage in a debate with local homeowners who didn’t want a bar near their homes.

“Are both presenters here?” Wedgewick asked, the gleam in his eye worrying Draco. The other person must be influential as well, to have garnered that look from the notorious social schemer.

“Draco Malfoy, representing Malfoy Industries,” he said, standing and bowing slightly to the board.

He heard the crowd gasp, turning slightly to see what had caused the commotion.

“Harry Potter, representing Weasleys’ Wizarding Wheezes,” the dark-haired man said from the back of the room.

***

As much as he wanted to leave, Draco knew it would be rude to disrupt the board meeting. He’d finished

his presentation – and successfully garnered both the zoning permit and the alcohol license – and was now listening to Potter drone on contesting some rule about displaying animated adverts that was having a negative effect on the joke shop's business.

He was intrigued. This man was nothing like the Potter he knew from school. He was calm and direct, easily presenting information and answering questions efficiently and confidently. He seemed to be knowledgeable about the laws and his defense of the signage, which the board sought an injunction against, was intelligent.

Draco kept his face cool and remote as he watched the proceedings, admiring the way Potter's hair fell in softly mussed waves. It was much the same as it had been in school, but somehow the mop of unruly black strands looked different on the lean, muscled, attractive man Potter had become. Gone were the ill-fitted clothes Draco remembered, replaced by carefully tailored wizard's robes that likely cost more than most people made in a week. His bulky black glasses had been replaced by thin wire frames, which served to accentuate his startlingly green eyes and the sculpted planes of his lightly tanned face.

Definitely not hard on the eyes, Draco mused as he studied Potter, enjoying this opportunity to ogle his former rival. To the crowd, Draco knew he looked politely engaged, remote but attentive. In reality, he wasn't catching most of the questions Wedgewick and his cronies were firing at Potter, instead concentrating on the way his full lips curved when he smiled, parting to reveal straight, white teeth when he answered their requests.

"– no recourse but to agree with Mr. Potter," Wedgewick said, his shrewd eyes glinting with reluctant agreement and something more, a slightly sinister calculation that Draco didn't care for.

He gathered up his own papers, stuffing everything neatly back into his satchel as the board voted, the majority agreeing to allow Weasley his signs. Draco still didn't know why Potter was there – he knew he was a friend of the family, Ginny talked of him as though he were a brother, but he'd been unaware the man had a stake in the business.

He'd hoped to make a fast escape, taking advantage of the short recess Wedgewick called between the new and old business on the agenda to slip away. His plans fizzled when he heard the annoying man call his name, summoning him up to the platform.

“Mr. Wedgewick,” Draco said, bowing formally to the shorter man. His gaze shifted to the other man who had been called back, bowing to him as well. “Potter.”

“Know each other, do you?” the wizard crowed, reminding Harry uncomfortably of Professor Slughorn. He hadn’t missed the possessive gleam in the man’s eyes when he’d addressed him – Wedgewick was definitely another collector. “Of course, of course. Probably see each other down at the club.”

“The club?” Harry asked, and Draco nearly bit his tongue to hold back his retort. Potter wouldn’t like this – hell, he didn’t like it, either.

“Yes, the Divitiae Society. Mr. Malfoy was kind enough to extend a courtesy membership to me. I’m very much looking forward to it,” Wedgewick said, smiling wolfishly at the thought of finally gaining entrance into the inner sanctum of the wizarding elite.

“Ah,” Harry said, his tone faintly disapproving. “I’m familiar with it, yes. Not a member, unfortunately, but I’m sure you’ll enjoy yourself, Mr. Wedgewick.”

Draco was struck with a perplexing sensation of guilt at Potter’s words, feeling ashamed that he retained membership in a society the other man so clearly disdained. Which was ridiculous, he reasoned, because he himself never went to the club, disliking it as much as Potter obviously did. Wedgewick blathered on about the society, seemingly oblivious to the dark-haired wizard’s tight expression.

“I apologize, Mr. Wedgewick, but I really must be going,” Harry broke in, thrusting his hand at the man so he was forced to take it. Harry shook their joined hands briefly, quickly releasing the man’s slightly damp palm.

He was surprised when Draco offered his own manicured palm, his warm fingers wrapping around Harry’s and dispelling all lingering disgust over Wedgewick’s slimy handshake. Harry’s eyes widened in astonishment at the firm hand gripping his own, shaking it absently as he met Draco’s similarly shocked gaze.

Draco couldn't explain it, but something intangible had passed between himself and Potter when he'd offered his hand. Draco blushed slightly when he noticed he was still gripping Potter's palm, realizing they'd been touching for more than a socially acceptable amount of time for a casual handshake. He withdrew his hand, fighting the urge to stare dumbly at it when the warmth of Potter's hand was gone.

"Potter," he said lightly, his tone masking his racing heart. This is ridiculous, he thought, blinking when he saw Harry shiver slightly. Did I really have that strong of a reaction to a simple handshake? With Potter, of all people?

Harry closed his hand into a fist, the only way he could stop the trembling he knew must be visible. When the blond had said his name, he'd felt – hell, he didn't know what he'd felt, but it hadn't been anything appropriate for the venue, or the speaker. Did I really just practically moan because Malfoy shook my hand and said my name?

"You're right, of course," Wedgewick said, still oblivious to the sexual tension that had sprung up between the two men. "We need to continue on with the petitions. But it was lovely to have met you, Mr. Potter, and to have seen you again, Mr. Malfoy. I do hope you at least, will join me at the club?"

The warmth Draco had seen in Harry's green eyes vanished at the words, and he swallowed hard at the surprising depth of his disappointment at seeing the dark-haired man's shutters firmly back in place.

"Er, no, Mr. Wedgewick," Draco said, his gaze still locked on Harry. "I'm afraid I don't make it to the club anymore."

Harry relaxed slightly, and Draco almost smiled.

"Of course, of course," Wedgewick muttered, slapping both of them heartily on the back. "I'd forgotten the board of governors started letting half-bloods in a few years back. Still a good place, though, but not what it used to be. I understand completely."

Harry's mouth fell open at the statement, his eyes flashing with anger even as Draco reached out to grab his arm.

"It's not like that, Potter," he said, his voice pitched low so it didn't carry as they walked out of the room.

"I'm sure it's not," Harry answered, his voice cold. "It was nice to see you, Malfoy. Take care."

Draco bit his lip, unsure why he was so upset that Harry had Disapparated before he could explain. What was Potter to him, after all?

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Monday, June 30, 2008 10:42 p.m.

Re: Distract me

Sly,

Had a bad evening, and I'm in need of some distraction. Are you free?

Gryffin

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectua@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Monday, June 30, 2008 10:48 p.m.

Re: Wank?

Sorry to hear you aren't happy. Mutual wank? Sharing fantasies? Discussing the national debt? What do you want to do? I can be in the chat room in a few minutes, if you want to meet me there. I figured out how to log directly into a private room. Give me a minute to get it set up, then I'll send you the link.

Sly

***

MustLoveQuidditch has entered the room.

MustLoveQuidditch: Brilliant

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Logging directly into the room, or me, for suggesting it?

MustLoveQuidditch: Both

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I could ply you with those cheesy pick-up lines you like so much, if it would make you feel better.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Hmm. Ooh, this is a good one.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Did you just cast Wingardium Leviosa, or am I this happy to see you?

MustLoveQuidditch: You're killing me, Sly.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I must have Seer blood, because I just had a vision of myself climbing naked out of your bed tomorrow.

MustLoveQuidditch: I can't believe they're getting worse … how is it possible they're getting worse?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Do you have any magical creature blood in you? No? Do you want some?

MustLoveQuidditch: Alright, stop. That was just gross.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Actually, that's one someone used on me last year. He was part Veela.

MustLoveQuidditch: If he was part Veela, why did he need a pick-up line at all?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Not sure, actually. Maybe he didn't inherit the good part?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: At any rate, did I take your mind off your bad mood?

MustLoveQuidditch: You did. Spectacular job.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Did you just want to chat, or did you want to …

MustLoveQuidditch: Don't tell me you're shy about language, Sly. I wouldn't believe it.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I was just trying to put it delicately.

MustLoveQuidditch: Wank

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Toss off

MustLoveQuidditch: Beat off

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Club the clam

MustLoveQuidditch: Polish your broom

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Charm the snake

MustLoveQuidditch: Conjure your Patronus

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I bow down to the master. I've never heard that one before.

MustLoveQuidditch: It fits, though, doesn't it? I've got tons more.

MustLoveQuidditch: I could go on for hours.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: That's not what it seemed like a few nights ago.

MustLoveQuidditch: Ouch.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Wounded, are you?

MustLoveQuidditch: I feel a challenge has been thrown down.

MustLoveQuidditch: I need to defend my honor.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Do you already have it on?

MustLoveQuidditch: What do you think?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Cast the charm on three?

MustLoveQuidditch: One, two …

***

Harry groaned, a thin film of sweat covering his bicep, which tightened as he gripped his cock harder. He bit his lip, his breathing harsh as he concentrated on keeping his rhythm steady as he stroked and squeezed his aching cock.

He would not let Sly win. He wasn't going to give in, no matter how badly he wanted to come. His hand spasmed, sore from the furious pace of his strokes. They'd been at this for nearly twenty minutes, which was at least ten more than last time, probably more.

He switched hands, flexing his cramping fingers as he circled the head with his other thumb, letting it slide in the precome that had gathered there. A droplet of sweat hit the leather sofa he was reclining on, and he pushed his damp fringe out of his face in annoyance. He would not let Sly win.

***

Draco's teeth were clenched so tightly his jaw ached, a welcome distraction from the fire burning in his lower belly. He needed to come so badly he was nearly whimpering, but he wasn't going to give in that easily. He'd been the one to signal Gryffin the first time they did this, and he wasn't going to be the one to do it this time.

Merlin's balls, he thought, cursing himself roundly for making this into a competition when he felt Gryffin's grip change, the unfamiliar planes of his other palm now grazing over Draco's heated skin. The tendons stood out on Draco's wrist as he fisted his bright-red cock, his tongue raw from pushing up against his teeth as he struggled not to moan. He would not lose this time. He would not be the first to break.

***

Bloody buggering fuck, Harry thought, his balls tightening uncomfortably as his body strained toward release it couldn't reach because of the restrictive cock ring. He couldn't take it anymore. He sat back heavily, his sweaty bare back sticking to the leather sofa. He loosened his grip on his cock, running his other and down to his balls, fondling them gently before squeezing lightly in concession.

***

Oh, thank Merlin, Draco thought, groaning with relief when he felt the soft tug on his balls. He wasted no time mirroring Gryffin's actions, his hands trembling as he released himself from the cock ring. They'd been at this for what seemed like an eternity, and his body was so grateful to be allowed fulfillment that he didn't even have to stroke himself before he was coming, gasping out a string of meaningless words and profanity as come spattered over his hand and stomach. Wave after wave of bliss rolled over him, leaving him completely boneless and gasping for breath when it finally finished.

"Points to me," he panted, grinning as he heaved himself up to return to the computer.

***

Harry's head fell back, his entire body convulsing with the force of his orgasm. He nearly bit through his lip before he realized it was alright to scream, letting himself shout loudly as his cock pulsed, shooting jets of come across the arm of the sofa. He shuddered as another wave of pleasure shook him, his muscles twitching with the strength of the unexpected aftershock.

Well, hell, he thought, grinning fondly despite the being the one to concede. After all, he'd managed to have a marvelous orgasm, and he'd helped Sly have one, too. He stretched lazily, enjoying the slight burn in his muscles from the strenuous wank. He was pleased that Sly's hand had felt so familiar when it touched his cock. Definitely something he could get used to, but surprising since they'd only done it once before.

He forced himself up off the couch, grimacing as his damp skin stuck to the cool leather. It didn't dim his smile, though, or his newfound good mood. Not a bad end to an otherwise crappy day, he decided.

***

IntrospectiveIntellectual: All bow down to the new master.

MustLoveQuidditch: Wanker

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Exactly

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Do you want to tell me what made your day so rotten?

MustLoveQuidditch: Honestly? I'm about dead on my feet. I haven't been sleeping well lately, and you just about did me in.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Oh, aren't you sweet.

MustLoveQuidditch: It's true. I nearly died. My tombstone would have read 'Here lies Gryffin, victim of a mind-blowing hand job'

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I bet you say that to all the guys.

MustLoveQuidditch: No, actually, I don't. Things are more … intense … with you. Don't know if that's the mystery or your masturbatory skill, but it's true.

MustLoveQuidditch: Still there?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Yes, sorry. Just thinking. You're right. I've not enjoyed anything this much, even sex, for awhile.

MustLoveQuidditch: I'm going to head to bed. Talk to you tomorrow?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Sure. Might be really late, though. I have a dinner engagement.

MustLoveQuidditch: My competition?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Nothing to worry about. Sweet dreams, Gryffin.

MustLoveQuidditch: Same to you, Sly.

MustLoveQuidditch has logged off.

IntrospectiveIntellectual has logged off.

***

Draco sat back, shivering slightly as the cool night air flowed over his naked skin. He grabbed his trousers off the desk, standing to step into them. He started to leave the room, hesitating guiltily as he looked at the computer again.

He sat back down, logging into his regular email, dashing off a note to Theo to see if he and Ginny would like to join him for his standing dinner date with Cal tomorrow. He had some questions for them.

Back to Index

Chapter 12: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They belong to JKR, even though she insists they're straight.

***

Harry squinted as he looked at the table in front of him, tilting his head as Hermione marked the chart with her wand. Her Aunt Betty would be uncomfortable sitting with the witches and wizards in attendance, she decided, tapping the parchment again. Her aunt's name appeared, joining the names of several other relatives at a table near the back of the room.

Hermione frowned, studying the seating arrangements, looking at the dwindling list of names in her hand. She bit her lip, her tone hesitant as she spoke.

"I only have a few left," she said, and Harry wondered if he was imagining the apprehension in her eyes. "Friends, mostly. My family was easy, and Molly and Arthur already asked me to fill out their table with Kingsley and a few other Ministry employees."

Harry nodded, unsure of what could have her so distressed. The wedding planning had been going smoothly so far, the entire thing so militantly organized that Harry was positive nothing would dare go wrong and risk Hermione's wrath.

"I wanted to have you at a table with us, but it was all couples, and –"

"No worries, Hermione," he said, grinning. He could set her mind at ease if that was what she was

worrying about. “I don’t mind sitting with the left-overs.”

“Oh, Harry,” she groaned, looking even more distressed at his joke. “It’s really not like that, it’s just –”

“I was kidding, Hermione,” he said, his lips twitching in amusement. Why was she so worked up over where he sat at the reception?

“We’ve had a few last-minute additions. A couple more classmates that hadn’t thought they could make it, and then Gin asked me to add two people as well,” she said carefully, cringing as she looked at the newest name on the guest list.

They were on mostly friendly terms, sure, but she’d not planned to invite either man. But they were both good friends with Theo and Ginny, and Daph and Neville as well. And she knew Theo was working with them to develop his new club, and it seemed like too simple a request to deny. At least, it had until this moment, when she was forced to figure out where to seat them.

“I’m putting them with you because I know I can trust you,” she continued, and Harry’s stomach dropped. He had a good idea of what was coming next. “I know you’ll do your best to make them feel comfortable, which shouldn’t be too hard, since they’re friendly with most of the other guests.”

Harry nodded, happy he hadn’t told her about last night’s run-in at the Diagon Alley meeting. There were only a few people who fit the description Hermione was giving him, and he’d just seen one of them.

“So you’ll be over here,” she said, tapping her wand to a table near the side of the room. She knew Harry hated sitting with his back exposed, so placing him near the wall made sense. She’d seen Draco at enough events over the years to know it was his preference, as well.

“With Malfoy,” Harry added, quirking a brow when her eyes widened in surprise.

“And Blaise,” she said meekly, cringing as she waited for an explosion.

“Alright,” he said equably, laughing when she gaped at him in surprise. “We’re all adults now, Hermione. We’re hardly going to hex each other on sight.”

***

Draco insisted on cooking, since he had essentially invited himself over for the evening. Ginny hadn’t given more than a token protest, since she knew he was a fabulous cook, and it was a chore she hated. She watched as Theo played on the rug with Caleum, who was babbling excitedly about Freddie.

“He’s fabulous,” she said, sneaking a piece of fennel from Draco’s cutting board. He made quite the elegant figure, standing in her kitchen chopping vegetables.

“He’s been talking about it all day, ever since I told him where we were going tonight,” Draco said, tossing her another slice of the anise-flavored bulb.

“He seems to know a lot about babies,” she added, looking over his shoulder to watch as Caleum carefully pressed a kiss to the sleeping girl’s forehead.

“He’s been practicing on the house-elves,” Draco said with a laugh, sliding a pan of roasted shallots and mushrooms out of the oven and resting it on the counter. He turned, stirring the garlic cream sauce bubbling away on the range. “He’s determined to be the best cousin he can be.”

“Cousin?” Ginny asked, earning herself a slap on the wrist when she snaked out a hand to grab a hot mushroom.

“Nev and Daph,” Draco explained, carefully transferring crispy pancetta pieces to a towel to drain. He

threw chunks of chicken into the pan, letting them sizzle in the rendered fat.

“Ah, yes,” she said, settling onto a bar stool near the counter and snagging a piece of spinach from the salad Draco was preparing. “I suppose they will be cousins, won’t they? Growing up together, at least.”

Draco nodded, swallowing past the lump in his throat at the thought of more years without his son. He just wasn’t prepared to bring Cal out into the open, though, and it was too difficult for him to live in France. He had responsibilities here in England – to the Malfoy name, to the companies he owned, to the people who worked for him, even to Cal, who would reap the benefits of Draco’s careful management of the family name and money when he came of age.

“Drain the pasta,” he said, hoping she hadn’t heard the hoarseness in his voice. It didn’t do to dwell on things he couldn’t change, like his social standing and the effect it would have on Cal once it was revealed the boy was a Malfoy. He wasn’t foolish enough to believe it would never happen; he just wanted to do as much good with the name as he could before it did. “We’re about ready.”

They worked together in comfortable silence for a few more minutes, putting the finishing touches on the meal. He mixed everything together with the pasta and drizzled the sauce over top, rolling his eyes when Ginny gave an exaggerated sniff of delight and pretended to swoon over the finished product.

***

“Everything all set for tomorrow night?” Charlie asked, tipping his glass toward Harry as he spoke. All of the Weasleys were back in town for the wedding, most eagerly anticipating Ron’s stag party.

“Yes,” Harry said, wrinkling his nose in mock distaste. “Theo’s set up some sort of bar crawl that ends at the strip club in Knockturn Alley.”

Charlie grinned, laughing when Bill shot them both a wary glance.

“I’m not sure –”

“It will be fine, Billywig,” Charlie teased, laughing as his brother stiffened at the use of his hated childhood nickname. “You know Theo’s going to want to get home early because of Freddie, and Hermione would kill Harry here if anything too untoward happened. You’ll be back in the arms of your loving wife before you know it.”

Bill grimaced, already plotting how he could sneak out early – before the naked women. Fleur’s Veela blood would boil if she knew he’d been to a strip club, which wouldn’t be easy to hide from her enhanced senses.

“I’ll keep you safe,” Harry announced, slamming down the rest of his beer and putting the empty glass on the table. “Protect your virtue and whatnot. No worries, Billywig.”

“Ugh,” Bill groaned, grabbing his robes, which were draped over the back of the chair. He threw a few Galleons on the table to cover their meal and drinks, trudging dutifully after Harry and his brother as they made their way to George’s store for party favors.

***

Theo cleared away the dishes, refusing Draco’s assistance on the grounds that he’d cooked, so someone else should clean. He took the opportunity to question Gin, who had just returned from tucking Freddie into her cot. Cal was sprawled on the floor, coloring a picture of a very misshapen hippogriff.

She eyed him appraisingly, amused that Draco seemed tongue-tied about something. They’d talked about the club over dinner, so it likely wasn’t that. Besides, that was Theo’s area, not hers.

“Spit it out,” she said, grinning when he flinched at her directness.

“That obvious?” he asked, his cheeks coloring slightly at his transparency. Must be losing my touch, he thought wryly, crouching beside Cal on the floor to gather up some of the scattered crayons. He grinned as he thought about what his father would say if he could see his grandson coloring with the Muggle implements.

“To me, at least,” she said, sitting on the sofa with her legs curled comfortably beneath her. It was a cool night – especially for early July – and she wrapped one of Freddie’s blankets around her bare arms.

“I need some advice,” he admitted, watching her carefully. “I met up with someone yesterday – someone from our past – and, I don’t know, something happened.”

He waited for condemnation or laughter, and receiving neither, pressed on.

“It’s ridiculous, because we were never close, and there’s no way it would ever be anything more than physical attraction. I hadn’t even talked to him in years. I mean, we’ve seen each other at parties and ceremonies, sure, but we never talked. But we shook hands last night, and I swear, there was this spark _”

He broke off, shrugging. He was trying to explain his surprising attraction to Harry Potter to Ginny Weasley. The irony wasn’t lost on him, but she was the only other person he knew who might understand. She picked up on the hesitation immediately, her jaw dropping when she realized who he must be talking about.

“He went because George couldn’t,” she said, shocked when Draco nodded lamely.

“Oh,” she said, unable to figure out what else she should say. Was Draco really here seeking advice about pursing Harry?

“I just wanted to know, when you two were … you know, did you ever feel this, I don’t know, pulse of energy when you touched?”

She shook her head dumbly, still unable to process what she was hearing. Any other time, she’d consider helping, but she knew Harry was seeing someone. Sort of.

Draco blew out an unsteady breath, which turned into a laugh as he shook his head.

“It was probably nothing. Scratch that, I know it’s nothing. We hate each other. That’s not going to change, no matter how civil we act in public. He’s still Harry Potter, and I’m still Draco Malfoy,” he said, his tone bitter, remembering the recriminating look the green-eyed wizard had given him yesterday at the mention of the Divitiae Society.

She nodded absently, wondering how she’d never picked up on the attraction between the men before. It was so obvious now – all those years of fighting, that intense hatred between them. It was no wonder Draco had felt sparks fly when they touched.

Draco smiled, the niggling guilt he’d felt since last night leaving him. He might be attracted to Potter, but he wouldn’t act on it. Ginny’s reaction had been enough to convince him it was absolute folly to even consider it. And why should he, when things were going so well with Gryffin? His attraction to Potter had felt almost like cheating when he thought about it last night, but sitting here with Ginny, he realized it had just been a momentary spark, something that likely wouldn’t even happen again. After all, how many more times would he and Potter ever shake hands?

“It was just a random thought,” he said, his confidence returning. “But he has turned out well, hasn’t he?”

He grinned when Ginny laughed, nodding. She bit her lip, unsure of how much she should divulge to Draco. She didn’t want him pining after Harry if her friend was unavailable, after all.

“Harry’s –”

“None of my concern,” Draco said quickly, holding up his hands to stop her. “It’s moot, anyway. I’ve met someone. It’s still in the early stages, but I think it could really work out.”

She smiled, surprised at how happy she felt for Draco – and how that happiness was tempered with disappointment, since under different circumstances, she really did think Harry and Draco might be good for each other.

“That’s wonderful. Are you bringing him to the wedding? Do we get to meet him?”

His smile dimmed slightly, and Ginny wondered what she’d said wrong. Was Draco having second thoughts about going to Ron and Hermione’s wedding? Had he decided it would be too awkward?

“Er, no,” he said, smiling sheepishly. “We found each other on Pansy’s dating site. I haven’t actually met him yet.”

She smiled weakly, a sick feeling blossoming in her stomach. She grasped for a subject change, babbling about the problems Hermione was having finding the types of flowers she wanted, which were apparently out of season in Great Britain this time of year, and the snit Molly was in because they’d insisted on having the reception catered instead of letting her take care of it.

They chatted on about wedding plans for awhile, and Draco gave Theo a few suggestions for Ron’s stag party when the wizard rejoined them after clearing up in the kitchen. Draco and Cal didn’t stay much longer, since he needed to get the young boy home and to bed.

She waited until the green flames had died down before throwing in another pinch of Floo powder, praying Neville was at his cottage and not at the chateau.

“Longbottom cottage.”

“Bon soir, Gin,” Neville greeted her, smiling and nodding as she asked if she could step through for a moment.

“Is everything alright? Freddie’s latest tests come back OK?”

She nodded, walking straight to his liquor cabinet and pouring them both a shot of Firewhisky.

“So Draco was over for dinner. It seems he’s met someone. Online.” Her gaze was steady as she studied Neville. She saw him stiffen, confirming her suspicions. “Nev, what the fuck is going on?”

Back to Index

Chapter 13: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. JKR: Billionaire author. Bru: Hopeless fangirl who owns nothing but a laptop and a very dirty imagination.

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, July 1, 2008 10:15 p.m.

Re: Are you around?

I’m back from my dinner. Are you around?

Sly

***

Draco swallowed a sip of Scotch, enjoying the oaky flavor as it swirled over his tongue. As much as he liked the added bite of Firewhisky, he’d taken to enjoying a glass or two of Muggle variety from time to time. He favored a rich Scotch like he was savoring, which had been distilled near Hogsmeade, or a fruiter American bourbon, which he brought back from his infrequent trips across the pond.

It seemed like a night that called for it, he mused, taking another sip from the leaded crystal glass. I can’t believe I admitted I was attracted to Harry Potter, and to Ginny, of all people, he thought, slightly maudlin from the three drinks he’d already had. It was unusual for him to have more than one glass of the Muggle whisky at a time, generally preferring the more familiar Firewhisky if he was on a mission to get drunk.

He looked over at his laptop screen, impatient for a response from Gryffin. After spending a considerable portion of his evening obsessing over Harry Potter, he really wanted the easy comfort of talking to the man. Gryffin was funny and laid back, nothing like uptight and judgmental Potter, he thought with a curl of his lip.

Draco rubbed his chin, wondering if he should confess his attraction to the man when he talked with Gryffin. It seemed like such a small thing, but what if Potter and Gryffin were friends? They were both Gryffindors, so it was possible. How would it feel to be out on a date with Gryffin and run into the dark-haired wizard? Draco wrinkled his nose as he looked at his half-full glass of Scotch, resolving it would be his last. His thoughts were getting ridiculous.

***

Harry stumbled through the Floo, almost losing his grip on the bulky box in his hands. George had provided them with numerous pranks and gags to help get them through tomorrow's stag party, and Harry had volunteered to take charge of them. He figured it gave him the chance to sort through the box and remove anything that would truly embarrass – or, knowing George, maim or injure – Ron. Charlie hadn't entirely been joking about Hermione's fear that the party would get out of hand.

He balanced the box against his hip, closing and warding the Floo behind him with his wand. He wouldn't put it past Charlie – egged on by George or Bill – to try something again. He glared at his sofa, as though the blow-up doll that had been perched on it this morning was still there. He'd Vanished it, of course, but the memory of the hot pink lipstick and voluminous breasts was still fresh. Stupid wanker, he thought fondly, a bit happy that Charlie thought enough of him to take the piss like that.

Harry didn't see the dragon tamer often, since he was still working for the reserve in Romania. But when the Weasley men got together, they all seemed to take Harry's sexuality as a personal challenge. This time it had been a blow-up doll. Last Christmas, Percy had rigged his Muggle DVD player to start playing a disgusting lesbian porno when he'd walked into the room – with Hermione's parents. It was always something with them, and he knew the ribbing would be even worse tomorrow night. It was all good-natured, the Weasleys had no problem with his sexual preference, but it still chafed at times. Especially when he wasn't seeing anyone.

He grinned, shoving the box on his kitchen table as he walked through to his study, flicking his wand to turn on lights as he went. It was late, but he wanted to check in and see if Sly had emailed.

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, July 1, 2008 11:34 p.m.

Re: Am now

Sorry for the delay – I was out with some friends. Still up?

Gryffin

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, July 1, 2008 11:38 p.m.

Re: I'm here

I'm up, but I'm not sure for how much longer. I've had a bit too much Scotch, and I probably shouldn't stick around.

Sly

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, July 1, 2008 11:42 p.m.

Re: Drunk?

That must have been some dinner. Too pissed to type?

Gryffin

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, July 1, 2008 11:45 p.m.

Re: No

Too pissed to make sense, I think.

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, July 1, 2008 11:49 p.m.

Re: I see

All the more reason we should chat. I could take advantage of your inebriated state and find out who you really are.

Gryffin

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, July 1, 2008 11:51 p.m.

Re: What?!?

I thought you were a Gryffindor! How immoral. I'm quite disappointed in you. You're meant to be above-board and kind.

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Tuesday, July 1, 2008 11:57 p.m.

Re: Shhh

I'll let you in on a little secret. I had my choice between Slytherin and Gryffindor. The hat let me choose, because I could have been placed in either. I chose Gryffindor, but over the years I've wondered if I made the right decision.

I was actually thinking about it earlier today. The decision to be a Gryffindor, I mean. Something happened yesterday that got me to thinking about Slytherin, wondering how different things might be if I'd been a snake. There are moments the thought's appealing.

And I'm rambling. Sorry. Are you headed to bed, then? I won't be around tomorrow night, I'm afraid. We'll talk Thursday?

Gryffin

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Wednesday, July 2, 2008 12:06 a.m.

Re: Night

You're rambling and I'm drunk. Quite the pair. Talk to you Thursday, then.

Sly

***

“Seriously, Hermione, I think I have carpal tunnel,” Harry whined, repeating the charm for what surely must have been the hundredth time.

“If you have carpal tunnel, Harry Potter, it’s not because of this,” she said, shooting him a disapproving glare. He blushed, waves of mortification washing over him again at the memory of George asking him about the charmed cock rings – in front of Hermione – at the brunch Molly had thrown for the couple this morning. “You said you’d help. We’ve got more than a hundred left to do, so get to work.”

“A hundred?” he yelped, incredulous.

Hermione gritted her teeth, swishing her wand as she completed another favor. They were putting Stasis charms on tiny asters, which would enable the plants to survive until the guests could get them home and plant them. It had been Daphne’s idea to give the wedding guests a favor they might actually use, and Neville had grown all one hundred forty plants from seed himself, promising Hermione every single one would bloom into a gorgeous, healthy plant in the fall.

She looked down at row after row of small plants, sighing as she stretched her aching back. Neville had planned to help them, since he could manage the spells much faster than they could, but he’d gotten held up at the vineyard.

“You’ve only done half a dozen,” she snapped, knowing she was being unreasonable but unable to stop herself.

Harry grimaced, hearing the underlying stress and exhaustion in her voice. She'd been so busy, between wedding preparations and work, and Ron had hardly been any help at all. Not that she would have let the man do much, but the fact that he hadn't made an effort to even try annoyed her even more.

"Why don't you go get us some coffee?" Harry asked, nodding toward the door. "I'll keep working."

She hesitated, lowering her wand and sheathing it in her wrist holster. Harry was right. She needed to calm down, and a walk down to get some coffee was the perfect opportunity.

"I'll be back in ten minutes," she promised, hurrying toward the door.

***

Draco pushed back from his desk, frustrated. They'd been working out the details of a major land sale in Wales for weeks, and the seller had just dropped out. Added to the pounding headache he had this morning – which he hadn't taken a Hangover potion for, letting himself suffer as a reminder not to overdo it again with whisky – the morning had been a complete and utter disaster.

"I'm going out, Madge," he called as he walked by the secretary's desk, surprising her.

Draco rarely left during the day unless it was to attend a meeting or pop over to see his son for lunch, so the witch was a bit concerned.

"Mr. Malfoy?" she asked, her glasses perched on her nose as she looked up from typing a contract. "Can I get something for you, sir?"

He shook his head, grimacing when the movement caused pain to spike through his temples. He was

resolute in not allowing himself the potion, but a strong jolt of caffeine might have the same results.

“Just going out to grab a coffee,” he said, winking at her as he passed.

***

He’d been working steadily since she left, but Harry still cringed when he heard Hermione’s footsteps approaching. He’d managed about a dozen more charms, which meant there were still many to go. They’d set up their operation in the back room of the joke shop, since George had a few spare counters they could use to prepare and store the plants until the wedding on Saturday.

He didn’t look up as the footsteps stopped, though he could sense her standing over him, watching him as he crouched on the floor, moving another plant into the finished pile. He saw a take-away coffee cup appear in his peripheral vision, and Harry reached up, grabbing it without looking away from his task.

“Thanks, Hermione,” he said absently, taking a sip as he stood slowly, wincing when the blood rushed back into his cramped legs.

“No problem,” a slightly familiar male voice answered, making Harry gasp in surprise and very nearly drop the steaming cup he held.

“Malfoy?” he asked, his eyes widening as he realized the footsteps hadn’t belonged to Hermione after all. “What are you doing here?”

***

“Well, I think it was nice of him to offer to help,” Hermione said, twirling a bite of pasta on her fork. “And

we finished much faster than we would have without him."

"I'm not saying it wasn't," Harry answered, shoving his uneaten dinner away. "I'm just saying it was a surprise."

Ron reached over, switching plates with the dark-haired wizard. It wouldn't do for the delicious dinner Harry had cooked to go to waste, after all.

"He's … different," Ron said, surprising both Harry and Hermione by coming to Draco's defense. "They're all different now. Everyone has grown up."

Harry poked at Ron, his eyes narrowed.

"What was the first spell you tried when we were on the Hogwarts Express in first year?" he asked, his head cocked as he watched Ron roll his eyes.

"Do we have to talk about that stupid rat? Besides, according to Hermione, it wasn't a spell at all," he said, sticking his tongue out at the woman who would be his wife in two days' time. "Listen, wise arse, I'm not Polyjuiced. I'm just saying you should cut the bloke a break."

Harry snorted, kicking Ron under the table. "Like you give Theo a break?"

Ron grinned, shrugging as he reached for another piece of Harry's homemade bread. "That's different," he said easily, winking at Harry. "He's family. It's my job to make his life hell."

***

The music was pounding, and Harry felt faintly dizzy. Perhaps it hadn't been a good idea to drink, considering he'd passed on eating dinner. He swayed slightly, a giggle slipping past his lips as Charlie caught him.

"You're such a lightweight, Potter," the older man mocked, helping Harry slide into the booth their party had claimed two hours ago when they'd arrived at the club.

"Not," Harry protested, his tongue feeling strangely thick as he tried to speak.

Harry flinched when Bill leveled his wand at him, swallowing as a wave of nausea overtook him. He wasn't so far gone that he didn't recognize the Sobriety spell the man hit him with, grimacing as the uncomfortable sensation spread through his body. He thought he might vomit for a moment, but thankfully fought the urge.

"A little warning next time?" he snapped, frowning at the brothers, both of whom were laughing at him.

"Next time, don't drink so much so fast," Bill said, rolling his eyes. "I haven't had to use that spell since we found Percy flat-out tanked in the back yard after he proposed to Penelope the first time and she said no."

Harry grinned reluctantly. He was having too good a time to be put out with them. Even the aforementioned Percy had shown up to toast the last days of his brother's bachelorhood. He looked around the club – filled mostly with their friends – and smiled, laughing as he saw Ron taking a body shot off Seamus.

"I hope he remembers that in the morning," Charlie said wistfully, watching Ron take a bite out of a lime wedged between the Irishman's lips.

"He won't," Harry answered, heaving his now mostly sober self up out of the vinyl booth. He hit both Ron and Seamus with a mild Memory Charm, shrugging off the protests from Charlie that Harry never let anything fun happy.

“Blaise?” Harry said, and the other wizard colored, assuming Harry was teasing him about the drunken kiss he’d shared with the younger Slytherin a few years back.

“We were both very sorry about that in the morning,” Charlie said, ready to defend his honor – and his heterosexuality.

“No, Blaise,” Harry repeated, nodding over his shoulder at the wizard who had just entered the club. “He’s here.”

“Is he?” Charlie asked, twisting so he could watch the darker wizard advance across the floor. They’d actually become friends, galvanized by the mortifying experience they’d shared. “Did you invite him?”

Harry shook his head, feeling a bit guilty. Maybe he should have? He honestly hadn’t considered it. He was about to move toward the wizard, who was now talking with Theo and Ron near the bar, when he saw a bright shock of blond hair by the loo.

Malfoy? Harry’s heart slammed against his ribs, and he was suddenly very, very glad for Bill’s Sobriety spell. He’d had a disturbing dream about the blond bastard the night before, no doubt caused by their accidental meeting and the fabulous but not-quite-fulfilling wank he and Sly had shared later. He’d written off his earlier appearance at the joke shop as a fluke, but now he had to consider the truth: Fate hated him.

He watched in horror as the blond git moved through the crowd –how was it possible to look graceful whilst dodging drunken dancers? – and approached the trio near the bar, nearly groaning when Ron slapped him on the back, leaning in to talk with him over the loud music. Just fabulous, Harry thought, wincing when he noticed the blond head bob in agreement at something Ron had said. Probably inviting him to join them at their next stop, the strip club that had Bill so worried.

Grey eyes sought him out across the crowded club, and Harry’s pulse jumped when they made eye contact. It’s just that he still makes me so irrationally angry, even after all this time, Harry explained to himself, conscious of the blood pounding through his veins in a way he’d never been before. The music, he thought, wondering why it had taken the ear-splitting bass so long to affect him. Harry motioned for a waitress, grabbing two shot glasses filled with neon green liquid from her tray and plunking a Galleon

down in their place. He downed both without hesitation, not even tasting the sickly sweet alcohol as he tossed it back.

***

Draco sat back against the plush velvet, watching the scene before him with detached amusement. It wasn't that he couldn't appreciate the beauty of the naked, writhing women on the stage, it was just that they held no real attraction for him. Large breasts and long, shapely legs had never really appealed to him, though his former wife Patrizia had possessed both.

He watched a witch twirl around a pole, doing things with it that should not have been anatomically feasible, his lips twitching with laughter as Blaise leaned forward, tucking a shiny Galleon into the scanty G-string she wore. The money disappeared at once – Draco wondered what kind of charm they'd used, curious about how they'd managed that piece of complicated magic – which was fortunate, since the skimpy fabric didn't look like it would have withstood the added weight of the gold coin for long.

Draco looked away, studiously avoiding eye contact with the other patrons. He didn't understand the compulsion to sit in a room with dozens of other men watching women undress. Dozens of aroused men. His eyes flicked to Harry involuntarily, noting that he seemed immune to the charms of the well-endowed witch as well.

He'd heard Potter was gay, of course, but it had never really registered until tonight. He wondered if Potter was attracted to women at all, or if he was only here to support Weasley. Draco watched him slam back another drink – his sixth since they'd entered the club less than an hour ago. He'd had no idea Potter was such a lush.

"Can I bring you anything, sweetie?" a waitress drawled, giving Draco what she no doubt considered her best come-hither look.

"No, thank you," he said, tossing a Galleon onto her tray anyway. She smiled and winked at him, moving on to another table.

He nursed his club soda, resolved not to drink at all tonight. He'd only just rid himself of the headache from last night's over-indulgence, which he was in no hurry to repeat.

"So beautiful," he heard Ron slur as a topless witch leaned down in front of their table, apparently intent on giving the bridegroom a lap dance.

Draco waited a beat, expecting Potter to intervene. Surely this was not on the list of allowable activities for the night. He'd discussed them at length with Hermione while they waited for their coffee earlier that day, after she'd invited him and Blaise to tag along. He hadn't planned on taking her up on it, but then he'd remembered Gryffin wasn't going to be available all night.

"Weasley, no," Draco snapped, leaning over Theo and Blaise to grab the redhead's robes when it became clear Potter was too drunk to realize what was going on.

"No?" Ron asked, his voice distraught.

"No," Draco said firmly, sliding a few more Galleons across the table to the pouting witch. They disappeared quickly, and so did she, sauntering off to another table. "You'll thank me in the morning, trust me."

He arched a brow at Blaise, who was looking a bit worse for the wear himself. Theo was completely pissed, though not as far gone as Potter or Weasley. The dragon tamer was chatting up a dancer at another table, surrounded by several other of Potter's Gryffindor classmates.

"I think it's time to go," Draco whispered to his friend, nodding toward Potter, who was now asleep with his head propped on the table, and Weasley, who was looking around with a huge smile on his completely plastered face.

The darker wizard nodded, prodding Theo with his elbow. They managed to hit Potter with another Sobriety spell, and several men Draco vaguely recognized came to help lead the still-disoriented

dark-haired wizard and the giggling bridegroom out of the club.

“Can you get them home?” Charlie asked, his eyes flicking back toward the woman he’d just left. “I think I’m staying.”

Seamus and Dean elected to stay as well, leaving Theo and Blaise to help Draco get the two men home. They decided Apparating was too dangerous in their current state – and Draco was too tired to take the lot of them by Side-Along – so they opted to Floo from the Leaky Cauldron.

Draco had no idea where either man lived, but Theo did, so he took charge, calling out a destination that sounded vaguely familiar to the blond. When they stepped through the fireplace, he realized it must be the Black ancestral home. He’d been there once or twice as a child, but he remembered it being much darker and dirtier than it was now.

He helped Blaise lower Ron onto the dark leather couch, taking care to keep him upright as they eased their arms back. When he was satisfied the redhead wouldn’t fall, Blaise turned to Theo, watching as he struggled to get Harry up the stairs.

“His bedroom’s up here. Can one of you cast a Lightening charm? I’m just going to carry him,” he said, sighing in relief when Draco’s spell made it possible to easily heft the sleeping man.

“What should we do with him?” Blaise asked, inclining his head toward Ron, who had also drifted off.

“I’ll be back down for him,” Theo said, disappearing up the stairs. He raised his voice, and Draco assumed Potter’s bedroom must be somewhere on the second floor. “He can sleep it off in the guest room.”

Draco took advantage of the opportunity to look around Potter’s study, smiling when he saw the laptop open on the desk. He figured most witches and wizards their age had a computer these days, even though it was a pain to ward them from the ambient magic in most wizarding households. He was anxious to get home to check his own, hopeful that Gryffin might have changed his mind about going out and emailed him after all.

Back to Index

Chapter 14: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They aren't mine.

***

Harry was instantly alert, his head pounding as he sat up quickly. He panicked when his wand wasn't under his pillow, where it usually rested while he slept, but a quick perusal of the room – and himself – reassured him that everything was fine. He'd just gone to sleep in his clothes, with his wand still in its wrist holster.

Gone to sleep in his clothes? Harry looked down at himself, frowning. Why had he done that? And why did it feel like a herd of hippogriffs were dancing the tango in his skull? He swallowed thickly, grimacing at the horrendous taste in his mouth. Merlin, what had he done last night?

He jerked to awareness when he heard the peculiar noise again, briefly thanking his war-honed reflexes for pulling him out of his alcohol-induced slumber to alert him to a problem. It had been years since he'd needed to wield his wand for protection, but the instinct was still there.

He eased himself out of bed, wincing as his muscles protested the move. He noticed he'd managed to get his shoes off, at least, last night. Thankful for the added stealth his sock-feet gave him, he padded down the hallway, wand out in as he searched for the bizarre noise.

There, he thought, turning abruptly as the rough sound echoed through the corridor. It sounded like –

snoring? Coming from the bathroom? He pushed the door open, ready to Stun or Disarm whomever he found there if necessary.

Harry lowered his wand, his heart still racing. Ron was curled up in the claw-footed bathtub, fully clothed, the picture of absolute misery. Harry wondered how Ron had ended up there, searching his memory for any clues from the night before.

He remembered drinking at the club with Bill and Charlie, and the Sobriety spell Bill had hit him with. And then – oh, bloody hell – Malfoy coming in. Everything after that was a blur. Harry didn't know if he'd spoken to the blond at all.

Or worse. Harry moaned, slumping against the wall. A hot blush flooded his cheeks as he wondered what he might have said to the Slytherin in his drunken state. I'd like to bend you over the bar and bugger you senseless? Possible. Oi! Malfoy! Why don't you shut your bloody mouth before I shove something in it? More likely. Harry ran a hand through his hair, grimacing in disgust as he found it to be sticky. Sticky?! He swallowed hard, wondering what could have happened that would have resulted in something sticky in his hair. Oh, Merlin. He hadn't offered to re-enact his dream, had he?

Harry whimpered, squeezing his eyes shut as a wave of nausea swept over him at the thought. He fumbled in the medicine cabinet, his hands closing over the last bottle of Hangover Potion. He spared a quick glance for Ron – still passed out cold in the tub – before uncorking it and downing it in one gulp. He could always go out to buy another for Ron later. This was an emergency. He needed his wits about him if he was going to find out what he'd done the night before.

Harry cast a quick Cushioning charm on the bathtub, hoping it helped make Ron more comfortable. He didn't doubt there was a good reason his friend had decided to sleep there, and he was reluctant to move him until the redhead had something to settle his stomach.

He dashed down the stairs, headed for his study so he could make some Fire-calls. He felt a pang of guilt and regret as he noticed his laptop, still sitting open on his desk. What if he had done something with someone? He wrinkled his nose, disgusted with his inability to admit – even to himself – that realistically, it wouldn't have been just someone, it would have been Malfoy. He'd been ridiculously attracted to the bastard when they'd run into each other at the meeting, and every time he'd seen him since. Harry knew if he was being honest, he'd have to admit the tingles he'd felt the night before when Malfoy entered the

bar hadn't been entirely born of anger or frustration.

But the open laptop reminded him of Sly, and his heart sank. What if he had done something? Where would that leave his relationship with him? A note stuck to the screen caught Harry's attention, and he leaned over to grab it.

H –

It's embarrassing how low your tolerance is, my friend. Ron is tucked away upstairs in the guest room.

Take care of him. Hermione would kill me if she found out half of what we did last night, and Gin would let her.

-T

Harry read it over again, unsure of whether to be worried or relieved. Half of what they had done? Had he done something stupid?

Harry was about to boot up the computer to check his email – it had been more than a day since he'd talked with Sly, after all – when the Floo roared to life.

"Harry James Potter!" Hermione screeched as she stepped into the room, waving a copy of the Daily Prophet wildly.

"Er, Hermione?" Harry winced, wondering what she'd seen in the paper. Had there been any reporters there last night? He grimaced. Why hadn't he thought to check?

“Just exactly what is the meaning of this?” she asked, her voice dripping with venom as she threw the paper on the desk. “What were you thinking? And why was it Malfoy?”

Harry blanched. There was a photo of the two of them in the Prophet? His knees trembled, and he sat heavily in his desk chair. Merlin. But the Prophet wouldn’t print photos of things like that, would it? Surely not.

“He – I – we – I can explain –” Harry stammered, reaching a shaky hand out for the paper to see exactly what he needed to explain.

He turned it over, braced for the unimaginable. Or the very imaginable, if his dreams were anything to go by. Harry opened his mouth to defend himself, but closed it abruptly, brought up short by the photo.

Of Malfoy. Holding Ron in his seat while he waved a very beautiful – and mostly blurred out – naked witch away. Harry was visible in the background, quite obviously asleep with his head on the table. The table that looked – Harry squinted, leaning closer to the photo – like it was covered in something sticky. Like a spilled drink.

He raised a hand to his head, feeling the sticky, matted locks again.

Oh.

“Well?” Hermione asked, tapping her foot as she watched him.

“Er, sorry?” he offered lamely, flinching when he heard a loud crash from upstairs. Apparently Ron was awake.

“Oh, you’ll be sorry,” she hissed, grabbing the newspaper from the desk and storming upstairs. “You’ll both be very sorry.”

Harry watched her go, feeling sympathy for the greeting he knew Ron was going to get, and without the benefit of the Hangover Potion Harry'd had. He let himself relax into the chair, breathing a sigh of relief. His fears had been ridiculous. He hated Malfoy. Of course they wouldn't have done anything together. Harry dismissed his earlier worries, wondering if Hangover Potions had some sort of unknown hallucinogenic side effect. Really. Him and Malfoy?

***

Draco shook his head sadly at Blaise, who was sprawled out on the sofa in his office when he returned from a meeting at Gringotts.

"Feeling a bit rough, are we?" he asked, smirking as he dropped a bag of sandwiches in Blaise's lap.

Blaise muttered something unintelligible, muffled by the arm draped over his face. Draco grinned, directing his wand at the shades covering the windows. Light poured into the room and Blaise groaned, turning his face away.

"No Hangover Potion?" Draco asked, Summoning one of the sandwiches from the bag. He'd worked through lunch, and he was starving.

"Took one," Blaise said, squeezing his eyes shut and sitting up, rubbing his hands briskly over his face.

"And you still feel this poorly?" Draco asked, concerned. The potion should have taken care of any nausea or headache left over from last night.

"I'm fine," the wizard said, rummaging through the bag for a sandwich of his own. He stripped off the meat and cheese, eating the piece of bread plain.

Draco chewed thoughtfully, studying his friend's chalky face. Blaise usually recovered quickly from hangovers, and in truth, he hadn't been terribly drunk the night before.

"You're not," Draco said sharply, sitting his lunch aside to examine Blaise more closely. He pushed the man's feet off the low coffee table, crouching next to him to place a cool hand against his feverish forehead.

"Get off," Blaise muttered, giving Draco a half-hearted shove.

The blond ignored him, casting several diagnostic charms over him instead. Draco called for Madge, asking her to bring the wizard a glass of water.

"I think you have the flu or something," Draco said, frowning.

"No," Blaise said, shivering slightly. "I'm fine."

Draco rolled his eyes, grinning when Madge entered the room. She tutted over Blaise for a few moments, casting the same spells Draco had, and coming to the same conclusion.

"You've no business being here, Mr. Zabini," she scolded, making sure he drank the water she'd brought him. "You should be home in bed."

Blaise gave her a weak smile, waggling his eyebrows. "Is that an offer, Madge-pie?"

"Oh, you," she said, swatting him fondly as she left, a faint blush tinting her cheeks. "You make him go home, Mr. Malfoy. He's too sick to be here."

Draco grinned, holding a hand out to help Blaise up from the sofav . He'd make sure the man got to bed, even if he had to place him there himself.

"Let's go. I'll Floo home with you, make sure you have everything you need. I'm sure Madge is already Owling an order over to the apothecary for whatever potions you need."

***

To: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Thursday, July 3, 2008 7:06 p.m.

Re: Good evening

Are you around tonight? I've had a crap day, and I need to unwind. That's not what it sounded like. Just looking to talk. I'm too bloody exhausted to do anything else tonight, I'm afraid.

A good friend has the flu, and I spent the day Flooing between his house and work, making sure he was alright and covering all his meetings as well. The Healer said he's out for a few days, at least. We're incredibly busy right now, and on top of that, he and I were to go to an event this weekend that I was dreading, and now I'll have to go alone.

Maybe we shouldn't chat tonight. I'm in a rotten mood, and there's no reason to muck up your day as well.

Sly

***

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

From: MustLoveQuidditch@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Thursday, July 3, 2008 7:22 p.m.

Re: No, I'm here

What kind of Gryffindor would I be if I didn't take that challenge, eh? Besides, you cheered me out of my bad mood a few nights ago, so the least I can do is return the favor.

Meet me in the chat room? I'll send you a link.

Gryffin

***

IntrospectiveIntellectual has entered the room.

MustLoveQuidditch: Welcome

IntrospectiveIntellectual: So I've already told you about my crap day. How was yours?

MustLoveQuidditch: Boring. Most of my days are boring. I'm a very boring person.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I have a hard time believing that.

MustLoveQuidditch: No, it's true, honestly.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Were you not the one to suggest those charmed cock rings?

MustLoveQuidditch: Well, yes.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: A boring person wouldn't have been able to come up with that. Ergo, you are not boring.

MustLoveQuidditch: Ergo?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Do you have a problem with my vocabulary?

MustLoveQuidditch: Just amused by how … big… it is.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: You can make a sexual reference out of the most innocuous thing.

MustLoveQuidditch: It's a talent, really.

MustLoveQuidditch: Feeling less snarky?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I am never snarky.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: And I don't use words like snarky, either.

MustLoveQuidditch: Snappish?

MustLoveQuidditch: Crotchety?

MustLoveQuidditch: Acerbic?

MustLoveQuidditch: Caustic?

MustLoveQuidditch: Mordant?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Stuff it

MustLoveQuidditch: My mistake. Never snarky.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Yes, I feel better.

MustLoveQuidditch: You're welcome.

MustLoveQuidditch: So this event this weekend, it's work, not fun?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: A bit of both. Lots of old friends will be there, and some clients, too.

MustLoveQuidditch: I've got a bit of a chore this weekend, too.

MustLoveQuidditch: That sounds bad. It's something I'm happy to go to, but I'm kind of dreading it at the same time.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Business or pleasure?

MustLoveQuidditch: Pleasure, but don't put it that way, please. It conjures bad images.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: ?

MustLoveQuidditch: There's just going to be someone there I'd rather not see. Especially not thinking in that context.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: An old lover?

MustLoveQuidditch: NO!

MustLoveQuidditch: Sorry, no. Nothing like that. It's complicated.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I know what you mean. I've a situation like that myself. I was counting on my friend to be a buffer, but he's sick …

MustLoveQuidditch: Is yours an old lover?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: No. Just someone who manages to get under my skin.

MustLoveQuidditch: Ah, yes. Mine's like that, too.

MustLoveQuidditch: It's just for a few hours, though. Can't be that hard to manage, right?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Right.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: This is going to sound odd. I probably have no right to ask, even.

MustLoveQuidditch: Yeah?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Are you seeing anyone else right now?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: In person, I mean?

MustLoveQuidditch: No. Not in person or online.

MustLoveQuidditch: Are you?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: No, I was just checking.

MustLoveQuidditch: When we meet next weekend …

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I don't sleep around.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: If we hit it off, it would only be you, Gryffin.

MustLoveQuidditch: For me, as well. I just wanted to check.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: It's not something I do lightly. I've told you before that the press takes an irrational interest in my love life …

MustLoveQuidditch: I understand. Mine, too.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: It's just that – there have been a lot of rumors about me. Lots of reports of me and other men that aren't true. It's something we'd have to deal with, if we were dating.

MustLoveQuidditch: I really do understand, Sly. I've had more than one boyfriend run off because of something he read in the paper.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I'm a very private person. There are … things … I haven't told you yet.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Things I wouldn't feel comfortable telling you until we'd met face-to-face.

MustLoveQuidditch: Don't tell me: You're secretly a woman.

MustLoveQuidditch: You collect something odd, like PEZ dispensers.

MustLoveQuidditch: (shudders) You like *NSYNC.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I'm being serious here, Gryffin.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: What the hell is a PEZ dispenser?

MustLoveQuidditch. I know, but there's no need to get all heavy – nothing would dissuade me from meeting you next weekend, Sly. No use trying to scare me off now.

MustLoveQuidditch: Oh, it's a Muggle sweet. This little candy that comes out a funny-shaped dispenser. I have a few.

MustLoveQuidditch: Dozen

MustLoveQuidditch: I'll show them to you some time.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Is that some kind of Muggle pick-up line?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: 'Want to see my PEZ dispensers?'

MustLoveQuidditch: Wait, does that mean that you DO like *NSYNC?!?!?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Idiot

MustLoveQuidditch: That didn't sound like much of a denial.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Justin Timberlake is quite fit.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Well, he is.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Damn it, Gryffin.

MustLoveQuidditch: Sorry, I think I just had a stroke.

MustLoveQuidditch: Seriously? You hate pop music.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I didn't say I liked the music. Just that Justin Timberlake has a nice arse.

MustLoveQuidditch: Oh. Well that clears things right up, then.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: If you're finished being snarky …

MustLoveQuidditch: So NOW you'll use the word snarky?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Well, I do like to expand my vocabulary.

MustLoveQuidditch: And we've come full circle.

MustLoveQuidditch: Is your vocabulary expanded right now? Thinking about Justin Timberlake's arse?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I suppose if I told you I needed to log off now you'd never believe it was because I have to check on my friend?

MustLoveQuidditch: Is that what the kids are calling it these days?

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Gryffin

MustLoveQuidditch: Sly

IntrospectiveIntellectual: I really do have to go.

MustLoveQuidditch: Yes, go. Your friend's lucky to have you. I'm glad you care enough to check in on him.

MustLoveQuidditch: You're a nice bloke, Sly.

MustLoveQuidditch: Even if you DO like *NSYNC.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: In the name of all that is holy: I DO NOT like that band!

MustLoveQuidditch: Whatever you say, Sly. Go take care of your friend.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Wanker

MustLoveQuidditch: Too right

IntrospectiveIntellectual: You're incorrigible, you know.

MustLoveQuidditch: Ooh, Sly. You're using your big … vocabulary .. again.

IntrospectiveIntellectual: Goodnight, Gryffin

MustLoveQuidditch: Goodnight, Sly

IntrospectiveIntellectual has logged off.

MustLoveQuidditch has logged off.

***

“And then he says –” Harry broke off, looking at Ron with concern. “Are you alright, mate? Not having second thoughts are you? Because Hermione would kill us both, you know.”

Ron shook his head, his expression still shell-shocked. The story Harry was telling him about his online mystery man had just meshed with something Hermione had told him yesterday. Something about Harry’s odd reaction to something in the paper.

Ron looked up, trying for a smile that looked more like a grimace. This wasn’t happening, he assured himself. This couldn’t be happening. He slung an arm around Harry’s shoulder, steering him toward Theo and Ginny.

“I need to talk to Nev about something,” he said, trying to keep his voice light as he left Harry with them to head across the room. “Something I just remembered about – the flowers for tomorrow.”

Harry looked puzzled, especially when Ginny’s eyes widened at something she saw in her brother’s face.

“I, er, should go with him,” she stammered, watching Ron approach Neville. The two men headed out

toward the gardens, and Ginny started to follow. “Ron doesn’t know anything about flowers. I should make sure he’s telling Neville the right thing.”

Harry turned to Theo, half expecting him to bolt as well, but the former Slytherin looked just as confused as Harry felt. He shrugged, taking a sip of the cider in his champagne glass. He’d sworn off drinking for awhile after his experience on Ron’s stag night.

“Did you catch any of that Magpies game?” he asked Theo, falling into an easy conversation about Quidditch.

***

“You would know, if there was something to know, right?” Ron asked, cornering Neville as soon as they were out of earshot. The rehearsal dinner was in full swing inside, with everyone enjoying cocktails before Molly’s home-cooked meal.

Neville blinked, trying to make sense out of Ron’s words.

“You know,” Ron hissed, rolling his eyes. “About Harry? If there was something I should know? About Sly? The Slytherin he’s been seeing online?”

Neville swallowed, panicking when he saw Ginny striding across the grass toward them. This was bad. Did Ron – could he really have figured it out?

Ron turned when Ginny joined them, narrowing his eyes at the meaningful glance she shared with Neville.

“Oh, shit.”

“So you know?” she asked him, eyeing him with concern.

This was not the time or place for this conversation, she knew. Harry might come looking for them at any moment, and this wasn’t a revelation she wanted him to have less than twenty-four hours before he was meant to stand up for her brother at his wedding. Nor did Ginny want Ron to combust at his own rehearsal dinner. It would take both men considerably more than a day to cool down after they found out Sly’s identity, and she cringed at the thought of the revelation ruining the wedding.

“I think I know,” Ron said carefully, piecing everything together in his head. Everything he knew about Sly. Everything he knew about Malfoy. Fuck. “Yes, I know.”

“How?” Neville asked, arching a brow at Ron. The redhead was curiously calm about this. Did he really know?

“It’s fairly obvious, isn’t it?” Ron hissed, shooting a worried look toward the house. He didn’t want Harry wandering out for any part of this conversation.

“Is it?” Ginny asked, crossing her arms.

“Yes,” Ron whined, dropping his head into his hands.

Harry. His best friend.

His best friend Harry was falling for Malfoy. And he couldn’t do a thing to stop it, because they were so damn perfect for each other. Malfoy was a git, but he if really was Sly, then there was no denying he and Harry would be great together.

“Ugh,” he moaned, leaning against Neville when the man wrapped an arm around him, rubbing soothing

circles on his back.

***

Draco fidgeted with his cuff links, clenching his hands and forcing them to his sides when he caught himself. Malfoys did not fidget, and he had no reason to be nervous about this wedding. Hell, he hadn't been this anxious about his own wedding.

And why do you think that is? he asked himself, settling into his seat to await the start of the ceremony. Could it have something to do with Potter being the best man?

Draco frowned, studying the program an usher had given him on the way in. He'd expected Hermione would have insisted on writing their own vows, but it didn't look like they had. It seemed to be a pretty straight-forward ceremony, not many frills. He glanced at his watch, looking back at the door again. Pansy and Oliver had just come in, and he motioned them over. He doubted they'd be sitting together at the reception, but at least he didn't have to be alone for now.

***

Harry was worried about Ron. The wizard had been staring at him all morning, and it was a bit concerning.

"You're perfect for each other," Harry whispered, squeezing Ron's tuxedo-clad shoulder.

Instead of reassuring him, though, Harry's words seemed to make Ron even more tense. He couldn't really be that worried about getting married, could he?

“It will be over before you know it,” Harry said, studying Ron’s face. “Just a few more minutes, and then you’ll be married, and it will be brilliant. You’ll see.”

Ron smiled, nodding. The words did nothing to assuage his fears about Harry and Malfoy, but they did remind him why they were there. He had no reservations about marrying Hermione. He’d sprint down the aisle to her if he could.

“Are you ready? They’re calling for you,” Bill said, poking his head around the door.

Ron grinned at Harry, who felt relieved to see his friend relax.

“Let’s do it,” Ron said, hooking arms with Harry and striding out the door.

***

“Gin, what is your problem today?” Hermione asked, frowning when she caught Ginny staring out into the sea of people who’d already been seated for the ceremony.

“What?” Ginny turned, her lips curving when she caught sight of Hermione. She looked spectacular, and even though Ginny had just helped her get dressed minutes ago, she couldn’t help but admire the picture Hermione in a wedding dress made. “Nothing. Just excited.”

Ginny turned again, searching for the blond head that she knew would stand out from the rest. She found him, seated in the fourth row. Pansy and Oliver were with him, and she saw Daphne and Neville making their way toward him as well.

She brought her attention back to Hermione, smoothing some nonexistent wrinkles out of the simple silk sheath she wore. Everything about the wedding – from the elegant bridesmaid dress to the sensible

favors – just screamed Hermione. Ginny smiled, tucking one of Hermione's errant curls back into its pin. Hermione's light cream-colored dress fell in graceful waves around her, its scooped neckline accentuating her slender shoulders and graceful neck. Her hair was piled up on top of her head, secured by about a hundred pins and Great Aunt Muriel's goblin-made tiara, the same one Fleur wore when she married Bill.

"You look beautiful," Ginny said, pressing a careful kiss to Hermione's cheek, taking care not to smudge their make-up.

***

Draco mentally took back every insult he'd ever dealt Weasley as he watched the man light up when Hermione walked down the aisle. Everyone always watched the bride at weddings, but Draco liked to pay attention to the groom – and not just because his preference was men.

The bride always looked flushed with excitement, but you could tell a lot about how successful the marriage would be by watching the groom. Some didn't watch their wife-to-be walk down the aisle. Others watched, but didn't stare. Weasley, though, watched his bride progress down the aisle like a starving man looking at the only food for miles.

People always talked about how a bride glowed, and they were right. Hermione was no exception – she looked ravishing, and so happy it almost made Draco's heart hurt to watch. But Weasley – he looked like he'd gotten every birthday and Christmas at once, so shining with love and joy that his entire face lit up.

And Potter. Draco bit his tongue, trying to steer his thoughts away from the gorgeous dark-haired wizard standing next to the groom. He looked almost as happy as Weasley, his lips curved in a breathtaking smile, his eyes locked on his friend as she made her way toward them on her father's arm. You'd think he was the one marrying her, Draco thought, studying Potter's striking green eyes, full of love and pride. Draco tamped down a feeling of what he refused to acknowledge as jealousy at Potter's expression, telling himself it was merely the old rivalry between them rearing up again. Why should Potter look so happy, after all?

Draco didn't notice three sets of eyes watching him, the most conspicuous being the matron of honor, whose gaze flicked between him and Harry several times before settling on her brother, focusing on the words being spoken. Neville shot Pansy a small smile, both of them easily following Draco's gaze, which still rested on Harry. Maybe everything would work out, after all.

***

Harry was tired of smiling. He was tired of posing for photos, tired of shaking hands with people he was sure he'd never met before. Tired of answering the same old predictable questions, ones he couldn't answer truthfully.

So, what are you doing these days, Potter? Well, I write a wildly popular mystery series. Maybe you've heard of me? James Evans? He snorted, taking a sip of the wine he'd promised himself he wouldn't drink. It was just so bloody claustrophobic.

I don't see a date, Harry. Aren't you seeing anyone? I am, but I couldn't bring him. You see, I've never actually met him, though we have shared several very satisfactory hand jobs. Oh, and I'm fairly certain I'm in love with him. He smiled, his shoulders relaxing as he thought about Sly, who was likely fielding similar questions wherever he was today. It made Harry feel better, for some reason, knowing Sly was just as miserable as he was.

He'd managed to avoid Malfoy so far, but he knew his luck wouldn't hold out much longer. Dinner was about to be served, and Harry would have to take his seat at their table soon. He took another swallow of the wine, making sure to smile broadly when he saw Hermione trying to catch his attention from across the room.

He waved, giving her an exaggerated appraisal and a big wink. He saw her laugh once before she was swept away again, pulled into another crowd of well-wishers.

"So, Potter, what are you doing these days?"

The smile slid off Harry's face as he turned toward the voice, quickly replaced with the most civil expression he could muster.

"This and that, Malfoy. You know how it is, life among the wizarding elite," he answered, his tone more bitter than he'd intended.

Draco gave him an easy shrug, smiling slightly. "I wouldn't know. I run Malfoy Industries. Keeps me pretty busy."

Harry looked around, distressed to realize that everyone else was taking their seats. He gestured toward the sparsely populated table at the side of the room, following the blond's lead as they claimed their chairs as well.

"That's odd," Harry said, looking around the table. A few other singletons from their Hogwarts days were seated there, but the table should have been full. "Are we missing a few people?"

"Sue has the flu," Hannah said, wrinkling her nose. "Bad case, too. Poor thing. I think Justin was still coming, but he got held up at work."

Harry nodded, smiling at the witch who slid a salad plate in front of him.

"Blaise has the flu, too," Draco offered, reaching for the bread basket by his elbow.

Harry reached over at the same moment, their hands brushing. Harry's breath caught in his chest as Draco's palm slid against his, the silky smooth skin making the Quidditch callus below the blond's index finger even more noticeable.

Draco's eyes widened at the contact, his cheeks immediately beginning to heat. He knew that hand. He

knew that hand well.

Harry stopped breathing, his mind racing. His hand was frozen, still touching Draco's, but he was powerless to move it.

Blaise had the flu. Holy fuck, Blaise has the flu. Malfoy came alone, because Blaise has the flu.

Draco's heart stuttered, and he could hear the roar of his blood pumping through his veins. It was the only way he knew he was still alive. Because surely – surely – this couldn't be happening.

"Oh my god," Harry whispered, and Draco whipped his hand back as though burned by the words.

The exchange couldn't have taken more than a few seconds, but Draco looked around, panicked. How had no one noticed that?

"Yes," Draco said numbly, nodding his head in shock.

They were silent for a few more beats, until Harry gave a choked laugh, his eyes wide with panic and distress.

"Er, want to see my PEZ dispensers?"

Back to Index

Chapter 15: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They belong to JKR, I'm just taking them out for a spin.

***

Their eyes locked, and Harry cringed at the incredulity he saw in the grey depths. Want to see my PEZ dispensers? Holy hell, had he really just said that? Harry's entire body tensed, his head reeling. A million other words – words he should have used – immediately shot to the forefront of his mind. But no, as usual, he'd blurted out the first thing that popped into his brain.

Want to see my PEZ dispensers. Brilliant. Harry almost groaned, the only thing preventing the sound from escaping his lips being the total lack of oxygen in his lungs. He'd forgotten to breathe again.

Draco watched Potter warily, his hand safely cradled in his lap. Far away from Potter. Potter, who was apparently the man he'd been corresponding with for the last two months.

Draco's eyes widened in horror as he absently watched Potter turn an alarming shade of red, noting with detachment that it didn't look like the Gryffindor was breathing at all. He had much more important things to worry about. Like the fact that Potter was Gryffin. That he had confessed things about himself he'd never told anyone to Potter.

Oh, fuck.

He'd wanked with Potter. Magically enabled or not, he'd had Potter's hand on his cock. He flinched when he felt the traitorous organ stir, obviously thrilled at the idea. Thinking Potter was fit was one thing – the man clearly had a fabulous body and was blessed with boyish good looks that appealed to something visceral in Draco. But to actually have had one off with Potter? Draco groaned, closing his eyes so he didn't have to look at the suffocating man in front of him.

"Harry, are you alright?"

They both flinched, suddenly very aware that they were sitting in a room with nearly two hundred other people, three of whom were looking at them with concern. Draco opened his eyes, careful to avoid Potter's face. He knew the man was breathing again, but only because he heard the first shaky breath the Gryffindor took.

"Fine," Harry rasped, forcing his gaze to move from Malfoy to Hannah, who was half-standing, leaning across the table to try to rest a hand on his forehead. "Sit, sit. I'm fine."

The witch studied him curiously, her eyes wide as she took in his still-red face and the light sheen of sweat that now covered his upper lip. Fabulous, Harry thought dryly, embarrassed his body had betrayed his discomfort so visibly. At least she can't see the enormous hard-on I'm sporting. He swallowed hard, tamping down thoughts of his wank sessions with Sly. No, not Sly. Malfoy. Remarkably, the thought of Malfoy's hand on his cock didn't cause its immediate deflation, as Harry had expected. Instead, he found his arousal ratchet up a notch.

"Do you think you're getting the flu as well?" Hannah asked, reluctantly settling back into her seat. She was clearly disappointed to be denied the opportunity to touch him, and Harry found himself intensely grateful for the table separating them.

Idiotic Hufflepuff, Draco thought scathingly, his jaw clamped shut. Doesn't the stupid bint know Potter is gay, for fuck's sake? Why is she so eager to get her hands on him?

"The flu," Harry said, his voice sounding choked again. "Yes. Yes, that's probably it."

Draco looked away, focusing his gaze on another tableful of friends near the front of the room. His stomach lurched when he saw Pansy, who was openly staring back. Pansy. She'd known about this farce all along, and she'd done nothing to stop it!

Draco stood abruptly, thankful beyond measure that he'd chosen to wear robes instead of a Muggle tuxedo, since he knew the drape of the expensive fabric would hide his now-waning erection. He saw Potter flinch out of the corner of his eye, but chose to ignore it.

“Excuse me,” Draco said shortly, striding off toward the exit. He knew Pansy would follow him, which was fortunate, because this wasn’t a conversation he wanted to have in the middle of a wedding reception.

Harry almost growled in frustration. Malfoy was leaving? Just like that? Harry almost stood to follow him – though for the life of him he couldn’t figure out why Malfoy leaving was a bad thing, even though his mind seemed to disagree – before remembering he was in no state to stand just yet.

He watched, helpless, as Malfoy crossed the ball room in long, elegant strides, his straight posture and haughty expression giving no clue that anything was amiss. Moments later Harry saw Pansy streak past. This time he actually did growl softly, suddenly furious with the witch. She’d known all this time, and she hadn’t said anything? She’d had ample opportunity whilst delivering the food and wine they’d sent back and forth, not to mention the other small gifts they’d exchanged. Like his manuscript. Fuck, Harry thought, his chest constricting. His manuscript. Malfoy knew he was James Evans.

The thought of Malfoy revealing that tidbit of information to the press – which Harry fully expected he would – took care of the remnants of his erection, and Harry sprang to his feet, his napkin falling to the ground unnoticed.

“Harry?” a gratingly familiar voice asked, and Harry gritted his teeth. Perfect.

“Zach,” he responded, his tone frosty as he bowed slightly to the wizard who’d just made his way over to their table.

“I’ve been meaning to look you up,” the man continued, leering suggestively at Harry in a way that made his skin crawl.

Harry just bet he had. Thankfully, he’d been living in a flat with Hermione – not at Grimmauld Place – when they’d dated after leaving Hogwarts, so his current residence remained a mystery to the Hufflepuff. Not that it had stopped Zach from stalking him in public whenever he could, or sending Owls every so often begging to get back together.

“I was just leaving,” Harry said, trying to push past the wizard as politely as possible. Malfoy and Pansy were gone, but he’d seen the door they’d left through. If he could get away, he might be able to catch them.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Smith drawled, and Harry had to bite back a snarl. He hated everything about the man – especially the fact that he’d lost his virginity to him. “You’re the best man. You can’t leave.”

Hannah, not oblivious to the waves of fury rolling off Harry, stood quickly, wrapping an arm around Harry’s waist. He wondered who she was protecting, him or her fellow Hufflepuff.

“Harry’s not well,” she said, pushing him lightly away from the table. She blocked Zach’s approach with her own body, angling toward him so Harry could get away. “The flu, we think. He was just leaving to see if he could track down a potion for his headache.”

Harry nodded, sending Hannah a grateful smile for her intervention. He hurried away from the table, hearing Smith’s protests grow louder as he shot across the room. He was surprised when Neville caught up with him in the corridor, grabbing his arm.

“Harry –”

The dark-haired wizard whirled around, his jaw dropping when he looked at Neville. He wasn’t sure if it was something he heard in the other man’s voice, or something in his expression, but suddenly the realization that Neville knew exactly what was happening crashed down on him.

“How long have you known Malfoy and I were writing to each other?”

Neville, colored, looking away despite retaining his grip on Harry’s arm.

“A few weeks,” Neville admitted.

“A few weeks,” Harry repeated dully, feeling another wave of anger sweep through him. “Who else?”

He knew Neville well enough to read the other man’s discomfort, correctly assuming what it meant.

“Ginny. Ron.”

“Ron?” Harry couldn’t believe it. Ron knew and he hadn’t hexed Malfoy into the next century?

“He realized – we all realized – that you two are good for each other,” Neville said, his eyes finally resting on Harry again.

He wondered if his friend had realized he was in love with Draco yet. Sure, Harry now knew Sly and Draco were the same person, but had he really made the connection? Ron had told him about Harry’s reaction to Draco at the stag party, and Neville had witnessed the obvious attraction between the two men on the rare occasions their paths crossed in public. If Harry can just get past this, he’ll realize they’ve been dancing around this for years, Neville thought.

“Good for each other,” Harry echoed, and Neville began to worry he was in shock.

“Well, yes,” Neville said, his head snapping up when he heard footsteps approaching. Draco and Pansy came around the corner, stopping short when they saw them.

“Draco,” Neville said, nodding toward his friend. “Pans.”

The witch looked momentarily stricken by the sight of Harry, quickly regaining her composure. Without looking at Draco, she offered the men a tentative smile, closing the distance between them.

“Neville,” she said, kissing his cheek. She looked at Harry hesitantly, biting the bullet and leaning in to press her cool lips against his cheek as well. “Harry.”

Harry swallowed, feeling his emotions surge. This wasn’t the place for this conversation, and he needed time to think things through before he said anything he’d regret. Like begging Malfoy to take him home and fuck him.

“Pansy,” Harry said, returning the kiss. “We’d best get back in there before we’re missed.”

He broke away, covering the ground between them and the ornately carved doors to the ballroom in a few powerful strides. He bypassed his own table, heading straight for Ron and Hermione, who had just cut the cake and were now stepping onto the dance floor.

Ron’s smile faltered slightly when he saw his best friend enter the room, wondering what had happened in the corridor. It was fairly obvious – to those in the know, at least – that Harry and Malfoy had finally figured it out. He’d been tempted to go out himself, but he knew that would draw even more attention to Harry’s absence. People were already talking as it was, especially after Oliver had threatened to hex Smith when the idiot had tried to follow Harry out of the room.

Harry took a breath, determined not to ruin the reception for his best friends. He felt a genuine smile steal across his face as he watched Ron wrap his arms around Hermione, obviously taking great care not to muss her dress as they began to awkwardly move around the dance floor. He cast a surreptitious Shield charm on Hermione’s dainty shoes after he saw her wince when Ron stepped on her foot, drawing a laugh and grateful smile from both of them.

Ron was surprised when Harry joined them on the dance floor as the song ended, stealing Hermione away for the next dance with a huge smile on his face. Ginny appeared at his elbow and he held her stiffly, his dancing even clumsier than it had been with his bride.

“He looks alright,” Ron whispered, his eyes trained on Harry and Hermione, who were twirling around the floor with skill and grace.

He heard others on the dance floor giggle, probably laughing at the fact that it appeared as though he couldn't take his eyes off his bride even for a moment.

"Nev said he refused to talk about it," Ginny whispered, pitching her voice low so they wouldn't be overheard. "And Pansy said Draco said the same thing."

"Think it'll be alright?"

Ginny hesitated, her expression worried.

"I don't know. I expected a big scene when they found out. Yelling, hexing, fighting. Not this – this polite indifference."

Ron nodded, releasing her reluctantly as the song ended and Fleur materialized, ready to take Ginny's place.

"We'll see, I guess."

***

Draco watched as Potter danced with every female under the age of 80 in attendance, engaging in polite conversation and moving around the floor with surprising elegance and skill. A far cry from the klutz he'd been at the Yule Ball all those years ago.

He didn't know why he hadn't left yet. He'd stayed through the cake cutting and the first dance, compelled back into the ballroom by a sense of propriety that forbade him to leave the reception without complimenting the happy couple and dutifully watching their nuptial milestones. Something

intangible had kept him there, born either out of the desire to see Potter's eventual explosion or admiration of this calm, confident man the once-volatile Gryffindor had become. He wasn't sure which.

Potter had been the consummate gentleman all evening, laughing and mingling as though there was no other place he'd rather be. But Draco knew differently – or rather, he knew Gryffin felt differently. Potter's mask was as seamless as his own. Draco was confident that no one – not even Pansy – would be able to see the tension in his shoulders or the carefully guarded panic in his eyes.

He should have gone more than an hour ago, when most of the older family members had taken their leave. It was late, and he could easily have slipped away without causing a stir. But he stayed, dancing with those who asked and politely chatting with people he hadn't seen in years. All because he wanted to watch Potter.

Sometime over the last few hours, Potter had lost his tuxedo jacket, and Draco's stomach clenched at the sight of the man in his shirt-sleeves, cuffs rolled up to expose lightly tanned forearms that were ropey with muscle. He'd been watching those arms wrap around countless people all evening long, puzzled and disturbed by the jealousy he felt every time Potter led another witch out onto the floor or hugged a friend or acquaintance.

Draco shook his head, resolving to leave as soon as he found the newlyweds and said goodbye. It was ridiculous to pine over Potter – there was no way anything could possibly happen between the two of them. He felt a momentary pang at the thought of losing his easy conversations with Gryffin, but he was a realist. Harry Potter would not date Draco Malfoy, and even if he would, Draco Malfoy had too many responsibilities to even consider it. He'd known Gryffin had some degree of fame, and he'd figured they'd be able to deal with it. But Harry Potter? He would have no chance in hell of keeping their relationship out of the papers, and there was no way he'd put Cal in jeopardy like that. The press would have a field day investigating his every move if he and Potter were together, and that would eventually lead them to his son.

Draco looked around the ballroom, searching for Weasley and Hermione. He couldn't find them on the dance floor, but he spotted an open door to the terrace. Figuring they must have stepped outside for a breath of fresh air, Draco made his way to the French doors, stepping outside quietly to give them his well-wishes so he could leave.

His breath caught in his throat, the words of congratulations he'd been forming dying on his lips. The newly married Weasleys weren't on the terrace, but Potter was. The dark-haired wizard was seated on a chaise, cradling his godson in his arms, his expression soft as he pressed a kiss to the sleeping boy's forehead. Teddy – all long limbs and sharp angles – had obviously exhausted himself in all the excitement, not moving at all under his godfather's gentle caress. Suddenly, the enormity of what he was losing with Gryffin hit Draco.

He hadn't realized how much he had been looking forward to bringing the man into Cal's life until that moment. Feeling like a voyeur, Draco stole further back into the shadows, not yet ready to turn his back on the beautiful sight of a completely relaxed Harry Potter holding a sleeping child, his eyes glinting in the soft moonlight, his hair ruffling slightly in the summer breeze. Draco had no problem at all imagining a similar scene, with Potter holding Caleum in his arms.

Harry looked up sharply at the sound of a leather sole sliding over the rough stone floor, his heart stuttering when he realized it was Malfoy. Their eyes met for a brief second, and Harry was floored by the longing he saw in the grey depths. He opened his mouth to speak – though he had no idea what he intended to say – stopping when he saw Malfoy's expression change to one of absolute anguish. Malfoy shook his head once, the motion so minute Harry almost thought he'd imagined it. Without a word, the blond turned on his heel and walked through the doors, not glancing back as he disappeared into the crowd on the dance floor.

Harry shifted Teddy's warm weight in his arms, pressing his face into the curve of his sleeping godson's neck. He wasn't sure what had caused Malfoy's sudden departure, but he was sure about one thing: there had been an air of finality about it that made something inside of him clench and throb. Harry blinked as he felt the hot prick of tears behind his eyes, and he swallowed thickly, unwilling to let himself think about the fact that the burning he felt in his chest was unlike the emotions Malfoy usually stirred in him. He wouldn't think about how his heart had lurched when he saw the Slytherin in the shadows, or how that joy had turned to something much more complicated when he'd seen the naked hunger in those smoky grey eyes. Most of all, Harry wouldn't think about the burning, tearing pain in his chest when Malfoy turned away, which had felt remarkably like his heart shattering. Because it wouldn't do any good to think about any of those things, Harry's rational mind insisted, since he wasn't attracted to Malfoy in the first place.

Back to Index

Chapter 16: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They belong to JKR. Thanks to Kamerreon for the beta!

***

Draco sipped his tea, watching Cal run around the gardens. His son had been ridiculously happy when he'd woken to find Draco at the chateau, which made him feel more than a little guilty. Had he been neglecting Cal? Draco sighed, schooling his tired features into a bright grin when his son waved from his spot on the lawn.

"Morning," Neville said with a forced cheerfulness that made Draco grimace, sliding into the chair next to Draco with his own cup of tea.

Draco turned, his eyes narrowing as he studied the other wizard. He couldn't bring himself to be mad at Neville or Pansy, though he did think they should have intervened. The more rational part of him knew Pansy had been oath-bound not to reveal the secret, though, and it wasn't hard to imagine that the Gryffindor beside him would have been reluctant to betray his – or Potter's – trust.

"Morning," he drawled, quirking an eyebrow at Nev before turning his attention back to Cal, who was flying on a toy broom around the grounds.

Neville paused, trying to read Draco's mood. He didn't know if he should apologize for keeping the secret or ask how the blond was coping with the news. Draco's carefully neutral expression didn't help.

"Oh, for Merlin's sake," Draco sighed rolling his eyes at Neville's pregnant pause. "I'm not angry with you, though part of me wants to be. And I don't need to be indulged or pandered to. I'm fine."

Neville watched him silently, a trick he'd learned from years spent among Slytherins. He was sure Draco would start talking again to fill the gap in the conversation. He tried the approach often with Daphne, with mixed results. It seemed to work best when the other person was hiding something, and Neville was sure Draco was.

"It's no big deal," Draco continued his gaze still locked on his son, who was attempting to stand on the broom, which hovered a meter or so off the ground. He'd already cast several Cushioning charms on the ground, but he'd intervene if Cal tried it any higher. "So what? Gryffin is Potter. I'd have found out next weekend anyway. Yesterday was unpleasant, but it saved me an awkward date at any rate."

Neville took another sip of tea, sitting back in his chair. He knew more about the planned date than Draco did, but refrained from mentioning it. Gryffin and Sly had agreed to meet up for a movie, and if things went well, Draco had been planning to take Gryffin to dinner at an exclusive restaurant in Muggle London that was actually owned by wizards. What Draco didn't know was that Harry had made similar plans, intending to whisk Sly away to the very same restaurant. Neville had found the fact that they'd both made reservations at the notoriously difficult to book restaurant amusing at the time, but now it pained him. Another example of how bloody compatible they were, and it was never going to come to light unless Harry and Draco dropped this disinterested act.

"It all makes sense now, of course," Draco continued, seemingly unaware he was still speaking, the words falling from his lips in a rush. "James Evans writes about foolishly heroic Aurors, and Potter is a foolishly heroic idiot, always rushing into things and risking his neck for people he barely knows."

Neville didn't say a word, watching emotions flit through Draco's normally shuttered eyes. If the Slytherin had any idea what he was saying – or that Neville could see the truth behind his words in his troubled grey eyes – he'd be mortified. Neville was one of the few who knew how distraught Draco had been when news of Harry's last accident as an Auror had surfaced. At the time, he hadn't understood why Draco cared, but it was obvious in hindsight. Though he doubted Draco even realized it himself, then or now.

"That's Harry," Neville said, forcing a chuckle to try to lighten the mood. They wouldn't get anywhere if Draco was in this kind of mood. Best to leave it for awhile.

***

“Are you sure, Harry? You shouldn’t give up just because you’ve had a setback,” Pansy said, regarding the wizard seated in front of her with concern.

Harry had Floo-ed to Pansy’s office first thing that morning to cancel his account with Magical Dating Online. She’d tried to talk him out of it, but the stubborn Gryffindor wouldn’t be dissuaded.

“I’m sure. To be honest, I wasn’t having much luck before –” he broke off, at a loss for words.

Before I stumbled upon Sly, whom I foolishly thought might be my soul mate, but turned out to be Malfoy? No, not what he was trying to convey. Before I met the only bloke I’ve ever talked with who didn’t seem to be interested in me only because of my scar or my vaults? No, that wasn’t right either. Before I started a two-month relationship with a man I’d never met, which, by the way, is the longest one I’ve had since that disaster of a relationship with Smith? No, not the right tone. Before I fell in love with someone who doesn’t even exist?

Harry swallowed, the headache he’d beaten back with a Pain Relieving Draught earlier blooming behind his eyes. See? Harry’s mind screamed, viciously pushing back his other thoughts. Malfoy’s not even here, and he’s giving you a headache.

“– before I started, er, corresponding with Sly.”

He paused, clenching his jaw. Damn it all, why was this so hard? So he’d lost a good pen pal – so what? Because really, had Sly been anything more than just that – someone to casually email back and forth with? Yes, his traitorous brain sang, and Harry tried not to cringe.

“Er, Malfoy. Oh hell, Pans, you know what I mean,” Harry said, blowing out a breath.

Harry jumped when he heard a familiar drawl from the doorway; he braced himself for the flood of attraction he knew he'd feel when he turned around to face the speaker.

"By all means, Potter, tell the lady exactly what you mean," Draco said, his polite smile not quite reaching his stormy grey eyes. "Or is that why you prefer online dating? Find it easier to write than to speak?"

Draco's eyes narrowed as he watched Potter gape. He needed to wipe the surprised look off Potter's face and get the idiot to close his mouth before he did something rash. Like taste those deliciously parted lips.

"You did write those emails, didn't you, Potter? You didn't farm them out to Hermione or someone else, did you?"

Harry bristled at the accusation. He was a professional writer, for fuck's sake. Of course, he didn't have someone else write the emails. He flushed, remembering how Hermione had helped him write his profile and his initial response to Sly. And what had that gotten him anyway? Two months of trading emails with Malfoy, of all people.

"I don't know, Malfoy, do you really think it would have been possible to fake those … stimulating … chats we had?"

Harry grinned when he saw Malfoy's composure falter. His heart skipped a beat when he saw Malfoy's pale skin heat with a blush, and his mind was unwillingly drawn to the thought that this must be what the blond looked like when he was aroused – the peachy-hued skin, the parted lips, the fast rise and fall of his chest.

Draco looked away, angry with himself for getting drawn into Potter's little game. He'd come here to cancel his account so he could forget about the prat, not engage him in conversation. Draco found the dark-haired wizard alluring, but that was it, he assured himself; he was suppressing the urge to smooth his robes to make sure they were covering his burgeoning erection. Really, it was like he was a schoolboy again. He almost laughed at the thought of sitting in Sev's classroom at his advanced age, getting tips for managing his libido again. Merlin, he missed that man. He'd give just about anything to know what his

godfather would make of the ridiculous situation he found himself in with Potter.

Severus. Draco's grin widened as he stared at Potter, unable to stop the words that flew from his mouth.

"Oh, I'm quite familiar with what you find stimulating, Potter," he drawled, smirking in satisfaction when the dark-haired man blushed a deeper crimson, his green eyes widening behind stylish wire rims. "Though I'm surprised emails have the same effect on you as the spoken word. "

Harry's brow furrowed, unsure of what Malfoy was on about. Spoken word? They'd never spoken. He thought about their shared wanks over chats, and the heady mix of amusement and arousal he usually felt when he received an email from the man. But the spoken word?

Draco watched the Gryffindor puzzling over his words, biting the inside of his cheek to keep his laughter in check. He finally felt like he had the upper hand in a conversation with Potter, which made him much more confident and at ease. After all, he wouldn't be seeing the man again. Why not have some fun?

"I suppose not just any words though," he continued, his lips quirking. "Tell me, was it just the sound of his voice, or do you have some perverted kink for potions ingredients?"

Harry nearly choked and squeezed his eyes shut as he realized what Malfoy was taunting him about. Oh, hell, he thought wanly, waves of humiliation and misery crashing over him. I didn't tell Sly about my attraction to Snape, I told Malfoy. And now the fucker's going to tell everyone we know. Fabulous.

The thought reminded Harry of the other secret he no longer had any hope of keeping – his identity as James Evans. The cold realization stopped him in his tracks, obliterating the odd but undeniable enjoyment he'd been getting out of verbally sparring with the Slytherin.

Harry stood quickly, throwing a signed document on Pansy's desk – his official request to be removed from the site.

“I’ll see you around, Pansy,” he said before turning to nod stiffly at the blond, who moved from the doorway to let him pass. “Malfoy.”

Draco watched him go, absently wondering why Potter’s quick escape didn’t give him more satisfaction. He’d lived for moments like these in school – the opportunity for abject mortification for his rival – and this should have been even sweeter, since for once he’d actually forced the cocky Gryffindor to retreat.

Instead, he felt curiously sad to see him go, disappointed to have ended their brief but barbed conversation. He shook his head as though trying to clear the inappropriate thought, stepping in to place a form similar to Potter’s on Pansy’s desk. Potter was gone, and that was what mattered, he reminded himself.

“Oh, hell. You, too?” she asked, scowling as she grabbed a pen to sign both sheets. She’d just lost her two most popular clients in one fell swoop.

***

Ginny stroked Freddie’s soft cheek, handing the sleeping baby off to Daphne when the other witch held her arms out expectantly. She sighed and stretched, grateful for the break. Freddie had been restless today, and she’d cried every time someone put her down.

“Any news?” She asked as Neville joined them, pausing to press a kiss to the little girl’s forehead then repeating the gesture on his wife.

“No,” he said, exhausted from nearly a week spent as the go-between in the middle of the great Malfoy-Potter feud.

Not that they were actually feuding, since they’d have to be speaking for that. And neither man had asked Neville a single question about the other – it was everyone else who was driving him spare.

“I told you I’d let you know if anything changed, Gin,” he said, grabbing a cold bottle of Butterbeer from the kitchen and collapsing in his favorite chair.

She chewed on her lip nervously and Neville groaned. Whatever was coming couldn’t possibly be good.

“What?”

“I take it you haven’t seen the Prophet today?” She asked, pulling a folded paper from the diaper bag that was now her constant companion. She was continually amazed at how much stuff Freddie required.

He’d been monitoring the press, looking for any rumors about Harry or Draco, but he hadn’t seen today’s Prophet. He’d been too caught up in scanning the paper’s French equivalent, Le Monde Magique, which liked to dog Draco as much as the British press did.

He took the proffered paper, groaning in resignation as he saw the top story. Perfect, just perfect, he thought, not even bothering to read past the headline. This was definitely going to complicate things.

***

Hermione crossed her arms over her skimpy bikini, frowning as she watched her new husband stare out at the waves. They’d been in Fiji for over a week and he’d been somewhat distant the entire time. She’d even pulled her most revealing swimsuit out this morning – a gift from Ginny that was so indecent she’d blushed at the thought of even wearing it in the privacy of their bedroom, let alone on a beach where others could see her.

But she’d conquered that reluctance when she remembered yesterday morning, when Ron had turned down her offer of a pre-swim romp in the shower in favor of poring over the Daily Prophet. They were so

secluded that the issues were coming a day late, but Ron devoured them anyway.

Were Quidditch scores really that much more interesting than making love to his wife? Hermione pursed her lips, setting her shoulders in determination. This was her honeymoon, for Merlin's sake. They had two more weeks left here, and she was going to enjoy it, even if she had to cast the Imperius Curse on her husband to make him more attentive.

"Going for a swim?" She asked, resting her hands on her hips and canting them forward, making sure he couldn't miss the tiny scrap of cloth held together by a few thin ribbons that dipped almost indecently low.

Ron didn't turn, shielding his eyes with his hands to watch for the morning delivery owl. He felt Hermione wrap her arms around his bare waist, and he would have ducked to kiss her, but he saw a tiny dot on the horizon approaching.

"Finally," he sighed, breaking free of her embrace to pay the owl for the paper.

Hermione's eyes narrowed at the rejection, but she straightened and sauntered over to the patch of sand Ron had settled onto to read the paper. Yesterday's news was more alluring than she was, was it? Hermione smirked. She'd change his mind about that.

She batted the paper away before he had a chance to do more than unfold it, straddling his lap as she sank down to face him. She heard his breath catch, and her heart sped up as his eyes darkened with arousal. He took a good look at her swimsuit for the first time, something akin to awe stealing over his face as he realized how little fabric actually separated her from complete nudity.

"Finally," she mocked, allowing herself a husky laugh of relief before their mouths crashed together; her assault on his mouth so fierce it actually knocked him backward into the sand.

"Merlin, Hermione," he groaned when her hand fisted in his hair, pulling them even closer.

She grimaced as she heard the newspaper crinkle underneath them, pausing to grab it and throw it aside. She didn't want to end up with ink all over her back from the newsprint. Hermione gasped as a few words caught her eye, abruptly sitting up and yanking her hand back.

"What?" Ron asked his eyes were still glazed as he struggled to sit up to see what had happened.

"This," she whispered, thrusting the newspaper at him.

Ron groaned, heaving himself up off the sand after reading the headline. He didn't need to see more than that to know they needed to go home immediately. It wasn't the news he'd been expecting, but it would cause fireworks all the same.

"Devastated Auror caught in love triangle between Boy-Who-Lived and Puddlemere Keeper!" the headline screamed, accompanied by a picture of a distraught-looking Smith shielding his face as he left a restaurant.

Back to Index

Chapter 17: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. Not mine. Thanks to Kamerreon for the beta!

***

Draco's hands fisted at his sides as he paced in front of the Floo, waiting for Pansy and Oliver to come

through. He'd been seething since yesterday, when he saw what the interview that idiot Smith had given to the papers.

Of course, he knew it was ridiculous. Oliver was straight, and married to Pansy to boot. There was no chance he would – like Skeeter had gleefully written – use his status as the Puddlemere Keeper to seduce Harry Potter. He'd managed to hold off on Fire-calling Pansy for more than 24 hours, finally breaking down when he saw the latest tripe the Prophet printed – part two of the story, which included photos from Smith's two-year relationship with Potter. Smith claimed they were on the verge of reuniting when Oliver caught Harry's eye.

The last article had nothing to do with Draco Fire-calling Pansy, though. He assured himself he was only doing his duty as a good friend in checking up with the couple. It couldn't be an easy time for them, with reporters camped out on their doorstep and dogging after Oliver, hoping for a photo of him and Harry out somewhere together.

Which wouldn't happen, because Oliver was in no way interested in Potter, Draco assured himself. His fists clenched harder as he quickened his pacing, glancing up at the large antique clock over the mantle. They were late.

The flames roared to life, and Draco stepped back, leaving room for his guests to climb through. He sighed when he saw a familiar face appear.

"Thought I'd get front row seats for the show," Blaise said easily, brushing a bit of ash off his robes.

Draco glared at him, using his wand to Banish the ash that had settled on the floor. He should have known Pansy would Floo Blaise and ask him to be there, too. She was such a chicken.

"I'm not going to hex him," Draco said shortly, resuming his pacing without regard for the wizard now standing in his path.

Blaise grabbed Draco by the shoulders, ducking his head slightly so they were eye-to-eye. Draco had filled him in on the messy business of Gryffin actually being Harry Potter the day after the wedding. It

had taken Blaise a bit to wrap his mind around it, but now he was positive Potter would be perfect for the blond. He just had to get Draco to see it, too.

"If you were going to hex anyone, it should be Smith," Blaise said, his lip curling in distaste. He hadn't liked the man at Hogwarts, and he liked him even less now. "Sycophantic little wanker."

"More opportunistic than sycophantic," Oliver said from behind them, startling Draco. The blond turned, watching as Oliver made himself at home and poured all three of them a drink, Levitating the glasses of Firewhisky over to Blaise and Draco. "I decided to Apparate over instead of Floo, give the press something new to talk about."

Oliver laughed dryly, tossing back his Firewhisky in one gulp. "I can just imagine the headlines tomorrow. 'Malfoy revealed as party of Wood's secret harem – Potter crushed'," he said, shaking his head. "Pans stayed home. She just wasn't up to going out. Those idiots have taken to ringing the bloody bell at all hours of the night, hoping to get one of us to open the door."

***

Harry blew raspberries against Freddie's stomach, pausing when he heard Teddy's delighted giggle behind him. The boy had stalwartly protested he was too old for his godfather to do the same to him – after all, he was 10, and he'd be starting Hogwarts in a year. Definitely too old for baby games like that.

Careful not to jostle the baby lying on the blanket beneath him, Harry reached an arm around blindly behind him, capturing his godson and pulling him down to the floor. He whirled, rucking up Teddy's shirt to give him the same treatment.

"No, Harry, no!" Teddy giggled, his eyes on Freddie to make sure he didn't hit her as he flailed. "No, you can't!"

They both stopped when they heard the Floo roar to life, pausing mid-struggle to watch as Hermione

and Ron climbed out of the fireplace. They looked tired and harried, the stress of the last few hours showing on Hermione's sun-browned face. Ron sported a light sunburn – he could never be trusted to renew the charm that blocked the sun at regular intervals – and a healthy amount of red stubble on his jaw.

Harry sat up, pulling Teddy up with him. Ron and Hermione weren't due back from their honeymoon for another two weeks. Had something happened?

"We just heard," Hermione said in a rush, dropping her bag on the hearth and entering the room. Ron followed suit, stretching his shoulders in relief. "How are you coping? Are you alright?"

Harry quirked an eyebrow at her, shaking his head in mock confusion.

"So the news that both Andi and Ginny dumped their brats on me for the evening made it all the way to Fiji?" he asked, grinning when Teddy pushed him for the jib. "I've been better, I admit. This one," he said, poking Teddy, "thinks he's too big to play, and that one," he said, pointing over his shoulder to the baby, who was staring contentedly at the mobile Harry had charmed to the ceiling, "eats constantly. Must be a Weasley family trait."

Hermione frowned, crouching down to tweak Freddie's tiny toes. The baby gurgled, and she smiled, tickling the foot she still held.

"That's not what I meant, and you know it," she said reproachfully, scowling as he kissed both her cheeks.

"I'm fine. You didn't need to come home," he chided, pausing to study Freddie's increasingly agitated movements and noises. He'd only been half kidding earlier; she really did seem to need to eat all the time.

"Don't be stupid," Ron answered, digging around in the familiar diaper bag to hand Harry the charmed bottles Ginny always prepared whenever she left the girl. He'd been around Freddie enough to know the

signs of a hungry baby, no matter how oblivious everyone assumed he was.

Harry caught the bottle Ron tossed at him, testing its warmth against the back of his hand before scooping Freddie out of Hermione's arms and settling on the couch to feed her. He figured it was the safest place to be – they couldn't hex a man holding a baby, could they?

"We're here, and it's where we want to be. We couldn't have stayed there knowing what that idiot Smith was playing at. Did that b-" Ron broke off when Hermione cleared her throat meaningfully, inclining her head toward Teddy, who was listening avidly. "Bad woman, Skeeter, write anything else?"

Harry laughed, rolling his eyes. He felt guilty that they'd cut their honeymoon short on his behalf, but he couldn't deny he was happy to see them.

***

Neville threw down the paper in disgust, pushing his unfinished breakfast aside. Harry had steadfastly been refusing to comment on the Smith situation, which had only fueled the rumor mill more. Today's article featured quotes from the slimy bastard about things Neville wasn't even sure was physically possible – unless his translation was wrong. He didn't know what Smith was playing at – the decidedly nasty turn the articles had taken definitely didn't make it seem like he truly wanted a reconciliation.

Though they hadn't spoken about it, he knew Draco was following the stories obsessively. Oliver had Fire-called a few nights ago after having a few drinks at the Manor, promising that he'd managed to convince Draco that nothing was going on between him and Harry. Neville pushed back from the table, ready to head out to the greenhouse for a bit. Draco had finally agreed to take the magnolia trees out of Stasis, and he needed to check up on them to make sure they were suffering no ill effects.

***

“– end of March, which is fine with me. We’ll be ready for some warm weather by then, eh?”

Harry nodded absently, picking at his heaping plate of paella. He usually loved the dish, especially the way the chef there prepared it, but today he just wasn’t hungry. The pungent saffron reminded him of a flurry of emails he and Sly – no, he corrected himself, Malfoy – had exchanged over reputable places to buy exotic spices in London. He’d ended up sending a bottle of aged balsamic vinegar to Sly – no, damn it, he chastised himself, Malfoy – with a recipe he loved for whole wheat fettuccini with a light balsamic cream sauce.

Harry watched as Ron gave up on conversation and dug into his own meal, he wondered if Malfoy had ever made it. It was one of his favorite things to whip up on a cool evening. A pantry pleaser, he’d told Sly, since it went well with virtually any kind of protein or sautéed vegetable.

He sensed rather than saw Ron stiffen. The lanky redhead’s magic all but crackled around them, and Harry was instantly on his guard. His wand was in his hand before he even realized he’d released it from its holster, though Harry remained seated, following Ron’s lead.

“You have a real taste for married men, don’t you, Harry?”

Harry clenched his jaw, reeling in the flare of pure magical energy that fought to escape at the words. He’d attained marvelous control over his magic since the defeat of Voldemort, but he still struggled with bursts of wild magic when he was angry or tired. Right now, he was both.

“Zach,” Harry said, his green eyes cold as ice as he met the other man’s gaze.

Instead of backing off, the Auror slid into an empty chair at their table, earning a low growl of warning from Ron. “The papers will have a field day with this little rendezvous of yours, you know. First Oliver, now Ron? Poor Hermione.”

“Fuck off, Zach,” Ron hissed, making sure his colleague could see the tip of his wand, which was trained

on him under the cover of the tablecloth. Hexing a fellow Auror would cause a headache at the Ministry, but it would be worth it. “Get out of here.”

Zach smiled, clearly overestimating both men’s self control. He had no idea how close to the edge he was skating.

“I noticed you were alone at the wedding,” he said, winking at Harry. “It doesn’t have to be that way, you know. We were great together. We’d be great together again.”

Harry was amazed. After all this, Zach really thought he had a chance? They hadn’t parted on good terms, though Harry had always managed to be civil to his old lover in public. Until now.

“Listen you –”

Ron cut him off, smiling smugly as he took a forkful of Harry’s rice. It was an intentionally casual gesture, meant to show the other man that their conversation was over. “Oh, Harry wasn’t at the wedding alone, Zach,” he said, taking a bite to let the wizard have a few moments to mull his statement over. “He was there with someone he’s very much involved with.”

Harry’s mouth hung open at Ron’s words, but he quickly shut it, forcing himself to smile smugly.

“In fact, I wouldn’t be terribly surprised if there’s another wedding before the year is out,” Ron continued, leaning back in his seat and taking a sip of water.

Harry’s eyes flashed angrily, but he schooled his features into his normal mask of calm control. He shrugged easily, letting a slow smile steal across his face. It wasn’t hard – he just focused on his feelings for Sly. Well, before Sly was Malfoy.

“Harry, that can’t be –”

“Oh, but it is,” Ron smirked, nodding to the waiter to signal for their bill. He needed to get Harry out of the restaurant before the man blew. He knew Harry would be upset about an outburst later – this was his favorite restaurant, after all. “We’ve all met him, and we think they’re the perfect couple. So well suited to each other. Unlike some of Harry’s other partners.”

Zach glared at Ron, his frosty gaze shifting to Harry. The dark-haired wizard just smiled benignly, not making any move to expound on Ron’s words. His careful mask hid the swirling emotions and thoughts in his mind, and the traitorous little voice that was insisting Ron was right. He had found the perfect partner, and he’d let him walk away.

For the first time in years, Harry felt nothing but pity when he looked at Zach. He’d hated him for years, but it had been a mix of revulsion and regret, tempered with worry that the Hufflepuff had been his only chance at a real relationship. Harry could see now that he’d been wrong about that. He’d never had a real relationship with Zach. They’d been together for two years, and the man didn’t know him half as well as Sly. No, his mind corrected him, and for once he didn’t fight it. Zach doesn’t know me half as well as Malfoy … Draco … does.

Harry didn’t bother waiting for the bill to arrive. He stood, throwing more than an adequate number of Galleons on the table. He rested his hand on Zach’s shoulder, giving him a comforting squeeze. After all, he knew how much it hurt to watch the person you loved walk away. Though he doubted Zach really loved him.

“See you around, Zach,” he said, grinning like an idiot as he made his way toward the door, Ron hot on his heels.

***

Draco held the door for an older witch, smiling and bowing politely as she passed. He’d popped by his favorite restaurant to meet Blaise for lunch. He had something important to discuss with him, and he’d wanted to do it away from the distractions at the office.

He was still grinning as he made his way toward the maitre d', hoping his he'd be able to snag the table by the window he loved. The food here was excellent, and he'd had a craving for the restaurant's paella for a few days now. Not that the food really mattered – he'd come to a decision about what to do about Gryffin. Potter, he corrected himself, his smile growing. No, Harry.

He'd spent as much time as possible with Cal over the last week, and he'd come to the realization that Gryffin – Harry – would never stand for an innocent child to be hurt because of their relationship. It would be hard to keep things under wraps, but together, he was sure they could manage it. Together, he thought, giddily. Together.

He looked up, scanning the restaurant for Blaise, on the off chance the perpetually late wizard had beaten him here. Draco felt his heart plummet when he saw Harry sitting with Weasley and Smith. Weasley was smiling, and Harry didn't look disturbed at all. Not the way someone who was sitting with a person he hated should look. Not after the tripe Smith had spread around the papers recently. Unless it was true, his mind screamed. He was vaguely aware of Blaise calling his name, but he couldn't focus on it, not with the horrible buzzing in his head and the aching throb in his chest. Because Harry – his Harry – had just given Smith a million-watt smile and squeezed his shoulder affectionately.

Draco stood, frozen, as Harry approached, his lungs screaming for air as he held his breath, hoping the wizard wouldn't notice him.

"M – Draco," Harry said, his expression thoroughly pleased. Draco swallowed hard, forcing himself to respond, wishing desperately that he'd been the cause of that smile instead of Smith. "Fancy meeting you here."

Draco's lips curved into a small smile, but Harry wasn't fooled. He'd studied the blond for countless hours at Hogwarts, and he could tell the gaiety was forced. There was no warming of those beautiful grey eyes. "Harry," he replied, nodding at him politely. "Weasley."

Harry faltered, wondering if Draco was struggling with him being Gryffin as much as he'd struggled with Sly's identity. "I was just thinking about you. I'd really like to –"

Draco cut him off before Harry could say something that would make him crumble – like 'I'd really like to be friends'. The thought of exchanging friendly emails with the man he was in love with but couldn't have was too much.

"I doubt Smith would appreciate hearing that," Draco said, his tone still cordial. He felt Blaise stiffen behind him, but ignored it. Draco looked over Harry's shoulder, watching the Auror's approach dispassionately. "I wouldn't want to cause any more trouble between the two of you."

"But –"

Draco thanked Merlin and every god he could think of when the maitre 'd appeared, oblivious to the tension between the men, and offered to lead him to his table. He watched Harry for a moment longer before nodding, following the man deeper into the restaurant without another word to Harry or Ron.

"What–"

Harry shook his head, ducking out of the restaurant and into a nearby alley. Ron followed, casting a quick Notice-Me-Not charm so they could talk without fear of interruption.

"I'm in love with him," Harry said, his goofy grin back in full force.

Back to Index

Chapter 18: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They don't belong to me outside the confines of my overactive imagination.

Thanks, Kamerreon!

***

Harry knew it was a lost cause, but that didn't stop him from settling in for the night with his laptop, intent on tracking Draco down. His Owls to Malfoy Manor had been returned, unopened, as had the missives he'd sent directly to Malfoy Industries.

He couldn't hide his disappointment when he opened his email, even though the automated response was no less than he'd expected. No matter, he assured himself. He'd just have to get creative.

***

To: HJPotter80@MerlinMail.uk

From: AutoResponseBot@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Wednesday, July 23, 2008 9:47 p.m.

Re: Undeliverable mail

The following message to was undeliverable.

Server error 2.8.1 – unknown address error 250-'IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk' … no such user.

---------Forwarded Message ----------

From: HJPotter80@MerlinMail.uk

To: IntrospectiveIntellectual@MagicalDatingOnline.uk

Wednesday, July 23, 2008 9:43 p.m.

Re: We need to talk

Draco,

You've got the wrong idea about Zach. I'm not in love with him. I've never been in love with him. I want

[message truncated]

***

To: DMalfoy@MalfoyIndustries.uk

From: HJPotter80@MerlinMail.uk

Wednesday, July 23, 2008 10:15 p.m.

Re: We need to talk

Draco,

I’m sorry to contact you at work, but I couldn’t find another address for you and you’re not returning my Owls. I’ll keep this short in case your secretary screens your mail, but I really do need to talk to you. Please get in touch with me.

Harry

***

To: HJPotter80@MerlinMail.uk

From: AutomatedResponse@MalfoyIndustries.uk

Friday, July 25, 2008 4:16 p.m.

Re: Message bounced

The following message to was denied by the server.

Server message 6.2.5 – user has been blocked by recipient.

If you believe you have received this message in error, please contact the database manager.

---------Forwarded Message ----------

From: HJPotter80@MerlinMail.uk

To: DMalfoy@MalfoyIndustries.uk

Friday, July 25, 2008 4:15 p.m.

Re: Answer me!

Damn it, Draco! Stop being so stubborn and let me tell you what happened! If you would just

[message truncated]

***

“He won’t listen to reason, Harry,” Pansy said, frowning. “I’m sorry.”

Harry groaned, running his hand through his hair in frustration. He’d been trying to contact Draco for days now, and he’d been shot down at every turn. No Owls. No emails. He couldn’t visit the idiot because his home was protected. He couldn’t even Fire-call the prat because the house-elves at the Manor wouldn’t tell him where he was staying and Draco’s secretary seemed to guard him with her life. He’d even tried to drop by Draco’s office, mortified to find himself escorted from the building by two burly security guards before he’d even made it past the lobby.

“He’ll listen,” he said, gritting his teeth.

***

“You can be such a stubborn prick,” Blaise spat, rolling his eyes as he watched Draco drink himself into oblivion for the third night running.

“Your compassion astounds me,” the blond drawled. He was surprisingly steady after the four tumblers of whisky he’d already consumed.

“Well, your stupidity astounds me, so I suppose we’re even.”

The darker wizard paced the room ignoring the slightly amused smirk Draco shot him. He’d been trying to convince the man that there was nothing going on between Potter and Smith for days now, and he hadn’t made any progress.

“Pansy said –”

“Pansy has nothing to do with it. She’s hardly Potter’s closet confidante.”

Blaise sighed, appealing to Merlin for strength. It was a wonder Potter was still trying to contact Draco after the roadblocks Draco had thrown up. He was Draco’s best friend and even he was at his wit’s end with the wanker. He had the benefit of knowing that the blond pulled himself behind this mask of distain and aloofness when he was truly hurting, but Potter didn’t know that. It had been so obvious that Potter had been excited to see Draco, but the prat hadn’t been able to see past what he had considered an affirmation of the Prophet headlines.

He let his fingers touch the letter in his pocket the one Potter had slipped to him this evening when he’d passed him on the street. He’d watched Draco cast Incendio on similar attempts by Pansy and Neville, and he knew his effort would meet no different end.

“Alright,” Blaise said cordially, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Neville said –”

“I’ve already spoken with Neville,” Draco said stiffly, hoping to avoid a drawn-out row with Blaise. He’d come to France for some quiet, after all, not to continue to rehash this ridiculousness.

“Then you know that –”

“I know that Neville is a loyal friend to both Potter and myself,” Draco cut in, earning himself a glare. “As such, he feels it is his responsibility to repair what he erroneously perceives as a rift in my relationship with Potter.”

“So there’s no rift then?” Blaise muttered, unable to keep silent.

“No,” Draco said calmly, Summoning a magazine from the table. “There’s no relationship.”

***

“I hate to see you in the middle like this, Nev,” Harry said, smiling sadly at his obviously distraught friend. Draco had been hidden away in France for the last few days and Neville had taken the brunt of his temper. “You know I don’t need you to intervene, right?”

Neville shook his head, casting a few diagnostic spells over a plant on Harry’s table. It would be so much easier if he could just take Harry to see Draco, but he couldn’t. Complicated wards and protections – similar to the Fidelius Charm – blanketed the chateau, and Neville was bound by an Unbreakable Vow not to speak of it or anyone who lived there. Everyone who knew about Cal had taken a similar vow, not that any of them would have divulged any information about the boy’s existence. Not even to Harry.

“He’s positive you’re with Zach. He’s upset about it, but he’s refusing to acknowledge it,” Neville said,

pulling a small vial of Nutrient Potion out of his pocket and sprinkling it over the wilted leaves. They brightened a bit, but still looked sad and lifeless. Harry cringed, wondering if Kreacher remembered to water the thing more than once a month. “I know he has feelings for you, Harry. I do. But I just don’t know if that’s enough.”

Harry grinned, an expression of total confidence settling over his features. He knew much of the world thought he had some sort of superhuman instincts or force guiding him, but he knew the truth. His hybrid Gryffindor and Slytherin qualities had served him well before, and he’d make them work to his advantage now. Harry Potter was a very determined man. When he wanted something, whether it was the end of Voldemort or Draco Malfoy’s attention, he got it.

“It will be,” he promised, his eyes widening as the Nutrient Potion finally took effect, transforming the plant from sickly to robust. “It will be.”

***

Draco scowled. The owl with the Prophet was late, and it was throwing off his entire day. He’d spent the week since his unfortunate run-in with Potter – because that was all it was, and it ended badly not because he was jealous, but because he hated the prat, he assured himself – settling into a comfortable routine. He’d read several newspapers with his breakfast tea before taking the Floo directly from the chateau to his office in London. He’d taken to turning down all evening and early morning invitations and appointments, both business and pleasure, so he could spend more time in France.

His son was blossoming under the extra attention, which only intensified his guilt over leaving Cal for days at a time over the past two years. It strengthened his resolve that his momentary lapse of judgment regarding Potter had been just that – a lapse in judgment. His place was here, with Cal. He had already started the necessary arrangements to close up Malfoy Manor so he could live full-time in France. He had a small flat in London he could use on the nights he worked too late to come home. It was what he should have been doing all along and he hated himself for sacrificing time with Cal for the good of the family and the business. Without his son, none of that mattered.

And if he was a little lonely, well, it was to be expected. It didn’t mean he missed Potter. Running into Potter and Smith in that restaurant had been a blessing. It had saved him from doing irreparable harm to

his family. After all, Potter was hardly the all-powerful savior everyone lauded him as. He couldn't possibly keep news of their relationship out of the paper, or protect Cal if his existence was revealed.

Draco glared at the house-elf that popped in, holding it personally accountable for the unusually late paper it held in its trembling hands. He was usually a kind master – nothing like his father had been – but he'd had a short temper over the last week. Everyone but Caleum had been reamed over something by the irritated blond lately, and as a result, no one other than Cal came near him unless it was necessary.

"Finally," he muttered, his stomach plummeting in anticipation of what he might find in that day's issue.

The press had a field day with Harry and Smith having lunch together, running wild headlines about their relationship and how they'd overcome Harry's infidelity with Oliver. Draco had followed the coverage out of what he'd told himself was idle curiosity. No different than the rest of the world, which hung on every single word Skeeter wrote about the couple.

Nothing he'd imagined prepared him for what he saw on the front page. Draco's eyes widened in shock as he read the headlines.

"Exclusive story! Auror charged with stalking!" A photo of a beaming Weasley holding a magically bound and extremely irate Smith showed the duo walking into the Ministry at the center of a crowd of other Aurors.

"No relationship between Smith and Potter! Boy-Who-Lived provides Pensieve proof!" The standard shot of Potter accompanied this one, and Draco couldn't help but return the shy smile in the photo.

"An open letter from the Savior of the Wizarding World about his mystery love interest, inside on Page 8!"

Draco's breath hitched as he scrambled to turn the pages, cursing his stiff uncooperative fingers as he tore the paper in his haste. It couldn't be, could it? Potter hated the press. Surely, he wouldn't have exposed both of them in that manner? His eyes flew over the text, heart racing as he looked for any sign of his name. There was none. His elation at finding Harry wasn't involved with Smith vanished at the

thought that there was someone else, some other mystery love interest Draco hadn't known about. Of course, not finding his name was a good thing, he assured himself. Wasn't that the reason he didn't want to pursue anything with Potter in the first place?

He bit his lip hard enough to draw blood, but the salty tang went unnoticed as he steeled himself to read about Potter's latest paramour. An open letter to the wizarding community. Potter certainly did have a flair for the dramatic.

"To whom it may concern:

I have always done what was expected of me. I sacrificed myself for the greater good on more than one occasion and I have no regrets at having done so. I did what was expected of me, often at great personal loss.

In the convening years, I have also done what is expected of me. I went into a career with the Auror Corps, despite my distaste for violence. I settled into a relationship with a man the wizarding world thought was appropriate for me, despite my reservations about him. I turned a blind eye toward the gossip and slander that continually circulates through the wizarding populace about me, ignoring the countless libelous articles and books that have been printed about me. Worst of all, I let my notions of who I was expected to be get in the way of a blossoming relationship with the man who could quite possibly be my soul mate, all because I, too, fell into the expected and refused to see him for what he really was.

I am through with the expected.

This letter and its ramifications will be unexpected. But if I've learned anything over these last few months, it's that the unexpected happens frequently.

It was unexpected to find my soul mate through an online dating service.

It was unexpected that said soul mate was, of all things, a Slytherin.

It was unexpected that our lives would already be so intertwined without our knowledge.

It was unexpected that I would meet an old acquaintance by random chance and find myself instantly attracted to him.

It was unexpected that said acquaintance would turn out to be the same person I'd been pouring my soul out to for months.

It was unexpected that I'd fall in love with him, despite our past.

My time of toeing the line of what is expected is over.

I, Harry James Potter of the Noble Houses of Black and Potter, do hereby formally announce my intention to court and marry. As is my right and due by virtue of my station, I am here by invoking Delibero Pergo immediately in regard to my courtship and subsequent marriage.

Signed and sealed,

Lord Harry James Potter

Head of the House of Black

Head of the House of Potter

***

Draco hadn't moved from his seat in twenty minutes, completely frozen. He was torn between anger and elation. What was Potter doing? Though he had to give him credit for being clever, there was no way it would work.

Part of him was soaring at the knowledge that Harry was in love with him. He wanted nothing more than to throw caution to the wind and go after him. The other, more rational, part held Draco back. There was no hope of it withstanding today's 24-7 news cycle and the constant barrage of press. No one had invoked Delibero Pergo in more than 100 years.

But still, it was an intriguing idea.

He wasn't surprised to see Blaise stride into the room moments later, a huge grin on his face. He was sure the house-elves had called for him, probably worried about their master's health. They knew better than to go to Mistress Cissa with concerns about Draco; she wasn't even speaking with him now after a particularly nasty fight a few days ago.

"Who's the idiot now?" He asked the blond, barely holding back his own laughter.

Back to Index

Chapter 19: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They don't belong to me.

Thanks again to Kamerreon, beta extraordinaire!

***

“Harry, are you sure you know what you’re doing?” Hermione was nervously shredding her napkin, and tufts of the mangled paper littered their table.

“I’m not sure how he found out about it, but it’s a perfectly legitimate law,” Neville put in, answering for Harry since the other man was currently chewing.

She turned toward Neville and his shoulder sagged. He shouldn’t have opened his mouth. He knew what Hermione was like when she didn’t understand something: ruthless.

“It’s a law?”

Neville sighed, casting a longing glance at his own plate of cooling eggs before answering.

“It’s a law. Delibero Pergo has been on the books since 1322, when Durward Ravenclaw was courting Luella Maitland. His family – descendants of Rowena – were against the match, because they claimed Luella came from an inferior magical background.”

Hermione was enraptured, her attention completely drawn away from the mangled napkin in her lap. Neville took a sip of coffee, being much too tired lately for tea, and continued.

“The Wizards’ Council – I’m sure you know that preceded the Ministry, yes?” Hermione nodded and Neville continued. “Well, the Wizards’ Council intervened on behalf of the Ravenclaw Family’s interests. The girl was imprisoned so they could no longer court, and arrangements were made to force Durward into a marriage with a more suitable match.”

Even Harry was listening intently. He knew the law, of course, but he'd never heard the specifics of how it came into being. Ron, who like Neville had grown up with the story, listened with disinterest while scanning the restaurant for trouble. They'd come to the Muggle diner for the sole purpose of evading the wizarding press, and he wanted to make sure their private conversation stayed private.

"Durward took Luella's imprisonment as a mortal insult and he appealed to the council with every bit of Ravenclaw wisdom and logic he could muster. It took him five years, but he finally won the right to court her. Delibero Pergo was the law he proposed. It's a formal Wizard's Oath to pursue a courtship. It literally means pursuit with determination and resolve, or something like that."

Hermione frowned, trying to process Neville's words. There must be more to it to justify the Cheshire grin Harry was currently wearing.

"What Neville's not telling you, possibly because he doesn't know, is that it is illegal to interfere in any way with a courtship that has been formed under Delibero Pergo," Harry said, winking at his friend.

"Illegal to interfere?" Hermione still wasn't sure what bearing that had on Harry's pursuit of Draco.

"Harry correctly assumed that part of Draco's hesitancy was the press he was likely to garner if he was dating the Chosen One," Neville said, sticking his tongue out in response when the dark-haired wizard quirked an eyebrow at him. "And yes, I know the implications of the law, Harry. I just hadn't gotten there yet."

Harry spread his hands in mock invitation, gesturing for Neville to continue.

"By invoking Delibero Pergo, which can only be done by someone who is a member of one of the wizarding Families that existed at that time – that's family with a capital F, Hermione – he's made it illegal to do anything that would be detrimental to his courtship of Draco."

A slow smile spread across Hermione's face as understanding dawned. Ron, who had been looking away in his perusal of the restaurant patrons, turned back toward them, a huge grin on his face as well. All descendents of the Families were well-schooled in those archaic rules that applied only to them. No one

had ever entered into a courtship as public as the one Harry and Malfoy were about to, though, so no one had used the old law in more than a century.

“So the Prophet –”

“Can’t print a damn thing about me dating Draco. I sent a certified owl to both the publisher and editor of every wizarding paper and magazine in Europe this morning,” Harry said, looking more than a little satisfied with himself. His solicitors were preparing similar missives to papers in the United States as well, since the American magical community exalted in following his love life, too.

“Brilliant, mate,” Ron said, slapping him on the back.

“It was,” Neville agreed, looking around before casting a surreptitious Warming Charm on his neglected breakfast. He dug into his eggs, his stomach rumbling as he ate. “Still,” he said between bites, “You’re going to have a hard time with Draco, Harry. I hope you’re prepared.”

Harry just continued to beam, the calculating gleam in his eye making everyone more than a little uncomfortable. “Oh, I am.”

***

“I don’t want to,” a petulant voice pouted.

Blaise slowed his steps, not enthusiastic about getting in the middle of another Malfoy battle.

“And I don’t care. You don’t have a choice in the matter. Now, go.”

“I don’t want to.”

Blaise heard a heavy sigh and an ominous silence. Against his better judgment, he propelled himself forward, walking through the open door into Draco’s study without so much as a cursory knock.

“Being difficult again?” he drawled, crossing his arms and doing his best to look stern.

“Is he ever,” Draco growled, sending a pointed look toward his son, who was glaring at him from across the room.

“I don’t want to go to bed. Uncle Blaise, tell daddy I don’t have to go to bed,” the boy whined, turning shining grey eyes on Blaise.

His heart melted at the sight, but he stood his ground. The boy had everyone wrapped around his little finger, but Blaise knew better than to contradict a direct order from Draco.

“No, Cal, you have to listen to your daddy. It’s past time for little wizards to be in bed,” he said, shaking his head grimly.

“It’s not fair!” Cal yelled, stamping his foot.

Draco laughed humorlessly, and Blaise bit his tongue to refrain from pointing out that Cal’s stubbornness was definitely an inherited trait.

“Life’s not fair, Caleum. Now go to bed before I call your grand-mère.”

Small lips trembled at the threat, and Draco could see the beginnings of tears in his son’s eyes. He had no idea why bedtime had become such a struggle lately, but it was driving him spare. He’d already spent

half an hour trying to coax Cal to bed and he was losing his patience.

“Mamie won’t make me,” Cal said, his tears finally brimming over. “She said I have to take care of you, because you’re too stupid to let anyone else.”

Draco felt like an iron fist was squeezing his heart. His son had been refusing to leave his side for days, and he’d assumed it was because he was adjusting to having him back fulltime. He’d never even considered that Cal thought he was taking care of him.

“Mon chou, what do you mean? Take care of me? A father’s job is to take care of his son, not the other way around,” Draco said, fighting to keep his voice calm.

“Mamie says you’re throwing away your chance at having someone love you,” Cal said, his head down. “But it’s not true. Because I love you. And you’re not stupid. You’re the smartest father there is.”

Blaise saw Draco stiffen, and he knew the man wouldn’t want Cal to see the emotions that were likely playing across his face. He charged forward, swooping in and lifting Cal into his arms before the boy could protest.

Blaise kissed the tear tracks on Cal’s face, making silly smacking noises as he did. Encouraged by the boy’s reluctant laughter, he shifted him, holding him upside down so he could tickle his belly with his free hand.

“Your father has lots of people who love him,” Blaise said, pausing his tickles so he was sure Cal could hear him. “And he’s definitely one of the smartest wizards I know, and I know a lot of wizards.”

He resumed his offensive against Cal’s stomach, not stopping until the boy started flailing and he nearly lost his grip. Laughing himself, Blaise lowered the now-boneless boy to the floor, gently settling him against the priceless Aubusson.

“Did your grand-mère really call your father stupid?” Blaise asked, curious to know exactly how the conversation had gone. He couldn’t imagine Narcissa saying something like that, but she had been furious with Draco lately.

“No,” Cal admitted, still grinning. “She called him a salopard, but I didn’t know that word. She said it meant he was being a foolish idiot.”

Blaise choked back a laugh, and even Draco’s grimly set lips twitched. Narcissa must have been in rare form to call Draco an arsehole in front of her young grandson.

Blaise took charge of Cal, shepherding the boy to his rooms and helping him get ready for bed. He figured Draco needed the break or at least the chance to calm down. He hadn’t seen him look so stricken in years. Even the mess with Potter hadn’t upset him as much as his son’s innocent words.

Draco was still lost in thought when Blaise returned, and the wizard took the opportunity to study his friend. He was a bit thinner than he’d been a month ago and it was clear from the smudges under his eyes that he wasn’t sleeping well, either.

“I talked to him,” Blaise said quietly from the doorway, unsure of whether or not his friend would want company tonight. “He’s alright. Worried that you’re unhappy, but okay.”

Draco’s voice was hoarse when he responded, his tone bitter. “He shouldn’t have to worry about me. Even trying to do the right thing I manage to fuck it up.”

Blaise hesitated, then entered the room. Draco needed someone to tell him the hard truths, and it looked like it was up to him.

“Harry loves you.”

“So it’s Harry now, is it?” Draco mocked, his eyes dull when he met Blaise’s gaze.

“We’ve had some good talks. He’s right for you, Draco, I just know it. He loves you, and you’ve fallen in love with him, too,” Blaise said, his voice low.

Draco shook his head, becoming more resigned. It was a direct contrast to the anger Blaise had expected.

“Do you think I don’t know that?” He asked, bracing a hand against the mantle as he spoke. “I think I’ve been half in love with him for years, I just didn’t realize it.”

Blaise waited, knowing Draco would continue. It was an effort to keep from shouting at the blond, but he restrained himself.

“He’s Harry Potter, for fuck’s sake. Every news outlet in the world would be after that story. I can’t see him Blaise, no matter how much I want to. I can’t expose Cal like that.”

Blaise watched Draco stare morosely into the flames – normal flames, which meant he’d warded the Floo. Apparently, Draco had known they’d be having it out tonight and had taken precautions against interruptions, he thought wryly.

“I can’t expose Cal like that,” Draco repeated, but the words sounded less sure than they had before. He knew it was only a matter of time before he buckled to his own desire and agreed to meet with Harry, and he hated himself for his weakness.

“But he invoked –”

Draco laughed bitterly, pushing away from the fireplace so he could pace the large room. He stepped over a pile of crayons and toys without noticing, his eyes unseeing as he moved.

“Do you really think Delibero Pergo is going to stop the Prophet? Or any of the papers? It’s an outdated law that most of them probably haven’t even heard of.”

Blaise grinned, feeling lighter than he had in weeks. If that was Draco’s last objection, then things were about to get much better for the blond and everyone subjected to his moods.

“Didn’t you hear? Harry sent a letter to all of the newspapers in Europe this morning outlining exactly what the law means. He’s even had his solicitor send copies of the original law out and set up a hotline for reporters to Fire-call before they print anything about him or the courtship,” Blaise said, rushing through the words with a huge smile on his face.

“And since he invoked it for marriage as well, it might carry over if you two decide to go that route. I’ve never seen Delibero Pergo interpreted that way, but he has a very expensive solicitor who seems to think it can be.”

Blaise almost sighed in relief when he saw interest light Draco’s grey eyes. Thank Merlin, he thought as he watched Draco un-ward the Floo and Fire-call his own solicitor, heedless of the late hour.

***

“What do you need, Harry?” Luna asked, tying her long blonde hair up to keep it out of her way.

The dark-haired wizard smiled, rummaging around in his pocket for a small plastic toy. He sat the PEZ dispenser on her desk, digging further until he found a photo as well.

“Can you Transfigure that to look like the picture?” he asked, nodding to the items on her desk.

Luna had been a great resource for Harry over the last few days. Since he'd invoked Delibero Pergo, he'd begun his courtship in earnest. He intended to pursue Draco the proper pure-blood way, and he wasn't willing to skip any of the steps, even though it prolonged the wait before they could actually meet up in person.

The courtship ritual had been designed in a time ruled by arranged marriages, which were still popular among the pure-blood elite. Draco had entered into one himself, Harry knew. He'd researched Draco extensively, with Luna's help, before deciding to invoke Delibero Pergo. He wanted to make sure he knew everything possible about the blond. What he learned left him with more questions than answers, though, especially about his failed marriage and subsequent two-year disappearance.

Harry knew several of his friends held the missing information – Neville, for sure, since he worked for Draco somewhere in France, and possibly Ginny, who seemed more closed-mouth about the entire thing than he had expected.

No matter what the Slytherin was hiding, though, Harry was confident he could handle it. Prison time in another country? No problem. Mental breakdown? He seemed fine now, so that was alright too. Rehab for Potions abuse? A common enough occurrence, and one Harry could easily deal with.

Harry smiled as his thoughts returned to the present, watching Luna Transfigure the item. Despite being a member of the media, he knew he could trust her with anything. She was also the most talented among his friends at Transfiguring off-the-wall things, like the PEZ dispenser he'd just given her. Besides, seeing him storm out of the Quibbler offices angrily would only serve to underscore his warning to the other media outlets. If he were that angry with one of his good friends, what would the great Harry Potter do to a stranger who violated the law? He laughed, remembering yesterday's scene. Luna's tears had looked quite convincing and he'd almost felt bad until he saw her wink at him before she started screaming at him for denying the public the news they deserved to have.

Ah, Luna, he thought fondly, grabbing her and kissing her exuberantly on the cheek when she'd finished her spell.

"It's perfect!" he cried, marveling at the tiny masterpiece in his hand.

***

Draco laughed aloud when Harry's latest gift arrived, utterly delighted. It was the perfect companion to the gift he'd received yesterday.

"What is that?" Neville asked, squinting at the PEZ dispenser.

"It's a Muggle sweet," Draco answered, studying the item carefully. "Harry collects them. This one is made to look like Justin Timberlake."

Draco used his thumb to tip the plastic man's head open, cupping his palm underneath to catch the sweet that fell out. He popped it in his mouth, grimacing at the too-sugary confection. He offered one to Neville, who politely declined.

"Justin Timberlake? Is he an important Muggle?"

Draco grinned, his gaze sweeping over to his desk, where the first of his courtship gifts, a CD Harry had sent over the day before, was tucked away. It was *NSYNC's Greatest Hits, and he'd die before admitting to Harry or anyone else that he already had a copy.

***

"Not the ideal way to spend your birthday, I know, but she insisted you come in if you wanted the change made," Hermione said apologetically, leading James Evans through the familiar halls of the publishing house.

"It's just for a few minutes, then we can go have fun," Harry said with an easy smile. He'd been a lot

easier to be around after Draco had accepted his courtship offer two days ago.

The meeting took much longer than Hermione's promised few minutes, but Harry didn't mind. It was important, and therefore worth his time. He couldn't wait until the finished product hit the stores in a week. James Evans' latest triumph, and the ace up Harry's courtship sleeve.

***

Even Blaise had turned out for Harry's birthday, and Grimmauld Place was teeming with people. He'd wanted to keep it as low key as possible, so Harry had opted to have the celebration at home instead of out at his favorite pub, as he normally would have.

"I still don't understand why he didn't invite Draco," Hermione said crossly, sloshing a bit of the Muggle beer she held when someone jostled her from behind.

"Because it isn't proper for him to see Draco in person until the first fourteen courtship gifts have been accepted," Pansy said, rolling her eyes. She didn't hate Muggle-born witches and wizards, nor did she think they ought to be barred from wizarding life, but she did think they should have some sort of remedial education on the culture.

"Fourteen? " Hermione gasped out, coughing as she choked on her drink.

"Fourteen," Pansy confirmed taking a calm sip of her own drink; it was a Muggle concoction Harry loved called a Tom Collins. It wasn't bad. "Most couples spread those out over weeks or months, but our Harry's in a hurry, so he's doing one a day. They don't have to be grand, just a token of affection or respect."

Oliver wrapped an arm around his wife's shoulders, dipping his head to press a kiss against her neck.

“Ollie sent me everything from Quidditch tickets to his grandmother’s heirloom necklace,” she added, giggling when he kissed her again.

“I wasn’t taking any chances of you or your parents saying no,” he murmured, prompting more laughter from Pansy.

“That’s barbaric,” Hermione complained, her words slightly slurred from too much celebration. “Buying someone’s love?”

Oliver shook his head, his eyes serious as he answered her snide question.

“It’s not. It used to be a way to solidify a wizard’s intention to court, but now it’s a way to prove your esteem before the actual dating begins. No marriage contracts these days, not even arranged marriages, are forced.”

Hermione sniffed, clearly skeptical. After all, it sounded like it was all a ploy for gifts. Harry had been frantic yesterday when he hadn’t heard back from Draco about a gift, worrying he had offended the man by sending something so trivial. The thank-you owl had come shortly after his panic attack, but the memory worried Hermione. What if Draco didn’t think Harry’s gifts were worthy?

“It’s old-fashioned romance,” Pansy said simply, dragging a hand along Oliver’s jaw fondly. She turned back to Hermione, frowning. “It’s not a one-way street, either. After accepting fourteen of the suitor’s gifts, the person being courted has to give a gift in return. One that signifies whether or not he or she is willing to go on with the courtship.”

Hermione hadn’t heard that yet. She didn’t think Harry was doing very well, if the point was romance. She hadn’t understood the first or second gifts – albums and memorabilia from an American Muggle band? – and today’s gift was equally odd, a book on the natural life cycle of the Magnolia tree. Clearly, Harry needed some help in the romance department.

Back to Index

Chapter 20: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. If they were mine, the Epilogue would have been so different!

Thanks again to Kamerreon!

***

Harry arched and groaned, running his long fingers through fine, silky blond hair. He was covered in sweat, his heart beating frantically as he ground against Draco, his eyes bright as he watched his cock slide in and out of Draco's swollen red lips as he fucked his mouth.

Heavily lidded eyes blinked slowly as Draco's hand snaked around Harry's hip, roughly fondling his balls before pressing a knuckle against his perineum, making him gasp out loud again. He was transfixed as he watched a pale, slender finger disappear, his eyes finally drifting shut as he felt it trace a gentle pattern around his entrance. The finger was slick – Draco must have cast a wandless Lubrication Charm. A thrill rippled through Harry at the thought of having such a magically powerful partner and he cried out when not one, but two fingers slipped inside him the faint burning enough to stave off the climax that threatened just moments before.

Harry whimpered when Draco's talented mouth began to move in tandem with his fingers. Up, down. In, out. Oh, Merlin, now he was swirling his tongue over the head of Harry's swollen cock, his fingers mimicking the sweeping motion inside him, brushing over the sensitive spot that never failed to make Harry howl.

And suddenly he was coming in hot spurts, his arse clenching around the pleasurable intrusion of Draco's

fingers …

“Christ!” Harry gasped, sitting up suddenly. He shivered in the cool night air, slightly disgusted to find himself bathed in a cold sweat and – he lifted the covers, his lip curling in distaste – cooling come.

The dreams had been increasing in frequency for weeks now, but the intensity hadn’t started kicking up this high until last week, when Draco agreed to accept Harry’s courtship. He grabbed his wand, but hesitated before he could cast the spells he’d come to rely on almost nightly. Really, wet dreams at his age? It was mortifying.

Harry sighed, throwing back the damp and sticky bedclothes and heaving himself out of bed. Cleaning Charms worked perfectly well, but this was the second time tonight he’d woken up in a pool of his own sweat and come. It was getting ridiculous.

Harry groaned, stripping the bed himself instead of calling for Kreacher. The elf would have happily done the chore for him, but he didn’t mind doing it. It gave him some time to avoid thinking about why the bed needed to be stripped for the third time this week, especially since it was only Tuesday. He had another whole week of this before he could even see Draco, and there were further restrictions about being alone with each other – a big taboo – and touching each other – an even bigger taboo – for another few weeks after that.

Harry was halfway out the door with the soiled sheets before he realized he had no idea where Kreacher took the dirty laundry. He spent a moment reflecting on that, feeling curiously bad about it, before piling the sheets near the dresser and pulling on a pair of boxers to wear while he searched for fresh linens. Those, at least, he had a general idea of where to find.

Twenty minutes later, Harry was climbing back into his freshly made bed after a lukewarm shower. Two wet dreams in one night – he’d never even suffered this badly when he was in school! He wondered if Draco was having a similar problem, smacking his head sharply against the headboard when the mere thought of the blond had his cock twitching again. It was going to be a very long week.

***

Blaise poked at the framed black and white photo on the desk in Draco's study, wondering who Hugh Grant was and why Draco would be grinning like a loon over getting an autographed photo of him. He smiled in spite of himself at the words scrawled in messy black marker, positive Harry had used a light Persuasion Spell to get the man to sign it. A Muggle actor, Draco had told him.

"To Draco:

This Harry bloke seems serious about you. Anyone who is able to gain access to my private residence in the middle of the night to ask for an autograph is obviously quite determined.

Best of luck to both of you,

Hugh Grant"

Of even bigger concern was the fact that his good friend was now completely melting over the fact that Harry had sent him a box of Muggle candy. Malted milk balls. Draco hadn't paused long enough to explain the odd gift – even odder than the autographed photo and several dozen Muggle DVDs with titles like Love Actually, Bridget Jones' Diary and Notting Hill that had arrived yesterday – before darting off to pen a thank you note in reply.

Whatever they were, it apparently pleased Draco. Blaise sighed, his eyes drawn to the smiling Muggle in the photo again. Odd. Very odd.

***

Draco popped another DVD into the player yet again glad he'd purchased the Muggle device a few years ago. Like all electronics, it had taken some complicated warding to protect it from the ambient magic in the room, but it was all worth it now.

He grinned, sitting back to enjoy the unfamiliar film. He'd already worked his way through his favorites – Love Actually being the best, of course – and now he was into some of the ones he'd never seen before. He'd had no idea Hugh Grant had been in so many movies, but he was enjoying each one immensely.

Draco pulled a dormant Golden Snitch out of his pocket, absently stroking it until its tiny wings began to flutter. It was charmed to stay put until thrown, so he didn't have to worry about it escaping and wreaking havoc through the chateau. It was a poor substitute for Harry, but since it had been one of the gifts from him, accompanied by a written promise to play a Seeker's game sometime in the near future, Draco kept it close.

Saturday's gift was sitting on the coffee table in front of him, with several passages marked for future use. Want to Play With My Wand? 1,001 Pick-Up Lines for Wizards had been an inspired choice, and Draco fully planned to use each and every one on Harry at some time in the future. He grinned, a strangely content feeling creeping through his chest at the thought of having a future with Harry, even if it included cheesy pick-up lines. Hell, especially if it included cheesy pick-up lines. Because pick-up lines often led to sex and Draco very much wanted to have sex with Harry.

He focused his attention back on the screen where a young Hugh Grant was dashing, if not slightly ridiculous, in a large mustache and period clothing. Draco had no idea if that was really how Americans dressed before the Civil War, but it certainly worked on Hugh Grant.

It had been a constant battle to keep his thoughts away from Harry, but a necessary exercise. He'd never wanked this often in his life, not even after his emails and chats with Gryffin had taken a decidedly sexual turn. And of course, Harry had to go and make this a proper courtship, he thought uncharitably, his lower lip pouting ever so slightly. How did he even know what to do? Draco made a mental note to ask Harry who had coached him on the old laws and traditions, because it was obvious the Gryffindor had gotten his information from someone other than his friends. Even Neville, who had the same pure-blood upbringing that Draco did, had been unclear on some of the ancient courtship rules Harry had invoked.

And now we have to follow through with them, which means no sex in the near future, Draco thought

morosely, reaching onto the table beside him to grab the box of malted milk balls Harry had sent over earlier. At least he had chocolate.

He sighed, bored with the film already. Deciding a book might hold his interest better, Draco turned the television off and Summoned the first edition copy of Wuthering Heights that had been Sunday's gift. It was the first gift Blaise actually exclaimed over, though the cost or rarity of the book hardly meant anything to Draco. He didn't dare actually read it, lest he disturb the Preservation Spell someone – likely Harry, since the book had come from a Muggle auction house – had placed on the book. He ran a finger over the cover, tracing the title and author's name. Ellis Bell. It had been the perfect gift, really. Not only did it mean Harry remembered his sympathy for Heathcliff, but the inscription inside had melted the last of his resolve.

"To Draco –

It seems that most of your favorite authors seem to use a pen name: Emily Brontë because she felt she had to change her name in order to be published, and Harry Potter because he was afraid his name would be the only reason he was.

You once said you felt Heathcliff was a kindred spirit, and you wondered what that said about you as a person. It says you're stubborn and domineering, with the propensity to be cold, calculating and vengeful. It also says you have the ability to love genuinely, deeply and forever. I wouldn't change anything about either of you.

With fondest affection,

Harry"

***

“I don’t remember the exact words, but the gist was that he called him a cold-hearted bastard,” Neville said, his eyes alight as he watched Hermione recoil in horror.

Harry laughed, rolling his eyes at Neville. The other wizard knew exactly what he’d meant – he’d been the one to tell him Draco had been extremely pleased with the gift.

“He’s just winding you up, Hermione,” Harry said, squinting as he studied the antique stone basin in front of him.

“So you didn’t write those things to Draco?” She ran a finger over the raised runes that decorated the bowl, which looked like it had been carved out of soapstone. It was gorgeous. The absence of a price tag also likely meant it was expensive.

“No, I did,” Harry said absently, raising his hand to catch the shop keeper’s attention. “Can you tell me a bit about this?”

The older wizard hurried over, his eyes widening when he recognized Harry. His bored expression was immediately replaced with one of keen interest.

“This, Mr. Potter, sir?” he asked, reaching out to grasp the side of the stone basin. “It was hand-carved in 1611 by a renowned Seer named Chaitali, rumored to be the result of a thirty-day spirit meditation fast.”

Hermione grimaced, hoping Harry didn’t fall for the man’s story. Harry’s prophecy aside, she still thought Divination was by and large a hoax, especially those Seers who claimed to have spirit visitations. The piece looked old and fragile enough to be of that provenance, but she highly doubted a Seer had anything to do with it. It was probably just a story to hike up the exorbitant price even more.

“And the spells on it?” Harry asked, crouching down so he could see the carvings up close. They really were exquisite.

The wizard smiled, confident in his sale. It would take a very powerful wizard to be able to detect the magic swirling around the piece. This was definitely Harry Potter, and if what the wizarding papers said was true, he could certainly afford the hefty price tag.

"Very good, sir. They are ancient spells, not easily detectable," he said, watching Hermione and Neville both lean closer, curious about the magic they hadn't noticed before. "Since this belonged to a Seer, the bowl was imbued with several high-level clarity and protection spells. Specifically, the original owner cast Animus Ligo, Enucleo and Perduco spells on it, all sealed in place with a Fides Charm."

Harry's eyebrows rose at the complicated magic. It was perfect: rare, prestigious, ancient – a very worthy gift. He nodded to Neville, who grabbed Hermione's arm, pulling her toward the door. If Harry was set on buying it – and Neville agreed, it was perfect for Draco – there was no sense in letting Hermione nag.

"I'll take it."

***

Draco fought his way out of sleep, aware of a hot, heavy weight pinning him to the bed. It was like being under a sweltering blanket, and he absently wondered if the room's Cooling Charm had failed sometime in the night.

He tried to turn over, his eyes snapping open when his torso didn't respond to his command. He blinked sleepily and his arms automatically felt around for his son. Cal was splayed over Draco's chest, his head resting against his shoulder.

Draco stretched as much as he was able without waking the boy, trying to wake up enough to shift Cal over to the mattress. He really needed to set some sort of alarm ward that would notify him when Cal was out of bed, he thought, easing himself up into a sitting position once the sleeping boy was safely nestled next to him.

Thankfully, he hadn't been awakened by one of the erotic dreams he'd been having about Harry this time. He felt his heart speed up at the memory of the dreams, which had become more explicit as the courtship wore on. Six more days, he reminded himself, willing away the beginnings of his burgeoning erection.

He glanced over at Cal, running his fingers through the dark hair that spilled over the pillow. He'd be six next month. Draco's smile faded as his thoughts turned toward telling Harry about Cal. He'd spent countless hours over the last week thinking about it, and he still didn't know how to proceed. Yes, I'd love to continue this courtship. By the way, I have a son. Straightforward, but maybe too much so. Remember how you said you'd like to have kids some day? How about right now? Good for shock value, but probably detrimental to his cause if he really wanted Harry to stick around.

Draco sighed, pushing the bedclothes back and easing himself up, careful not to jostle Cal. They'd had another epic bedtime battle the night before, so he was sure he needed the extra sleep. The house-elves had already laid out tea for him, and Draco shuffled through the door to his private sitting room to read the morning papers. They had all taken Harry's letters seriously – no word about Harry or his courtship had made it into any of the papers Draco or his solicitors were monitoring. There had been a few small pieces about Draco's retreat from London, and some gossip about Malfoy Industries hitting hard times, as evidenced by his desertion of his role as chairman. Draco snorted, picking up the Prophet. He hadn't been available for meetings lately, but the business hadn't suffered. Blaise was talented enough to run it on his own, not that Draco would ever tell the man. His ego was already big enough.

He smiled when he saw a front-page article about the release of James Evans' newest book. Apparently, it hit the shelves that day and it was already on the best-seller list, thanks to pre-orders. It deserved to be, he thought flipping to the business section. He'd enjoyed it immensely, back before he knew James Evans was Gryffin and Gryffin was Harry.

"Morning," Blaise said, breezing in without so much as a knock. Draco scowled at him, but the other wizard just shrugged, snagging a scone from the tray. "Thought you'd want an update before our morning meeting with the Ataliers."

Draco's frown deepened. He hadn't been able to allay Madam Atalier's fears a few weeks ago, nor had he been able to convince her that her son was the problem. She and her husband steadfastly refused to turn him out, despite the fact that the business had been on the decline since he took the helm. Blaise

had put all the Atalier's Gringotts accounts under surveillance for the last two weeks, though, and they'd gotten the proof they needed to show the little bastard was embezzling.

Blaise dug in his robes, tossing a nondescript wrapped package to Draco. "For you."

"Are you playing messenger now?" Draco teased, restraining himself from tearing into it immediately. He didn't want news that he was over-eager reaching Harry. He had to preserve his advantage, after all.

He finished his tea, finally caving to his curiosity and calmly unwrapping the gift. It looked like a book, and he figured Harry had probably given him a signed copy of the James Evans novel that had just been released.

"Well, that's a bit chintzy," Blaise drawled, wrinkling his nose. "A copy of a book he gets for free? One you've already read, even?"

Draco laughed, cracking the book open. He loved the way the spine of a new book resisted at first, and the way the pages were so crisp.

"I don't mind," Draco said, flipping through the pages. It really had been a good book. He wouldn't mind reading it again.

A piece of parchment floated to the table, and Draco grabbed it, his brow furrowing at the cryptic message written in Harry's scrawl.

"Page 2."

He dutifully followed the instructions, turning to the second page. Maybe Harry had signed it? Draco's breath caught as he read the only printed words on the page. The dedication page.

“For Sly, who inspired me with tales of his childhood pet, Argie. You hold my heart in your hands.”

Harry had jotted a few hasty words underneath in ink, but Draco didn’t notice. He felt hot and dizzy. Harry Potter had professed his love for him in a best-selling book. Millions of people would see it. They might not know it was Harry, or that Harry was talking about him, but still.

Blaise shook his head, pouring himself another cup of tea. Draco was grinning like an idiot again.

Back to Index

Chapter 21: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. I don’t own ‘em. My undying gratitude to Kamerreon for the beta!

***

“Can you believe those people?” Blaise growled, winging the file folder across the table angrily. It slipped off the other side of the polished conference room table scattering parchment and statements across the floor.

Draco shrugged, lazily retrieving the spilled file with his wand. The papers were still out of order, but it hardly mattered. The Ataliers had just made it clear that Malfoy Industries no longer represented their businesses, so keeping their file tidy was no longer necessary.

He Summoned the contents, picking through the jumble of paperwork until he found the Gringotts statements they'd just been discussing. The Ataliers' son Cato had been steadily embezzling from them since he took the helm of their apothecary business a few months ago. Profits had been declining, but the Ataliers preferred to blame Draco's management of their investments and properties for the losses instead of their son's obvious duplicity.

"Talk to Jorgenson," he said, tucking the statements into a different file. He wanted to keep them close, in case the Ataliers tried to make trouble for Malfoy Industries. "Have him continue to monitor their accounts."

"Even though they're blaming us for bodging it up?" He wasn't really surprised at Draco's order – he wasn't the type of man to let his client get taken advantage of, even if it was by a family member. And that client was technically no longer a client.

"Even though," Draco answered dryly, scribbling a note to Madge on the outside of the new folder and sending it off with a waiting owl.

***

"It's a big risk, mate," Ron said, eying the package Harry was wrapping warily.

"It's not really a present, per se," Hermione said with a thoughtful frown, tying the twine around the plain brown paper with a spell when it kept slipping through Harry's fingers. "Are you sure it will count?"

Harry nodded, carefully placing the now-wrapped box on top of the mantle. He'd asked Neville to come pick up the gift, since he didn't want to send it by owl. He grinned, wondering if he'd finally get a chance to see Nev's house after he started dating Draco. The whole area was under some sort of protection charm and Harry had never been able to visit Nev and Daph because of it.

“It may not be a traditional present, but it is a present,” he assured Hermione, touched that she worried so much about his courtship. True, it was annoying most of the time, but she did it because she loved him. And because she was desperate to find out more about the laws and traditions she didn’t understand.

“If he doesn’t like it –”

“If he doesn’t like it, I’ll deal with the fall-out when it happens,” Harry said firmly, unwilling to be swayed from his choice. If Draco couldn’t understand what he’d done, they probably didn’t have much of a future together anyway.

***

“I don’t know what it is,” Neville said quickly before Draco could ask, handing him a slim box. “He just said he thought you shouldn’t be alone when you opened it.”

Draco frowned, turning the lightweight box over in his hands. He felt a pang of excitement as he studied the dimensions of the box – the very familiar dimensions. He’d had two strikingly similar boxes in his lifetime.

He swallowed, his hand trembling as he ripped away the simple brown paper. It couldn’t be, could it? He had been certain the Ministry destroyed it years ago. It hadn’t been listed among his other possessions when he’d been released from his brief stay in Azkaban nearly ten years ago. Of course, it hadn’t been in his possession when he’d been arrested, ripped from his parents’ side in the Great Hall the morning after Harry killed Voldemort. His frown deepened as he thought about the desolate month he’d spent in the wizarding prison, cold and terrified despite the absence of Dementors. He shivered, his insides clenching as he thought about his father, dying alone in a dank, dirty cell.

Pushing thoughts of his father out of his mind, Draco ran a finger over the nondescript box, unsure of whether or not he wanted to open it. Neville watched silently, unsure of what would evoke this reaction.

Normally clear grey eyes were clouded with doubt and regret, and the man had gone as still as a statue.

“Draco?” Neville asked tentatively, wondering if Harry had known the gift would upset the man. Was that why he’d asked him to be there when Draco opened it? Why would Harry have sent something that would distress the man he was courting?

Draco’s eyes rose to Neville’s the resolve in them clear. He opened the box, joy and sorrow mingling into an overwhelming urge to cry when he saw his old wand nestled in the dark velvet. The wand he never thought he’d see again. The wand he’d never even thought he wanted to see again, since it represented a wholly different life than the one he lived now.

Neville watched as Draco cast the box aside, holding a slightly scuffed wand in his right hand. Why would Harry have sent Draco a wand? Wands were extremely personal, not something another person could choose for someone. Hell, that was the reason he’d had such trouble at Hogwarts. He’d been using his dad’s wand, at his grandmother’s insistence. Wands chose the wizard, not the other way around.

“How?” Draco whispered, caressing the worn wood with his thumb as he held it in his grip.

***

Harry was waiting in a comfortable armchair by the fire when Neville stepped through the Floo. He’d clearly been expecting him, since Nev’s favorite Muggle beer was waiting on the table, chilled to the perfect temperature, and held there under a Stasis Charm.

Green eyes studied Neville wordlessly as Harry waited for Draco’s reaction. He hadn’t included a note of any kind, assuming anything he could say wouldn’t have been enough to answer the myriad of questions he was sure Draco would have as soon as he recovered from the shock of seeing his old wand.

Neville took the chair opposite Harry, indulging in a swig of his drink before shooting questions at Harry rapid-fire. How had he come to have Draco’s wand? Why hadn’t he turned it over to the Ministry after

the war ended? Why had he kept it all this time? Why hadn't he returned it after Draco was pardoned? Why give it to Draco now?

"I just –" Neville stopped, looking away. He was so angry at Harry and he didn't really have anything to do with the situation. How must Draco feel? "Why, Harry?"

Harry smiled sadly, watching Neville take another drink. He hadn't even tried to get a word in edgewise during the usually calm man's furious rant, correctly assuming Neville was looking to vent, not looking for answers. Now though, it seemed he was ready to listen.

"Because it was time," he answered easily, his tone at odds with the concern tinting his eyes. "Is he alright?"

Neville sighed, tired of cryptic answers. In truth, he didn't know if Draco was alright or not. He'd barely gotten more than a half-dozen words out of his friend before leaving him to question Harry.

"He's shocked, understandably," Neville answered after a moment, feeling better after seeing Harry was actually worried about the other man. "I think it dredged up a lot of painful memories for him. He tries not to think about – about that time of his life. Nothing that happened was his choice. Hell, you know that. You were there at his trial."

Harry nodded taking a sip of the Shiraz he'd poured himself earlier. Every time he drank it now he thought of Sly's assessment of the wine, calling it bold and spicy without being overly sweet. It was ironic, since that was how Harry would describe Draco. His favorite wine and his favorite man.

Neville almost growled in frustration when he saw Harry had no intention of elaborating on any of the questions he'd shot at him. He let the conversation drift to other things – Draco's reaction to the other gifts Harry had sent, an update on Daphne's pregnancy, Harry's ideas for his next book. He knew better than to press his former Housemate for more information than he wanted to give. Harry was surprisingly Slytherin in his views on sharing information – like Draco, he operated on a need-to-know basis most of the time.

“I just need to know that you’re going to explain it all to him some day,” Neville said suddenly as he made to leave, his gaze seeking Harry’s assurances.

“Everything,” Harry agreed, nodding solemnly.

It had been a gift, true. But it had also been a test. If Draco wanted to be with Harry, he had to be prepared to find out some disturbing things about the wizarding world’s vaunted Savior. He’d never told anyone – not even Ron and Hermione – all the details of what happened that night, but it wasn’t something he planned to hold back from his future husband. If Draco couldn’t handle this, Harry figured he might as well cut his losses now.

***

Harry woke to a tapping on his window. It wasn’t even light out yet, and he fumbled for his glasses, casting a quick Tempus before letting the owl in. Just after 3 a.m.

The bird nipped at him impatiently as his sleep-numbed fingers struggled to untie the scroll on its leg. The owl clearly wasn’t any more pleased with its early-morning task than Harry was; he’d only gotten to sleep an hour earlier. He grumbled at the bird darkly before letting it go, slamming the window shut without watching it soar away into the inky blackness outside his window.

He rubbed his eyes, hoping to dispel the muddiness in his mind before reading the missive. He’d waited for hours for any word at all from Draco, finally giving in after midnight and retiring to his room to toss and turn for two hours before sleep finally claimed him.

He unfurled the scroll, his tight expression easing at the single word elegantly scratched across the page.

Alright.

Harry blew out a breath in relief, bringing the short note back to bed with him. He curled back under the covers, able to enjoy the soft blankets and comfortable mattress now that he knew Draco forgave him. Alright. One word, but it spoke volumes to Harry. He fell asleep quickly, a grin on his face and the crumpled parchment held tightly in his fist.

***

“I’m sorry you had to waste an afternoon, Weasley,” Draco said, and Ron marveled that the man actually did sound sorry.

He nodded stiffly unsure of what protocol he should be following. There wasn’t a chapter in the Auror Training Manual about how to address your best friend’s love-interest-and-likely-future-husband while overseeing a Ministry-mandated search of said love interest’s office.

Ron cleared his throat, waiting until one of the junior Aurors on his team had left the room, leaving him alone with Draco.

“It’s hardly your fault, Malfoy,” he said, his voice laced with sympathy. No one down at the Ministry actually believed the charges that had been levied against Draco and his company, but all formal complaints had to be thoroughly investigated. “I’m sorry for the disruption this is causing. We’ll be out from underfoot soon.”

Draco glanced around his office, grateful the Aurors hadn’t trashed the place in search of proof that he had embezzled money from the Atalier Family. All they’d find, of course, was proof that Draco had discovered the problem some months earlier and recently started monitoring the business’ accounts. Bloody idiots. They’d just ensured their son would do time in Azkaban for embezzlement. Draco hadn’t reported his findings to the Ministry, hoping the Ataliers would be able to resolve it without the help of the courts. Once charges had been filed though, there was no way to go back. Cato would be held accountable for his actions now that his parents had filed a formal complaint of embezzlement.

“It’s no trouble,” Draco reassured him, signaling Madge to bring a tray of tea in. They may as well get comfortable, since the Aurors still had piles and piles of files to get through. Accommodating though he may be, Draco had no intention of allowing them to leave the building with files that were not expressly included in the Ministry search warrant. That meant wading through thousands of pieces of parchment. “No trouble at all.”

***

Ron was still in Draco’s office two hours later when Pansy came in with a large package. The redhead grinned when he recognized the familiar shape glad he was getting the chance to see Draco open one of Harry’s gifts. This one was a big one, too. He hadn’t been there when Harry purchased it, but he’d seen it the next day when he and Harry went over the spells and enchantments on it carefully, ensuring nothing dangerous was present.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Pansy asked, her brows furrowed when she saw Ron in his magenta Aurors robes.

“An official investigation,” Draco offered with a wry smile, nodding his head toward the corridor, where three similarly attired wizards were sorting through boxes of files.

Pansy’s frown grew as she turned to watch them, wondering how she’d possibly missed them on her way in. Of course, the box she was carrying was terribly heavy, so her attention had been focused on not dropping it, not on her surroundings, but still.

“A formality,” Ron said, rolling his eyes and making it clear that he considered the whole exercise to be a farce.

Pansy’s shoulders relaxed at Ron’s dismissive tone, relieved she hadn’t wandered into some sort of epic battle between the two former rivals. She thrust the box at Draco, sighing in relief when he took her

heavy burden.

“Today’s gift?” he asked, testing its weight with his arms.

“However did you avoid Ravenclaw with awesome powers of deduction like yours?” She snapped, grabbing Draco’s sandwich from the desk and taking a bite. She was missing lunch to run this errand for Harry.

Draco rolled his eyes, focusing on the box he’d just set on his chair. He was a bit reluctant to open any more gifts from Harry after yesterday.

“Just open it so I can go,” Pansy sneered, grabbing Ron’s Muggle soda and taking a drink.

The press had backed off Harry, as per his orders, but they were still camping out on her doorstep daily and printing stories about how her marriage was in trouble. She and Oliver were handling it as best they could, but it still infuriated her every time she opened the Prophet and saw some new speculation about an affair she was supposedly having, or how Oliver was gay and had only married her because he needed to produce an heir.

Draco opened the box, holding his breath as he delved inside, batting away the layers of gauzy cloth wrapped around the heavy object. He was surprised at how small it was, expecting something two or three times its size given the weight of the box.

“Merlin,” he whispered when he’d freed the stone basin of its wrappings. He ran his hands around the cool soapstone, tracing the carved runes with the pads of his fingers. “It’s amazing.”

Ron grinned, launching into an explanation of the protective spells on the Pensieve and details about the intricate runes that covered most of the rim. Draco and Pansy were both suitably impressed by the story behind the ancient basin, awed by the history and the obvious power that emanated from it.

“Why a Pensieve, though?” Draco asked, still stroking the soft stone. He could swear he felt it move under his hand, as though responding to his touch.

Ron paused, his expression uneasy. He knew exactly why, but he also knew Harry wanted it to be a surprise. Still, it was odd he hadn’t included a note with the gift, at least outlining its provenance.

“No, wait,” Draco said, holding up a hand when he saw Ron’s discomfort. “Don’t answer that. I’m betting tomorrow’s gift will explain it. That git’s too Slytherin for his own good.”

Ron smiled again, laughing as he envisioned Harry as a Slytherin. It was ridiculous, of course. Who was a better embodiment of pure Gryffindorishness than Harry? He shook his head, turning back to his sandwich. If Draco thought Harry had so much as a single Slytherin bone in his body, maybe they didn’t know each other as well as he thought they did.

Back to Index

Chapter 22: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They belong to JKR, along with my undying gratitude for introducing us to these two beautiful boys! Thanks again to Kamerreon for the beta!

***

“Having a party, are you, son?” The witch asked, winking as she boxed up Draco’s purchases.

He gave her a winning smile, handing over a bag full of Galleons and grabbing the box from the counter. She was still staring at him, but he was too happy to care. He’d spent days agonizing over the perfect

present, and he was so relieved to have hit upon something he was proud to give Harry.

“No party,” he said over his shoulder, his smile growing as her eyebrows shot up. “This is all for one person. One very special person.”

***

Harry held the vial of swirling grey smoke in his palm, realizing he was taking a huge step. He’d repressed these memories for so long it was almost as though they had happened to someone else. His muscles felt tight and shaky, and he wiped away a stray tear absently with his fist. It was important that Draco knew these things. That part of Harry’s life was over, but it would never truly be gone.

The darkness of his hate for Voldemort. The guilty desire to give up his life, to stay in the comfort and quiet of the afterlife, instead of returning to the chaotic war that he knew still raged. The bone-numbing exhaustion, mental and physical, born of years of fighting that made it so appealing. The resentment he still felt at times for being forced to choose between saving the world and staying with those he’d loved and lost.

He tucked the vial into a small box, blanketing it with charms to render it unbreakable. He layered on another spell that would respond only to Draco’s magical signature, ensuring no one else could view the memory. He was positive he could trust Draco with this, but he didn’t want to risk it falling into someone else’s hands.

Harry faltered before he could tie the small package on his owl’s leg, swallowing back a sudden pang of sorrow for the loss of Hedwig. It had been more than a decade ago, but it felt as fresh as yesterday after dredging up all those old memories for Draco’s gift. He let the package rest on the desk, waving the owl away. He wasn't ready to send it off just yet.

***

“I don’t know where he is,” Draco said, his tone sharp.

Ron had been unable to spare Draco from this interrogation, going so far as to file a formal complaint against his supervisor when the man insisted on bringing the Slytherin in. As a result, he had been barred from the interrogation, which may have been a blessing in disguise. Draco wasn’t sure he wanted Harry’s best friend to have access to him while he was under the influence of Veritaserum.

“Were you in on the scheme, Malfoy?” The Auror sneered, his expression full of disdain. “An innocent guy like Atalier couldn’t have come up with this on his own. What was your cut?”

Draco sighed, his head pounding from the overdose of the potion – six drops, when three would have worked perfectly well – and the extended interrogation.

“I found out about it when the Ataliers came to me about discrepancies in their accounts,” Draco answered through gritted teeth. “I put a watch on their Gringotts account and found out that way. I informed Madam and Monsieur Atalier of Cato’s embezzlement as soon as I had confirmed it.”

“How much did you skim off the top, Malfoy?”

Draco almost growled in frustration. “Nothing. I had nothing to do with it.”

The old Auror shook his head in disgust, slamming his fist down on the table. A younger man next to him examined the bottle of Veritaserum, as though expecting to find something wrong with it.

“It must not be working,” the older man spat, kicking the other man’s chair. “Go get another bottle. Test it on yourself, then bring it to me.”

The younger Auror nodded, hurrying from the room. Like most of their team, he was afraid of their

supervisor. Personally, he agreed with Ron – it was obvious that Malfoy wasn't involved. Everyone knew the man hated the Malfoys for the part they played in the war, and it was clear he was using this opportunity to extract some revenge against Draco.

"Let's start again. What is your name?" the man asked as soon as the door had closed, and Draco closed his eyes, his magically bound hands tightening into fists under the table.

"Draco Abraxas Malfoy."

"Age?"

"28."

"Residence?"

"Malfoy Manor in Wiltshire," Draco said, his jaw clenching when the potion wasn't satisfied with his answer. Fuck, he thought, fighting it as hard as he could. He hadn't been living at the Manor recently.

He sighed, closing his eyes again as his mouth opened. "The Malfoy Chateau in Amboise, France."

The grizzled Auror perked up at the new information, pulling Draco's file closer to him. It didn't say anything about the existence of a chateau in France.

"Why have you been living in France, Malfoy?"

Draco swallowed, trying to test out answers to see how much the potion would let him hide. He had to figure out a way to answer truthfully without giving too much away.

“To get away from the press here in England.”

“Why would you need to do that? You’ve never seemed too worried about it before,” the man sneered.

Draco hesitated, waiting until the pull of the potion was too much to ignore before answering in a flat monotone.

“I’m in a relationship now. I didn’t want the press to interfere.”

The Auror laughed darkly, scanning the file again. There were dozens of photos of Malfoy and his love interests there, and none of them looked like he’d been trying particularly hard to hide. Was something different about this one, then?

“Afraid hearing the truth about you will send him running, eh?”

Draco clenched his teeth biting down so hard his jaw ached. It had been more of a statement than a question, and he hoped the potion would let him keep his silence. The building sense of urgency in his mind shot that theory down, and he was forced to answer.

“No, he knows the truth about me.”

Draco’s breath hitched as the potion caught what he’d been trying to hide, compelling him to continue. The words spilled out in a rush as Draco’s eyes widened in horror.

“I’m afraid he’ll lose interest when he finds out everything.”

The Auror smiled, and Draco didn’t care for the feral light in his eyes. His heart hammered in his chest.

Everything he'd worked so hard for, all those years of hiding Cal away in France, his failed marriage, it was all for nothing. He could tell he wouldn't be leaving this room until the Auror had completely stripped him bare.

"What part doesn't he know? That you were a Death Eater? That you still dabble in the Dark Arts? That you're a cold-hearted bastard who isn't capable of love?"

Draco's mouth was dry, and he licked his lips, swallowing to wet his throat. The first question had been too open-ended; he could get away with a vague answer. The others, those were specific and easily addressed. He relaxed slightly, keeping himself on his guard but knocking his panic down a notch. Maybe there was still hope.

"I wasn't a Death Eater. I was never marked. He knows that. I have had nothing to do with the Dark Arts since the war. The Ministry searched Malfoy Manor and all our other properties and removed any Dark artifacts."

He paused, hoping the Veritaserum would let him stop there. He almost cried out in frustration when he felt the niggling in his brain again.

"I am not cold-hearted, and I am very much capable of love."

He saw the malicious glint in the other man's eyes, and he knew it was over. Draco had just unwillingly given him the opening he needed, and if he took it, Draco's life would change dramatically.

"Oh? And just exactly who do you love? Did you love your dear, departed daddy? Did you love him even after you found out he had raped and killed my wife?"

Draco sat stock still, hoping the Auror might lose his temper and hex him, hit him, anything that might stop him from being compelled to answer. Anything would be better than the torture of revealing his son's existence, of ruining everything he'd worked to keep safe for nearly six years.

“I didn’t know,” he said softly when the potion forced a response. “I don’t approve of the things my father did.”

The Auror remained silent, and Draco felt more answers being pulled from him.

“I loved my father.”

He bit his lip hard enough to draw blood, trying to resist the compulsion to continue.

“I loved him despite the horrendous things he did, because he was my father. I don’t have to agree with what he did to love him.”

Draco’s throat tightened as the potion continued to work, his muscles shaking with the effort of holding back the information. This was worse than any torture he’d ever been subjected to – worse, even, than the Cruciatus Curse Voldemort had been so fond of using on him every time he disobeyed.

“I love my mother.”

A safe enough answer, but not enough. He knew it wouldn’t be enough, but he kept fighting it.

“I love Pansy Parkinson-Wood.”

Another twenty seconds ticked by, the compulsion in his brain buzzing frantically.

“I love Blaise Zabini.”

The Auror sat with his arms folded, waiting for Draco to continue. He no doubt figured he'd at least get the name of Draco's partner, and the blond assumed all hell would break loose when that happened.

"I love Neville Longbottom."

Another ten seconds.

"I love Daphne Longbottom."

Five more seconds. It was getting harder to fight.

"I loved Severus Snape."

The pain in his skull was sickening, like waves of acid lapping against his brain.

"I love Harry Potter."

Draco was counting on some sort of violent reaction to the news, something to break the compulsion to continue answering. There was only one name left. Draco Malfoy didn't love many people, something he'd never lamented until now.

The Auror simply quirked an eyebrow, his gaze shifting from Draco's sweaty face to the file in front of him again. They couldn't have already known that, could they?

"I love –" he bit his tongue, his teeth sinking into the soft flesh. The shooting pain was a welcome relief from the torment in his skull, giving him something new to concentrate on. He could feel the effects of the Veritaserum beginning to wane. It must finally be wearing off, he thought distantly, his stomach roiling as fresh blood dripped down his throat. No, his mind corrected, his thoughts drawn to the books Sev had forced him to read about the potion. My body's just shutting down. Haven't been here long

enough for it to be wearing off.

The door swung open, and Ron was standing there, a protective order from the Wizengamot in his hand. He blanched at the sight of Draco's bloody mouth, the blond obviously in deep distress. Before Draco succumbed to the blackness that threatened, his mouth opened again, his words slurred by his swollen tongue.

" – my son."

***

"You can't go in there," Blaise said, stopping Harry with a firm palm against his chest.

Harry shoved at the taller wizard, trying to get past him. Ron had just Fire-called with the news that Draco had been admitted to St. Mungo's, and he'd come as quickly as he could.

"He's –"

"He's fine, and he'd be furious if you broke the courtship rules and went in there right now," Blaise countered, shoving Harry roughly into a chair in the corridor. He sank into a crouch, his hands curled around Harry's knees, restraining him. "If you do that, you won't be able to continue to use Delibero Pergo."

Harry tensed, his struggles stopping. Blaise was right. The old traditions had to be followed to the letter, or he could no longer hide behind the ancient law to shield them from the press. And after what Ron had just told him, they were going to need it more than ever.

"What he said –"

“Is something you two need to discuss, yes,” Blaise said, his heart slamming against his chest as he studied Harry’s reaction. Would he still want to be with Draco now that he knew about Cal? Would he help them protect the boy? Would Harry Potter’s involvement make things better or worse? “Later. Two more days.”

Harry nodded woodenly, fishing in his pocket for a small box. He nudged Blaise’s hand, forcing the wizard to release him and take it.

“It – he shouldn’t watch it now,” he said carefully, meeting Blaise’s eye. “It’s important, but it’s not something he should have to deal with today. Not with – not with everything else.”

Blaise nodded, still watching Harry warily. It was a good sign. Harry was still interested in pursuing the courtship, apparently. And he cared enough about Draco to race down to St. Mungo’s, knowing he’d likely be turned away at the door.

“Cartwell, he’s the Auror who –” Harry broke off, looking over at the door to Draco’s hospital room. He cleared his throat. “He’s the Auror. Ron arrested him, and he’s in the Ministry holding cells now. He got a Patronus off before they took him down, though. We don’t know who he sent it to.”

Blaise closed his eyes briefly, nodding. It was likely that news of Cal’s existence was spreading already.

“They’re charging him with harassment and attempted murder,” Harry said quietly, his voice shaking on the last word. Draco must love his son very much, he knew, to take the risk he did. Resisting Veritaserum was difficult, but it was possible, though the result was often death. “It sounds like he’d been trying to find a way to get Draco in for questioning for years. He was also behind the death threats Draco and Narcissa received a few years ago.”

Blaise nodded again, his mind racing. He needed to get to France. Cal needed to be secreted away at least until they knew what was happening. If Cartwell was working with someone else in the Ministry, they would have access to Draco’s property holdings. They’d be able to find the chateau.

“They think he may have killed Lucius,” Harry added, and Blaise’s attention snapped back. If the man was that crazy, he needed to get to Caleum immediately.

They both looked up at the sound of feet slapping against the wood floor, loud in the otherwise silent corridor. Ron turned the corner, red-faced and panting.

“Gone,” he gasped skidding to a stop in front of them. “Cartwell’s gone. He had a hidden Portkey. He’s escaped.”

Back to Index

Chapter 23: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. Not mine. Thanks again to the fabulous Kamerreon for her beta skills!

***

Blaise’s eyes widened at Ron’s words, and he grabbed both of them, roughly pulling the two men into an empty hospital room.

“Shouldn’t you tell Malfoy –”

“No!” Harry and Blaise said at the same time, their glances unconsciously traveling across the hallway to

Draco's door.

"No," Blaise said again, turning back to Ron. "Not until we're certain Cal is safe. The Aurors guarding the room will tell him soon, no doubt. We need to go."

Ron nodded, still confused but willing to go along with whatever Blaise and Harry wanted to do. They knew Malfoy better than he did, after all, and if they agreed it was likely the right thing.

"I'm going with you," he said, nodding to one of the Aurors across the corridor to let him know everything was alright. "I've got permission to do whatever is necessary to find Cartwell, and I have a feeling he's going to be going after Malfoy's son."

Blaise hesitated before nodding tightly, his eyes slightly wild at the thought.

"The Malfoy Chateau is in Amboise, France. The only way to travel there if you haven't been entered into the wards is with me, Neville or Draco," he said in a rush, not releasing their arms. "I'll take you there now, if you're willing."

Both Harry and Ron agreed, taking a step closer to Blaise.

"Hang on," Blaise said, tightening his grip before Disapparating.

***

"Harry? Ron?" Neville spluttered, pushing Cal behind him when the three men suddenly appeared in the chateau's entryway.

He'd gotten a panicked Patronus from Blaise twenty minutes earlier, instructing him to guard Cal and gather up anything they'd need to be away for a few days. He didn't need any further explanation – this was a possibility they'd been planning for since Cal was a baby.

"No time," Blaise said, grabbing one of the heavy bags from Neville's shoulder and crouching to pull Cal to his chest in a fierce hug. "I know this is scary, Cal, but everything will be okay soon."

He fished under Cal's collar for the medallion the boy had worn for as long as he could remember, his eyes meeting Neville's over the top of Cal's unruly black hair. Neville nodded, placing a hand on Cal's shoulder. This was serious, then. He'd never even seen the safe house the Portkey would take them to, but he knew it was even more heavily warded and protected than the chateau. Merlin himself probably wouldn't be able to find it after all the work Draco and Blaise put into secreting it away.

"Harry, Weasley," Blaise said, pulling a similar medallion from around his own neck and tossing it to Harry. "Use it only when it is safe for us to return."

Harry nodded, the hidden meaning in Blaise's innocuous words clear to him. Come for us only when Cartwell is no longer a threat. Harry's heart stuttered at the thought, his gaze locked on the little boy still caged in the protective embrace of Blaise's arms. He was obviously terrified, but he stood straight and proud, his thin shoulders squared. Wide grey eyes returned Harry's stare, aristocratic features set into a look of grim determination no child so young should ever be forced to wear. The slight tremble of his lower lip was the only thing that belied his fear, and Harry saw so much of Draco in his expression and bearing that it almost hurt to look at him.

This situation clearly wasn't a complete surprise to the boy – Blaise had called him Cal? – so Draco must have told him it was possible, Harry thought. He felt something inside him snap, white hot rage at the thought of Draco being forced to hide his son away from the world, fury that a little boy who had done nothing wrong would be held accountable for the sins of his family.

Harry dropped to his knees, an odd feeling of pride sweeping through him when the little boy flinched but did not retreat, grey eyes meeting green head-on.

“My name is Harry Potter,” he said quietly, holding his hand out.

Cal hesitated, then placed his own in Harry’s larger palm, shaking his hand. “My name is Caleum Malfoy.”

“Do you know who I am, Caleum?” Harry asked, his eyes never leaving the boy’s face.

Cal rolled his eyes, looking so much like his father in that moment that a startled laugh slipped past Harry’s lips.

“Of course I know who you are,” Cal said, his tone dripping with an impressive mix of disdain and confidence. Definitely a Malfoy, Harry thought ruefully. “You’re the Savior of the Wizarding World. The Boy Who Lived.”

Cal leaned in a little closer, his eyes seeking out his godfather briefly before he continued. “You’re Harry-Bloody-Potter, The-Blasted-Seeker-Who-Never-Loses.”

Harry laughed again, something tight loosening in his chest. This little boy – this perfect copy of Draco, with olive skin and black hair – was everything and nothing like he’d expected in the frenzied hour since he’d learned of his existence. Beautiful, privileged, confident, smart, brave – Harry looked at Neville’s hand on the boy’s shoulder, following it up to offer an encouraging smile to the stoically silent man – loved. He could see a future with Caleum and Draco.

Harry grinned at the boy, his heart melting even more when the boy offered him a tentative smile. He nodded once to Blaise, letting him know he’d understood his earlier words. Whatever it took, he would make sure Cal was safe from whatever was out there.

“Activation phrase?” He asked the man, holding up the medallion still clenched in his fist.

Blaise’s eyes flickered to Ron, a sparkle of mirth flashing through their somber depths. “Weasley is our

king."

"What?" Ron shouted, his hand automatically going for his wand. Harry grabbed his wrist, forcing it down.

"Had to be something we wouldn't say by accident," Blaise laughed, wrapping his arms tighter around Cal before activating the necklace his godson still wore.

Neville pulled a similar disc out of his own shirt, shrugging uncomfortably as he murmured the words and disappeared.

***

"Mr. Malfoy, please calm down!" The Healer shouted, leveling her wand at him as he fought.

Draco was thrashing against the restraining hands of a mediwizard who was currently pinning him to the bed, weak but determined to get to his son. He'd woken up a few minutes ago, disoriented and in a lot of pain, but the moment he'd seen the grim Auror guarding the door everything had rushed back. The questioning, the pain of trying to resist, the moment he gave away his son's existence, the blissful rush of unconsciousness.

"I'll use magical restraints if I have to, Malfoy," the man whispered in his ear, and Draco's head snapped up, the familiarity of the voice breaking through his terror.

He studied the man, sure he knew him but uncertain how. "Harry Fire-called a few minutes ago. He said to tell you 'Weasley is our king'."

Draco went lax in the man's arms, letting himself be propped up on the bed. This man knew Harry. Oh

Merlin, Harry, he thought, swallowing convulsively to bite back his terror. Harry knew about Cal, and knew that Blaise and Neville had gotten him to safety. The Healer cast a few diagnostic spells over him while he watched the tall, sandy-haired man observe silently, his arms crossed as though waiting for Draco to act out again.

"I'll leave you to rest, Mr. Malfoy," the Healer said, regarding him sternly. "You're to do whatever Mediwizard Finnigan asks of you."

Draco nodded dully, his eyes shifting to the tall mediwizard. Finnigan. Wasn't there a Finnigan in his year at Hogwarts? A friend of Harry's? He tried to think past the potion-induced haze in his mind, fighting to make sense of what was happening to him.

Seamus waited until the Healer left, asking the silent Auror to wait outside while he did a physical examination. The Auror left reluctantly, obviously loath to let Draco out of his sight. To protect me or keep me from escaping? Draco wondered idly, blinking as Seamus cast Muffliato, a spell he hadn't realized anyone outside of Slytherin knew.

"Seamus Finnigan," the man said, crossing his arms again. He didn't look friendly, but Draco didn't think he had any reason to fear for his own safety. "I'm a friend of Harry's. He asked me to be the mediwizard on your case."

Draco stayed silent but struggled to sit up, intent on getting his clothes and leaving. Seamus stopped him easily, pressing a hand against his chest.

"You're not going anywhere, Malfoy," he said, his tone suddenly professional as he checked Draco's pulse. "Your breathing's still a little erratic, but your heart rate has stabilized."

He shook his head, recording the vitals on the chart with his wand. "I don't know how – or why – you did it. No one's survived resistance at that dosage. Six drops – it's a wonder that didn't kill you on its own," he said, clucking his tongue.

"I have to –" Draco was appalled at how rough his voice sounded, and he winced when pain lanced

through his tongue. He moved it tentatively, deciding it was still in one piece.

“No,” Seamus said, Summoning several potions from a cart near the door. Draco recognized the distinctive color of Dreamless Sleep in one of the vials. “Harry was very clear that you are to stay here. I don’t know what he has to do with any of this, or when you two became friends, but he seemed to think you were close enough that you’d trust him.”

Draco fell back against the pillows exhausted from the little bit of movement he’d managed. His head throbbed, the haziness growing with each passing moment.

“There is no antidote to Veritaserum, at least nothing that can be taken after ingestion,” Seamus said, uncorking two of the vials. “Your magic literally expelled the potion after you passed out. It’s probably what saved your life.”

He looked at Draco appraisingly, resting his hip against the bed as he tipped a potion against his closed lips. Draco tightened them, unwilling to take anything until he knew exactly what was going on.

“Your magic is depleted, which is why you probably feel a bit disconnected from your mind and body at the moment,” Seamus said, continuing when Draco nodded slightly. “The headache I’m sure you have should be the only lingering effect from the Veritaserum. We were able to heal your tongue, but there’s nothing we can do for a potion-induced headache.”

Seamus lifted the vial again, huffing out a frustrated breath when Draco’s lips stayed firmly closed.

“This is a potion to ensure there is no permanent damage to the tissue you bit through when you nearly severed your tongue earlier,” he said, his tone disapproving. “The other is a muscle relaxant, which will help you get comfortable while your magic stabilizes. I’m not sure how you did it, or if it was even a conscious thought, but your magic forced the potion out of your system. You must be a very powerful wizard, Malfoy, to have been able to do that.”

Draco shrugged negligently. He didn’t care about his injuries, or how his body managed to survive resisting the potion. He just wanted to know that Cal was safe. He couldn’t think of a way to ask without

revealing more than Finnigan might know.

“Harry said you’d be stubborn,” Seamus said with a sigh, putting the potions on the bedside table and sitting on the bed. He dug through his pockets, retrieving a small notebook. “I wrote it down, so I’d be sure to get it right. He said: Tell Draco to take the damn potions and get some rest. Everything is taken care of, and Ron and I are house-sitting for him in case any unexpected visitors come by.”

He looked up, rolling his eyes when Draco just quirked a brow at him.

“Tell him Blaise and Neville said: ‘Weasley is our king,’ and they’ll be gone until we get everything sorted. If he leaves now, he’ll just have Aurors following him here. That’s all he said.”

Draco nodded, the tight fist of terror around his heart still constricting painfully. If Harry said Cal was with Neville and Blaise at the safe house everything was probably fine, and he was right – there was no way he’d be able to ditch his Auror guards in the condition he was in.

“Wait,” Seamus said, thumbing through the pages in the small notebook. “He said one other thing. Made even less sense than everything else. I’m a bit worried about him, to be honest. He said: Tell Draco he’s amazing, and I’ll do what I need to do to keep him safe.”

Seamus fixed him with a hard stare, leaning over to grab the vials of potion again. “Why is Harry telling you you’re amazing?”

Draco smiled weakly, opening his lips this time when Seamus held the draughts up to them. He swallowed them quickly, reassured by Harry’s words and eager to stop the buzzing in his head.

“Wasn’t talking about me,” he slurred, blinking sleepily as the Dreamless Sleep began to take effect.

***

Cal hopped down from the ledge, his sock feet barely making any noise as he snuck up on his godfather. Blaise was napping, sprawled uncomfortably on a Conjured sofa while Neville guarded the only entrance to the small cave.

He jumped on the sleeping man's stomach, giggling madly when the movement caused Blaise to curse loudly and grab his wand, instantly on the alert for an attack.

"You're on thin ice, kid," he growled, pinning Cal's arms behind his back and rolling him so he was pressed against the back of the sofa.

Cal craned his neck, looking around the small grotto. His eyes traveled over the table and chairs, the magical fire, spelled to be smokeless, and his Uncle Neville, who was just barely visible in the distance at the mouth of the cave.

"There's no ice here, Uncle Blaise," he said, his brow furrowed.

Blaise laughed, tickling him until he surrendered. Blaise pulled himself into a sitting position, settling Cal on his lap.

"It means you're on dangerous ground," he said, ruffling Cal's hair. The boy had taken the evacuation with surprising calm. Bringing Harry had been the right call – his presence had reassured Caleum. "Are you doing alright? Hungry?"

Cal shook his head, nestling into Blaise's chest. It was a little cold in the cave, and he didn't understand why his father wasn't there, too.

"Is father –"

“He’s fine,” Blaise cut in, bringing a hand up to rub soothing circles against the boy’s back. “Remember when we talked about this last year? There are some bad people who don’t like your father, and one of them found out where you live. We’re just here until the Aurors can catch him.”

“Does he want to hurt father, too? Shouldn’t father be here with us?”

Blaise frowned, pressing a kiss against Cal’s dark hair. Sometimes he was much too smart for his own good.

“Your father is with the Aurors now, so he’s safe. And your grand-mére is safe as well. She’s with Harry and Weasley back at the chateau.”

Caleum was silent for awhile, and Blaise thought the boy might have drifted off to sleep. He settled them back into the sofa, letting himself slip back toward sleep.

“Is Harry Potter going to come live with us?” Cal asked suddenly, pulling Blaise out of his drowsing.

“What? Why would you ask that?” He asked, keeping his voice carefully modulated.

He felt Cal shrug against him. “Mamie said father had met his perfect match, and that things would be changing for us,” he said, his voice slurred with exhaustion. “I thought maybe that’s why Harry Potter came.”

Blaise was silent, hoping the boy would fall asleep before he had to answer. He tensed again a few minutes later when he heard Cal speak again.

“I hope he is,” Caleum whispered, snuggling closer to Blaise, leaving the man wide-awake with surprise while he fell into a fitful sleep.

***

“Do you think he’ll come?”

Ron paused, turning to face Harry. He’d been studying photos of Caleum on the mantle, fascinated by the way Malfoy’s face completely transformed when he was around his son. He looked – happy. Relaxed. Natural.

“If he sent that Patronus to someone else in the Ministry, then yes,” Ron said, his frustration clear. He hated waiting around for Cartwell to make a move, but he knew this was their best shot. “Malfoy would have had this place registered, even if it was under a higher security clearance.”

Harry nodded, staring at his feet. The fact that Draco had this whole other life he knew nothing about was really starting to hit home, and it was worrying him. Draco had agreed to the courtship, but had he really intended to progress to the next step? Harry chewed on his bottom lip, his mind focusing on the little boy he’d met earlier. Draco’s son.

“Mate?”

Harry looked up, smiling in a way he hoped looked vaguely reassuring. “Yeah?”

“I’m sure he was planning to tell you,” Ron said, his eyes traveling to a large photo of Cal. “It’s a lot, I know, but – well, I’m sure he had his reasons for keeping it a secret.”

Harry nodded, unsure of how to answer. It wasn’t hard to imagine Draco’s reasons for keeping his son’s existence a secret. It was amazing he’d managed it this long. Harry’s resolve strengthened even more, his doubts about his relationship with Draco taking a backseat to his concern for the little boy.

“Did you hear that?” He whispered, sinking into a crouch, his wand at the ready instantly. He hated combat situations, and he was loath to ever use his wand for violence again, but that didn’t mean those instincts had left him. He cocked his head, listening. “There.”

Ron nodded, his stance mirroring Harry’s. He cast a nonverbal Silencing Spell on their shoes, ensuring they’d be able to move through the chateau quietly. No footfalls were audible in the other room, either, which meant it was likely another Auror who’d had the same training as Ron.

Harry let Ron take point, following close behind as they crept toward the entryway. He fervently hoped Narcissa had followed their instructions and remained inside the small, warded cottage in the vineyard with Daphne.

Ron could see two shadows around the corner, and he motioned for Harry to stop. They waited a few beats, jumping into action as soon as the shadows turned the corner.

“Stupefy!”

“Expelliarmus!”

A short, stocky man fell to the ground, frozen by Ron’s quick Stunner. Harry’s attempt to disarm Cartwell didn’t fare as well, since the man had a spare wand tucked into a holster on his ankle. They circled each other, both crouched into a dueling stance, as Ron scrambled to get into a position with a clear shot at the rogue Auror.

“Harry!” He yelled, frustrated he couldn’t get a clear shot off.

“Leave it,” Harry hissed, not taking his eyes off Cartwell. “See to the other one. Find out who he is, who else knows.”

Ron didn't move unwilling to let his out-of-practice friend duel a seasoned Auror alone, even if he was the Boy-Who-Lived.

"Crucio!" Cartwell screamed his wand leveled at Harry.

"Protego!" Harry blocked the spell, his face darkening in fury.

"Sectumsempra!"

"Petrificus Totalus!"

"Reducto!"

"Impedimenta!"

"Confringo!"

Harry ducked and rolled, the curse missing him by mere centimeters. He felt a gash open up on his back from a piece of flying wood from the chair he'd taken cover behind, his pulse racing.

"Avada –"

Harry dove again, tucking himself into a ball to make himself as small a target as possible. He took aim, casting the first curse that came to mind.

“Contego!”

A silvery shield burst forth from his wand, the mist forming a physical barrier in front of Harry. It wasn’t a well-known spell. Harry had found it while researching his latest book, and he’d never actually cast it before. In theory, it should block just about anything, though no spell was known to repel the Killing Curse.

“– Kedavra!”

Ron’s Protego hit Harry’s shield at the same time the jet of green light did, causing the silvery mist to shimmer and solidify into a glass-like substance. The curse rebounded, hitting a tapestry on the wall and scorching through it.

“Stupefy!” Harry yelled as the mist dissipated, catching a shocked Cartwell off guard.

“Fucking hell, Harry!” Ron shouted when the Auror hit the ground, his eyes blazing with anger as he watched his friend get to his feet shakily. “What the fuck, were you thinking?”

Harry shook his head still stunned the spell had worked. Something had happened when it was combined with Ron’s Protego, but he wasn’t sure what. He looked up, meeting Ron’s furious gaze. They’d just successfully repelled the Killing Curse. He winced when moving produced a sharp pain in his side, shifting his shoulder experimentally. A hiss escaped through his clenched teeth – broken, most likely. He took another breath, grimacing when that caused more pain. Ribs too, then.

“Where did you even learn that spell?” Ron asked, his heart still pumping frantically, adrenaline coursing through his veins. He’d been so certain Harry had been about to die.

“Research for my next book,” Harry said, studying the two Stupefied men on the floor. “I don’t think it would have worked, though, without your spell.”

He looked up at Ron, a brilliant smile splitting his face. “Thanks, mate. Looks like I owe you one.”

Ron shook his head, muttering darkly as he cast spells to bind and gag both men. He needed to get them somewhere secure to interrogate them before something else went wrong. Ron turned quickly when Harry groaned, his wand out again in case Cartwell had come with another accomplice.

"No, it's fine," Harry said, wheezing slightly when his sudden laughter made his chest ache. "I just had a thought about what the press will make of this." He wrinkled his nose, rolling his eyes in disgust. "Harry Potter: The Boy Who Lives and Lives and Lives."

Ron smiled in spite of himself, still angry with Harry for putting himself in such a dangerous position. "I wouldn't count on it," he said with a sharp laugh. "More like Harry Potter: The Boy Who Was Killed By Hermione."

Harry's eyes widened comically. "You wouldn't –"

"Oh, I will," Ron promised, shaking his head again. "Idiot."

***

"He'd be here himself, but you still have another day left before the courtship rules allow it," Ron said, his chair scooted close to Draco's bed. He looked down, pulling something out of his robes and thrusting it at Draco. "Before I forget. It's today's present."

Draco examined the object, grinning when he saw a shrunken bottle of Ogden's. Harry must have remembered it was what he preferred to drink before nerve-wracking meetings. Tomorrow's date with Harry would definitely count.

Blaise had been by earlier, assuring him Cal was safe and that no word had spread yet to the wizarding papers. Everyone was back in the chateau, which Blaise assured him had only suffered minimal damage

in Cartwell's attack. He'd also brought Harry's present from the day before with him, a small vial of Pensieve memories. Draco had sent it home with Blaise, unwilling to take the risk of someone picking it up by accident at St. Mungo's. He had a feeling it wasn't something Harry would want anyone else to see.

Harry. Draco closed his eyes, fighting back a flood of panic. It was ridiculous to be worried about him now, after the fact, but he still couldn't wrap his mind around the fact that Harry had nearly been killed yesterday. He was a stupid, stubborn, beautiful man, Draco realized. Harry hadn't given a second thought to putting his own life on the line to save Cal's. Draco relaxed slightly, trying to regulate his breathing. Harry knew about Cal, and he wasn't angry. Oh, he was sure the man wasn't pleased, especially to have found out the way he did, but he was still proceeding with their courtship. He still wanted to be part of Draco's – and Cal's – life.

Ron leaned in even closer, his voice dropping lower.

"You don't have to worry," he whispered, his eyes trained on the door, watching to make sure no one came in. "Cartwell and the other wizard – Jameson – were the only two, other than myself and Harry, who found out about your son yesterday."

Draco blinked unsure of how having a vindictive Auror bent on revenge knowing he had a child was cause not to worry.

Ron coughed, looking away again. He seemed more comfortable with his gaze locked on the door instead of on the man in the hospital bed.

"Er, there was an accident in the interrogation room. I had a vial of Hair Thickening Potion in my pocket, and it, er, fell out onto the floor as I was leaving," Ron said, his face red. "I, ah, dropped a bottle of Veritaserum, too."

Draco's eyes snapped open, his body stiffening. Hair Thickening Potion's main ingredient was bicorn horn, and combined with the aconite in Veritaserum it would create thick fumes that were extremely poisonous. The effects were similar to a strong Memory Charm, essentially Obliviating the person

unlucky enough to breath them.

“How much did they lose?” He whispered, his eyes still wide.

Ron coughed again, looking extremely uncomfortable. “Remember what happened to Lockhart? How he ended up in St. Mungo’s?”

Draco nodded. Everyone in school knew the man’s entire memory had been wiped –

“Merlin,” he whispered, Ron’s answer clicking in his mind.

“Yeah.”

Both men were silent for a moment, then Draco stunned Ron by covering the redhead’s hand with his own, squeezing it tightly.

“Thank you,” he whispered, his voice thick with unshed tears. Ron had done something highly illegal to keep Cal safe. “Thank you.”

Ron shrugged, still not meeting Draco’s eye. He didn’t pull away, but he didn’t return the gesture, either.

“Thank Blaise. It was his idea,” he said, snorting. “Hair Thickening Potion? Leave it to a Slytherin.”

“I will, but I’ll thank you too,” Draco whispered, his voice stronger. “You’re a good man, Ron.”

Ron looked up at Draco’s use of his given name, the first time he could ever remember the blond using it.

“You are too, Draco.”

Back to Index

Chapter 24: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. I dream about them, write about them, and generally obsess over them, but they aren’t mine. Thanks to Kamerreon for the beta … you rock!

***

Draco stepped out of the Floo, looking around curiously. He’d expected Blaise or Neville to meet him at St. Mungo’s this morning, but he’d been surprised when Theo showed up instead. The other man helped him out of the fireplace, Draco’s overnight bag slung over his shoulder.

“I’m perfectly fine,” Draco snapped, slightly irritable from the last round of invasive poking and prodding the Healers had subjected him to before releasing him earlier.

“Of course you are,” Theo said, rolling his eyes. “Perfectly fine. The Healers routinely keep people in the hospital for two nights when nothing’s wrong with them.”

Draco growled, pushing past Theo. For obvious reasons, Caleum hadn’t been able to visit him in the hospital, and Draco wanted to find him as soon as possible. Logically, he knew his son was fine, but some irrational part of him wouldn’t believe it until he held him in his arms.

“Chessie!” He called, glowering at the house-elf who popped into view. “Where’s Cal?”

The house-elf wrinkled her brow, fluttering her long fingers nervously. “Master Cal?”

Draco clenched his teeth, the low-grade headache he’d had ever since he woke after his run-in with Cartwell blossoming painfully. What is going on around here? Draco wondered, pinching the bridge of his nose to stave off the ache behind his eyes.

“Yes, Chessie. Master Cal. My son. Your charge.”

The elf hesitated, looking down at her feet. She was wearing ballet slippers today, and Draco had to fight to keep his thoughts focused instead of letting them wander to why exactly the diminutive house-elf would be wearing the odd footwear.

“Master Draco…” Chessie let the word trail off, her voice pleading.

Draco felt panic ripple through him. Had the trick Ron and Blaise pulled with the Aurors not worked after all? Had someone come after Cal?

“Where. Is. My. Son?” He bit out, breathing heavily as the band of fear around his chest tightened.

“Cool it,” Blaise said, waving the increasingly worried house-elf away. He’d given her explicit instructions not to let Draco leave without him, and she’d popped in to tell him Draco was home moments ago. “He’s with us. Doing better, then? All healed? No lingering side effects?”

Draco glared at his oldest friend, crossing his arms tightly over his chest. “Who’s us? And where the hell were you this morning?”

Theo pressed a hand to his heart, pretending to be hurt. “What, I’m not good enough?”

Draco scowled at Theo, who laughed, tossing the bag he carried into a chair in the study.

“I’m going,” he said, directing his words at Blaise instead of the infuriated blond. “Fire-call me later, yeah?”

Theo waited until Draco’s head was turned, then mouthed the word ‘pictures’ to Blaise, who grinned and nodded before pulling Draco down the corridor. They heard the Floo whoosh in the study as Theo left.

“What –”

“You wanted to see Cal?” Blaise asked.

“Yes, but –”

Blaise squinted as he studied Draco’s clothing, deciding he was presentable enough. He knew the meticulous blond would never forgive him if he let him walk into Harry’s surprise date looking disheveled.

“Follow me.”

Draco huffed angrily, following Blaise through the chateau. He was surprised when they turned at the entryway, heading down the stone steps toward the grounds. Draco craned his neck, looking for his son’s dark head. It was a nice day – perhaps he was out flying with Neville or playing in the gardens.

Blaise followed the crushed stone path, winding his way toward the greenhouse. Draco’s brow furrowed when he realized the large building was their destination – Cal never went anywhere near it, forbidden

to play there by both Draco and Neville because of the dangerous fertilizer potions and plants inside.

The door swung open before Blaise could reach out for it, and the wizard slipped inside, turning slightly to make sure Draco was following him. The blond's mouth was open to ask another question, though it snapped shut abruptly when the door closed behind him.

The greenhouse – and Draco had to look closely to make sure that really was where they were, since it looked nothing like it normally did – was swathed in a soft glow, the reflection of thousands of twinkling fairy lights shimmering on the glass and the still surface of the small pond at the center of the large enclosure.

The magnolia trees, which had long since lost their fragrant blooms after Neville removed the Stasis Spells, were covered in more of the tiny, sparkling lights and colorful ornaments that dipped gracefully from their boughs. Draco blinked when something cold feathered against his cheek, looking around in wonder as he realized it was snowing inside the greenhouse. A quick glance at the ground confirmed it, as did a look at the pond. On closer inspection, Draco found the water wasn't simply still – it was frozen.

Blaise tucked a warm cloak around Draco's shoulders, snapping him out of his reverie. Neville materialized at his side, winding a familiar Slytherin scarf around his neck. He hadn't realized it was cold before that moment, but now he noticed he could see his breath crystallize in front of his face.

"But –" Draco looked around, dazed. Surely, Neville wouldn't allow the greenhouse to be turned into a wintry retreat. What about the delicate plants? The fragile fruit trees Neville cherished were covered in snow, their leaves a shockingly vibrant green against the white flakes. "The snow, the plants! It's –"

"Everything is fine," Neville assured him, chuckling at Draco's flustered reaction. It was great to see the blond's usually unflappable control disrupted – well worth the effort it had taken to cast Shielding Spells around the trees and plants. "Same spell we use on the vines when there's an unexpected frost."

Draco sputtered, turning in a tight circle to take everything in. Several large evergreens had been brought in, all decorated to the hilt with Christmas bows, lights and ornaments. A large stack of brightly wrapped presents sat underneath one, obviously spelled to resist the wet snow.

“Father!” Cal yelled, hurtling across the slick ground to pounce on Draco. He knelt, not caring that the knees of his trousers were instantly soaked, opening his arms to the giddy boy. “You’re home! Harry said you would be, but I got worried because it’s been forever and you still weren’t here!”

Draco blinked back the sudden prick of tears at having his son in his arms again, healthy and whole. He didn’t even register Cal’s familiar use of Harry’s name until the boy was wiggling away, small-gloved hands pulling at Draco’s arm to get him to stand.

“Harry!” Cal called, pulling his unresisting father across the snow toward the frozen pond. “Harry! Father’s here! Can we skate now? Can we?”

Harry stepped out from behind the largest Christmas tree, grinning from ear to ear. Draco’s heart stuttered at the sight of the wizard standing before him, soft white snowflakes sprinkled in his messy dark hair, quickly melting into shiny, iridescent droplets. He was wearing a Gryffindor scarf and a heavy cloak like Draco’s, holding three pairs of ice skates in his bare hands.

Draco turned, his tentative grin turning into a full-fledged smile when he realized Neville and Blaise were still there. His resolute chaperons had Conjured comfortable chairs near the edge of the pond, staring back with watchful eyes. He relaxed a bit, confident they would stop any inappropriate contact between him and Harry. He looked at his bouncing son, black hair hidden under a Slytherin-colored knit cap, cheeks flushed a rosy red from the cold, grey eyes dancing with excitement. Cal’s presence would prevent anything from happening as well, and his smile grew as he met Harry’s sparkling green eyes, sure that had been at least part of Harry’s intent. It was a relief to know that Harry was sticking with the courtship rules, even though those rules prevented them from having any physical contact for another week. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to touch the Gryffindor – in fact, he’d like nothing better than to strip him naked and shag him on the snow-covered ground – but he knew following the stringent rules would protect Cal. It meant the world to Draco that Harry seemed as committed to that as he was.

Draco twirled around again, taking the time to really appreciate everything Harry had done. He was completely awestruck. Harry was giving him Christmas as his final gift? A perfect wintry day, made even more special by including his son. His throat tightened as he beamed at Harry, not at all sure he could speak without his voice breaking.

Sensing that Draco was overwhelmed, Harry reached out for Cal, pulling the boy down into the snow so he could help him with his skates. Draco followed suit, the cold bite of the snow under him as he sat helping him gain control of his emotions.

“Skating first, then a picnic,” Harry said, winking conspiratorially at Cal. “With hot chocolate, of course. Cal’s request.”

Draco nodded numbly, as though it was the most natural thing in the world to do on a hot August afternoon.

“And then presents,” Cal said with a giggle, shooting Harry a sly look.

“Why, you greedy little monkey!” Harry exclaimed, tackling the boy so he was flat on his back in the snow bank. “What makes you so sure there’s anything for you under that tree, eh?”

Cal shrieked, his giggles joining Harry’s deeper laughter as they squirmed in the snow. Draco couldn’t believe what he was watching, shocked his son seemed to get on so well with a man he’d just met. Of course, Harry was quite loveable, as was Cal, Draco reasoned. And Harry was obviously comfortable with children, seeming to know exactly what to say and do to put Cal at ease.

Harry helped Cal to his feet, dusting the snow off the boy’s back and legs as he steadied him on the skates. “You ready?” Harry asked both of the Malfoy men.

“To skate?” Draco asked, his voice sounding rough and hoarse, as though he hadn’t used it in months, not minutes.

Harry smiled warmly, extending his hand to help Cal walk toward the ice. He absolutely itched to touch Draco – to run a finger down his pinking cheeks, to trace the outline of his perfect lips – but he resisted. The courtship rules were clear. No touching for them today.

Draco noticed Harry's free hand fist, and he smiled, knowing exactly what the other man was struggling with. It was going to be torture not to touch him, kiss him, fuck him, today, but Draco wouldn't trade the chance to be so near Harry for anything. There would be plenty of time for touching later, after their courtship was firmly established.

Harry quirked an eyebrow at Draco in silent question, cocking his head toward the frozen pond. When they were all safely on the ice, he leaned in, his lips almost touching Draco's ear.

"To skate," Harry confirmed, answering Draco's nearly forgotten question. The blond's mind went absolutely blank at the electric thrill of Harry's warm breath against his skin, all cohesive thought fleeing at the tantalizing almost-contact. Draco heard someone – probably Blaise – clear his throat across the ice, reminding him of their presence. "To date. To get to know each other. To share our lives."

Draco shivered, feeling cold and bereft as soon as Harry leaned back, instantly missing his closeness and heat. He looked at Cal, who was racing around the small pond, his hands out as though he were flying, laughing gleefully as his cloak billowed out behind him.

"Yes."

***

Cal murmured something sleepily, nestling deeper into Harry's arms. They'd spent the afternoon skating and playing in the snow, breaking for a quick picnic amid the twinkling Christmas trees before opening the pile of presents Harry had brought. As Cal had suspected, most were for him. The best – and most surprising – had been a tiny Crup puppy, which Harry trotted out from a hiding spot at the back of the greenhouse after Cal and Draco had unwrapped everything under the tree.

"Every boy deserves a puppy," Harry had said with a simple shrug, placing the squirming ball of fur in Cal's arms.

The Crup had been a huge hit with everyone. An ecstatic Cal had promptly named him Christmas Crup, C.C. for short, and the group spent the rest of the late afternoon and early evening playing with the energetic puppy. Even Blaise and Neville had joined in, later engaging in a ferocious snowball fight with Harry, Draco and Cal, with C.C. chasing after the soft missiles and barking like mad.

Draco tucked a lock of Cal's black hair behind his ear, completely intoxicated by the picture he and Harry made. It was almost exactly the way he'd pictured them at Ron and Hermione's wedding, when he'd come across Harry cradling his sleeping godson. He hadn't been able to envision how staggered he would be at the sight of Harry pressing a fond kiss to Cal's forehead, though, or how fiercely right his son looked in Harry's arms, their dark heads touching as Harry carefully bent to tuck the sleeping boy into bed. He'd completely exhausted himself playing in the snow and had fallen asleep on the picnic blanket about an hour earlier.

Draco smoothed the duvet over his sleeping son, feathering kisses across his cheeks and forehead before spelling the lights off and creeping toward the door. C.C. was snoring softly in a small pile of blankets on the floor, though Draco predicted the fur ball would likely finish the night in bed with Cal. He'd never been allowed to have Argie on his own bed, but he didn't have the heart to place a similar restriction on Cal.

Harry followed Draco down the corridor, shucking off his heavy cloak and jumper as they walked. It had been easy to forget it was the middle of summer while in the wintry paradise he, Neville and Blaise had created in the greenhouse, but it was undeniably warm in the chateau. They'd left the other two wizards to focus on setting the greenhouse to rights, both of them promising to behave themselves in the absence of their chaperones.

"Drink?" Draco asked, pushing the door to his study open. It seemed like the safest place to entertain Harry – no bed, and a sofa too small to encourage any horizontal activities.

"Some of that Ogden's?" Harry suggested, taking the seat furthest from the fire. He'd gotten a bit overheated on the walk back up to the house, especially with Caleum's warm weight cradled in his arms. Being alone with Draco for the first time in weeks wasn't helping, either.

Draco busied himself pouring the drinks, the easy camaraderie he'd felt all day morphing into something different – something tight and hot in his belly, a sudden nervousness that had him struggling for

composure. It was ridiculous, of course. This was Harry. There was no reason to be nervous. Then again, this was Harry. There were many reasons to be nervous. The joking, carefree man he'd spent the day with seemed different here in the privacy of Draco's study, drumming his fingers absently on the arm of the chair. He looked sexy, and more than a little dangerous.

Steeling himself, Draco crossed the room, careful to keep his fingers from touching Harry's when he handed him the whisky. The courtship rules weren't that strict, of course, random brushes of hands would be fine. Still, he didn't trust himself have any skin contact with the dark-haired wizard, afraid even the slightest friction of skin on skin contact would leave him helpless to do anything but throw Harry to the floor and fuck him senseless.

Harry grinned at Draco's stiff posture and overly formal manner, thrilled to realize the other man felt the same tug of desire he did. It was beyond torture to sit here with Draco, watching the firelight play across his finely sculpted features, his normally immaculate blond hair still tousled from their earlier snowball fight, and not be able to touch him. Harry unconsciously licked his lips, unsure of whether he wanted to fuck or be fucked the first time they were allowed such contact. To have Draco under him, writhing with pleasure – Harry cut the thought off abruptly, shifting uncomfortably in the over-stuffed chair. It was hard enough to be here without sporting a rock-hard erection, which was the way things were heading if he continued that line of thought.

"I haven't had the chance to say it, but thank you," Draco said softly, settling into a chair a safe distance away from Harry's.

Harry shrugged, taking a small sip of whisky. He savored the rich flavor, letting it roll over his tongue before swallowing. He didn't intend to indulge in more than one glass since he was having a hard enough time resisting Draco without the lowered inhibitions another shot of whisky would bring.

"You should thank Neville and Blaise too," he said easily, purposefully misinterpreting Draco's words. He knew the blond was talking about his role in bringing Cartwell down, but he really didn't want to talk about it. Not tonight, at least. "They spent all morning in there with me."

Draco inclined his head, letting the subject drop. He fully intended to find out the particulars of Harry's duel with Cartwell, but it was clear Harry didn't want to pursue it tonight. Later, he thought, after he'd had a chance to view Harry's Pensieve memories. He was fairly sure the other man wouldn't agree to

furthering their physical relationship until after he'd done so, knowing Harry was apprehensive about how Draco would feel about him after viewing them.

"I still can't believe you gave me Christmas as your last gift," Draco said, and he saw Harry's eyes flash gratefully at the subject change.

Harry shrugged, taking another slow sip. Draco watched his throat work as he swallowed, feeling the blood rush to his already half-hard cock at the sight.

"You mentioned you were a sap for Christmas once," Harry said, his tongue darting out to lick at a stray drop of whisky on his lip. He knew exactly how the motion would affect Draco, and he allowed himself a quick smirk. He was glad he wasn't the only one with a painful erection.

"And buying Cal a puppy? A puppy?"

Harry laughed, a bit of unease slipping across his face. He'd talked with Neville about it before buying the puppy, and the man had assured him Draco was planning to buy a Crup for Cal soon. Harry figured it had been a safe gift, but maybe he'd been wrong?

"I suppose I should have asked," he said sheepishly, risking a glance at Draco. He relaxed when he saw the other wizard was smiling.

"He loved it, and so did I. In the future, though, don't buy him anything live without checking with me first."

Harry grinned at Draco's words. In the future. He liked the sound of that.

"Speaking of the future," Draco said, putting his glass aside so he could retrieve a large box from behind his desk. Harry's present.

He lifted the box carefully, placing it on the low table in front of Harry. “For you.”

Harry took another sip of whisky, grateful for the slight burn as it trailed down his throat. It distracted him from Draco’s tantalizing nearness. Perhaps teasing him earlier wasn’t such a good idea, Harry thought, the sight of Draco’s erection pressing against his wool trousers making Harry’s own cock twitch painfully.

“Oh, for Merlin’s sake, Potter,” Draco sighed, pushing the box closer when he realized where Harry’s gaze was directed. He collapsed back into his chair, crossing his legs to hide his erection even though the movement squeezed his cock uncomfortably. “Just open it.”

Harry laughed, the tense moment broken by Draco’s petulant tone. At least one of us is thinking, he mused, scooting forward to open the box. He looked up at Draco, his confusion evident when he pulled one of the bottles out of the box. It was an Australian Shiraz, his favorite label out of Coonawarra. Ten bottles of it, it looked like.

Draco smirked, pleased to finally have the upper hand. He’d spent the last two weeks being continually shocked and delighted by Harry’s generosity and thoughtfulness, and he was glad to be the one making the romantic gesture this time.

“The Australian wine guide I consulted said it is best served aged, so I thought you might like to try an experiment,” Draco explained, his smirk turning into a smile when Harry still looked perplexed.

“We’ll try a bottle now, and then let the rest of them sit in the wine cellar,” he continued, his smirk returning when Harry’s eyes lit with understanding.

“It’ll take us awhile to complete, if we open a bottle every year, but it’ll be worth it, won’t it?” He asked, his heart thumping painfully while he waited for Harry’s reaction.

“Well, I do like to experiment with wine,” Harry said slowly, wrapping his mind around the fact that

Draco's gift was tantamount to promising to marry him. He looked at Draco for a few moments, choosing his words carefully. "My cellar's full," he said, enjoying the way Draco's face fell at his statement, knowing his next few words would reassure the blond. "Maybe we could keep them here?"

Back to Index

Chapter 25: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. They belong to JKR. Thanks to Kamerreon for her reassurances and her editing skills!

***

Harry pushed back from his desk, wincing as he stretched. He'd been hunched over his laptop all afternoon, furiously writing to make the latest deadline for his next book. Hermione wasn't speaking to him – aside from extremely professional emails inquiring after his health and the status of the new chapters, which was arguably worse than a total cold shoulder – and he thought finishing these early might get him out of trouble.

The book was taking a different path than he'd originally imagined, but he was happy with it. Harry grinned, saving his work and stretching again as he stood. Until now, the Aurors he wrote about were all single, and happily so. His main character in this manuscript, though, was married with a son. A six-year-old son, who liked puppies and snowball fights.

Harry snickered, wondering how Draco would react when he read it. He was sure the blond wouldn't like being cast as a woman, but Harry was a realist. Although homosexuality was accepted in the wizarding world, it still wasn't something most of the population was completely comfortable with. Not enough to buy books about a gay character, at least. He couldn't share their relationship with the world, and Harry realized that might not change for many years. Not until Cal was older or the climate in the wizarding world changed dramatically, where the Malfoy name was concerned. Still, he could immortalize his love

for Draco and Cal in print, even if no one but their friends knew who had inspired the characters.

He briefly considered calling Kreacher to make him a sandwich then changed his mind, throwing a pinch of Floo powder into the fireplace instead.

“Draco Malfoy, Malfoy Chateau,” he said clearly, crouching down so he could peer into the green flames.

“Harry?” Draco asked, blinking at the unexpected appearance of Harry’s head in his fireplace. They’d just seen each other yesterday, a quiet dinner with Cal at the chateau, and didn’t have any plans for today.

“Hi,” Harry said, settling himself in front of the fire.

“Er, hi?” Draco answered, dusting the hearth with his hand before kneeling. “Did you need something?”

Harry just smiled, shaking his head. “Nope.”

Draco paused, unsure of what to say. He and Harry still had three days left of their courtship before the formal marriage contract could be made, which meant three more days of no contact. They’d agreed to see less of each other for the next few days, since it was getting harder and harder to restrain themselves.

“Do –” Draco hesitated again, his mouth going dry. Even though his face was distorted in the green flames, Harry looked utterly fuckable, his mouth slightly open, his eyes twinkling with amusement and lust. “Do you want to come through?”

Harry cocked his head, considering Draco’s words. He could tell the blond was confused as to why he’d Fire-called, and to be honest, so was Harry. He’d just felt the need to talk to Draco, though he couldn’t explain why. He knew he wouldn’t be able to see Draco tonight without touching him, and they couldn’t have that – not when they were so close to the end of the courtship. They’d done everything right so far, and they couldn’t risk derailing it now. They needed the ancient laws on their side if they were to have

any hope of hiding Cal's existence.

"I –" Harry tried to form the words I don't think that would be a good idea, but his traitorous lips refused.

He swallowed, licking his lips. He looked away, hoping the spell would be broken if he didn't have eye contact with Draco. His gaze traveled around the room, his eyes widening when they lit on his desk. His desk, with the warded drawer no one but Harry could get into.

"I do," he said, the words tumbling from his mouth before he could stop them. He turned back to the fire, his grin growing when he saw lust and trepidation battling on Draco's face. "It will be fine. Give me –" he glanced at his watch, biting his lip. "– twenty minutes."

Draco studied him carefully, his heart slamming against his ribs. If Harry came through the Floo looking for sex, he didn't think he'd be able to stop himself. He almost screamed in frustration – Neville and Daphne were enjoying a rare night out in Paris, and Blaise was staying late at the office. He supposed he could grab his mother to chaperone, but –

"It will be fine," Harry repeated, easily following Draco's troubled thoughts. "Ward and lock the room, and I'll be through in twenty minutes. We won't do anything that will interfere with the courtship, I promise."

Draco still looked skeptical, though Harry could see the excitement on his face. He knew Draco would let him do anything he wanted in that moment, even if it meant sacrificing the privacy the formal courtship allowed them.

"I would never do anything to jeopardize Caleum," Harry said seriously, able to pinpoint the exact moment Draco's rational brain flicked back on because he saw the man stiffen and blink. "It will be fine, I promise. Twenty minutes."

And then he was gone. Draco let himself sit on the floor, not caring if the lightweight wool trousers he wore were ruined by the ash. His pulse was racing, and he could feel his hands tremble at his sides. His

mind started screaming about how inadvisable, how foolish, this would be but he couldn't stop himself. It was just after 8 p.m. and Draco hurried from his study, intent on tucking Cal into bed before Harry came through.

***

"This is the latest one?" Harry asked, trying to keep his tone even. George knew exactly why he wanted it, but that didn't mean he had to acknowledge it.

"That it is, mate," George said cheerfully, grabbing two of the prototypes and stuffing them in a bag for Harry. He held the bag back though, his face sobering. "Ang and I tested them," he said, his face coloring. "And, er, they're good. They work, I mean. But they won't actually physically stop you from, you know –"

Harry smirked. George's latest improvement on the charmed cock rings allowed for whole-body sensations. It would give him the ability to put his hands all over Draco without physically touching the other wizard. George had branched out to testing a stronger Contages spell on nondescript bracelets, combining it with a slightly modified Sensilis Potion that would heighten the drinker's sensitivity to touch.

"Someday you're going to have to tell me how Ang manages to test these out," he said, laughing when George turned an even brighter red. He suspected she used Polyjuice, though that brought up a whole host of other questions. Maybe George wasn't as straight as Harry had always assumed; and Angelina was definitely kinkier than he'd ever suspected.

He eyed George speculatively, enjoying the opportunity to tease the infamous jokester. "Or maybe not," he said, shuddering slightly at the thought of another possibility – some sort of potion or spell that would give Angelina a temporary penis. He grimaced, the image completely killing the erection he'd been sporting. LGood for something at least, he thought ruefully, grabbing the bag from George's outstretched hand.

George opened his mouth but closed it before he could speak obviously deciding he was better off not

responding.

“Thanks for this,” Harry said, waving the bag in the air as he strode out of the back room, headed for the shop’s front door.

“I expect a full report on how they work!” George called after him, blanching as he realized what he’d just said. “Er, scratch that. A report on if they worked and any problems you had. No details.”

Harry laughed, not bothering to turn around. “You got it,” he yelled back, the bell jingling as he pushed the door open and stepped out into the street.

***

Draco raised his wand, casting Locking and Silencing Charms on the room. He moved to a nearby chair, waiting, his eyes trained on the fireplace. It was 8:30 p.m. and Harry was officially late. Only ten minutes, and Draco himself had just that moment returned from putting Cal to bed, but still.

He tapped his shoe against the floor, the steady tattoo of noise increasing in tempo as his irritation grew. He looked at his watch again. Fourteen minutes late. Draco thought about pouring himself a drink, but decided against it. Whatever Harry was planning would surely test their willpower, and he needed a clear head for that.

Fifteen minutes late. Draco crossed his arms, his eyes narrowing as he watched the fireplace. Harry had really better have a good excuse, because –

The flames turned a bright green, and Harry stepped out of the fireplace. He was holding a small magenta bag – Draco’s mind vaguely registered it was probably from that joke shop one of the Weasleys had opened, he’d heard Harry was a partner – and wearing an expression of contrite apology.

“Sorry, sorry!” He mumbled, brushing a bit of ash off his Muggle denims – his well-fitted, delectable Muggle denims Draco thought absently – as he stumbled into the room. Harry had been using the Floo to come over often during the last few days, and Draco never ceased to be amazed at how the normally graceful man always tripped over himself as he stepped out.

Harry looked at Draco, who hadn’t moved from the chair. One elegant eyebrow was arched, and Harry knew his tardiness had been noted.

“Sorry,” he said again, tossing the bag onto a nearby table. “Took longer than I thought it would.”

Draco looked at the bag, then back to Harry’s wild hair and slightly flushed face. Merlin, he’s gorgeous, Draco thought a thrill running through him.

“So,” Harry continued, not waiting for an answer. He knew Draco well enough to know he wouldn’t speak until he was over his snit about Harry’s lateness. “I figured out a way around the no-touching thing.”

He paused, grinning when he saw the interest flare in Draco’s grey eyes. “That is, if you’re up for it.”

Harry let his gaze rake over Draco, paying special attention to the man’s crotch. Oh, he’s most definitely up for it, Harry thought, his grin turning wolfish as he noted Draco’s erection.

Harry’s expression sobered suddenly, and he studied Draco carefully. “Have you watched the memories yet?”

Draco blinked, surprised by the abrupt change of subject. Although knowing Harry as he did, he supposed he shouldn’t be that surprised. Idiotic Gryffindor, he thought as he rolled his eyes.

“No,” Draco admitted, watching as Harry’s shoulders tensed. He knew it was important to Harry, but he

hadn't been able to bring himself to watch them yet. He was afraid of what he might see, though he knew nothing Harry could show him would make him change his mind.

"I won't finalize the contract until you do," Harry said, his tone laced with warning. Until the marriage contract was signed, there would be no sex. And Harry didn't want to have sex with Draco before the blond knew everything there was to know about Harry's involvement in the war.

"I know," Draco said softly, his lips curving into a slight smile. It was just another way Harry was trying to protect him, and he wouldn't let himself get irritated with the man because of it. He met Harry's gaze head-on. "I want you there when I do."

Harry's first instinct was to protest, but he bit his tongue. If Draco wanted him there, he'd be there, no matter how uncomfortable it was for him. And if Draco was so appalled by what he saw that he never wanted to speak with Harry again – well, they'd deal with that if it happened.

"Tonight?" He asked, nodding toward the soapstone Pensieve Draco had left out on his desk.

"No," Draco said quickly, following Harry's gaze. "Later. After," he said, hoping Harry knew what he meant. He had a feeling both he and Harry would need some comfort after he viewed the memories. He didn't want to do it before they were able to find solace in each other's arms. If they waited until Thursday they'd be able to touch, even if they couldn't consummate their relationship until after the contract was signed.

"Alright," Harry said with obvious relief, his wicked grin returning.

Draco couldn't help but return the smile. He picked up the small bag, fishing inside so he could see what Harry had brought. His brow furrowed in confusion when he pulled out two silver bracelets and two small vials of a lurid purple potion.

"Charmed with Contages," Harry said simply, nodding toward the bracelets in Draco's outstretched palm. He shifted his gaze to the potions on the table. "Sensilis Potion."

Draco's lips parted in surprise as he studied the innocent-looking objects. He swallowed hard.

"Whole body?"

Harry's wolfish grin was back and nodded enthusiastically.

"Oh," Draco said, the sound barely a whisper. He looked back up at Harry, his grey eyes wide.

"Are you in?" Harry asked, the challenge clear in his voice. "We can set a Murus Ward," he continued, noticing when Draco's posture relaxed. The wards would form an invisible barrier between them, ensuring they couldn't touch even if they got carried away in the moment.

"So? Are you in?" He repeated, his eyes sparkling.

Draco held his gaze, waiting a few beats before moving. Instead of responding, he stood quickly, tossing the bracelets onto the table carelessly as he scrambled to unbutton his shirt. Harry almost choked on this tongue as creamy flesh came into view, snapping himself out of his stupor when slender fingers slipped under Draco's waistband, deftly unfastening his trousers and pushing them to the ground.

Harry mumbled the incantation to set the ward between them before the temptation to follow the path Draco's fingers had taken with his tongue became too strong. He shucked off his own T-shirt, his hands trembling as he made quick work of his denims and boxers. Draco laughed, an erotic husky sound, when Harry stumbled trying to toe off his trainers, which he'd forgotten about until he'd struggled to escape from the denims pooled around his feet.

"Wanker," Harry whispered, his battle with his shoes prolonged because he refused to break eye contact with Draco.

Draco's hand slipped over his stomach, sliding over well-defined abs and lightly tracing down the ridge of muscle just above his pelvis, his manicured fingers just barely ghosting over his throbbing erection. The humor in his expression was clear as he arched an eyebrow at Harry, his lips quirked as he held back the breathy moan that threatened to escape.

"All in due time," he answered, shocked by the way his voice shook as he spoke.

"Yes," Harry sighed, his eyes flicking to the bracelets and potion on the table.

Draco slipped one of the bracelets around his wrist, shivering slightly as the cold metal snaked around his skin. He tossed the other to Harry, relieved when it crossed the barrier ward without a problem. He grabbed the vial of potion next making sure it was tightly capped before throwing it to Harry as well.

Their eyes met for a moment as they fumbled to uncork the vials, not looking away as they blindly brought the potion to their lips, swallowing at the same time. Draco shuddered as he felt the potion slide down his throat, accompanied almost immediately by a heightened awareness. He could feel the slight breeze from a half-opened window caress his skin, the soft touch making his cock jump. He grabbed his wand to activate the bracelet, his eyes falling shut at the unbelievable sensation of the cold silver sliding down his arm as he did.

Harry mirrored his actions, his teeth tightly clenched to keep from moaning as his fingers slid over the soft surface of his wand, the sensation making his stomach jump in excitement. If these random touches felt this good, what would it feel like when Draco's hands ran over his body? Harry shuddered again, letting his wand fall to the carpet.

"Ready?" Draco asked, his mouth watering at the sight of Harry standing in front of him, completely naked and impossibly aroused.

"Yes," Harry rasped, closing his eyes as he ran a tentative finger down his own chest. He heard Draco gasp, but his satisfied smirk was gone the instant he felt an answering touch trailing down his thigh.

Oh, God, Harry thought, every muscle in his body tensing at the contact. He'd been prepared for it, but it

still took him by surprise. It felt so good.

He opened his eyes, arousal spiking through him at the sight of Draco running his hands over his own body. It was almost sensory overload, watching Draco touch himself but feeling those touches glide over his own skin. Harry moaned, biting his lip to keep from crying out.

Draco gasped at the feel of Harry's teeth against his lip. It almost felt like a rough kiss, and he was quick to let his own tongue slide over his lips, flicking in teasing circles. He saw Harry stiffen, another moan escaping his lips.

"Draco," he groaned.

His fingers traced the outline of his own features, but feeling Draco's. The blond let his head fall back, his eyes tightly shut at the sensation of Harry's callused hand cupping his chin, his thumb ever-so-gentle as it stroked Draco's cheekbone.

"More," Draco whispered, unsure how long he'd be able to take Harry's teasing touches. He sighed in relief when Harry acquiesced, shuddering as Harry's warm palms stroked down his body, resting lightly on his hips.

Draco decided not to be coy, wrapping his hand around his own cock and giving it one firm stroke. He heard Harry curse softly, and soon Draco's cock was enveloped in tight warmth as well. Draco closed his eyes, unable to concentrate on the amazing feeling of Harry's rough palm on his cock and watch Harry at the same time. It was too – strange. It had been odd enough when they'd done this with the cock rings, but now, knowing it was Harry's hand on his cock, watching Harry stroke himself and feeling the sensations himself, it was all too much.

"Celo, " he whispered, grateful when the barely noticeable ward responded, shimmering until it was a cloudy film between the two men.

"Draco?" Harry murmured, his back arching after a particularly hard stroke.

“Can’t,” Draco ground out as Harry’s thumb swept over the head of his cock, the sensation further heightened by the smear of precome that had gathered there. “Too much. Can’t –” he broke off, his words lost in a moan. “Fuck. Can’t watch.”

Harry made a vague sound that could have been agreement or protest, but Draco was too far gone to care. He jumped when he felt a hand on his arse, tensing when a well-lubed finger circled his entrance. Mother of Merlin, he thought, his legs trembling as the finger breached him.

“Harry,” he whined, his voice catching when Harry’s finger brushed over his prostate.

He muttered a Lubrication spell – one of the only wandless spells he’d mastered – on his own fingers, giving Harry no warning as he pressed them into himself. Harry’s startled moan made Draco smirk in satisfaction, and he sped up his strokes, knowing the other man had to be close.

“Christ!” Harry all but shrieked when Draco added another finger, his pace relentless as he finger-fucked him in time with his strokes. “I’m going to –”

“Fuck yes,” Draco snarled, more than ready to give himself over to his own release.

Harry’s hand was a blur as he stroked his cock furiously, pleased by the way his strokes made Draco pant and groan. He twisted his fingers, knowing he’d hit Draco’s prostate again by the way the blond keened.

“Harry,” Draco moaned, the word both an exclamation and a plea.

“Yes,” Harry answered, his hips bucking as he felt Draco’s hand fly over his cock, his fingers still buried in his arse. “Now.”

Harry gave his cock one last hard stroke before he was lost in his own orgasm, knowing Draco was

coming as well by the way Draco's tight channel constricted around his fingers. They both slowed their strokes as the last of their orgasms pulsed. The only sound in the room was their heavy breathing.

"Abdo, " Draco gasped, letting the barrier between them dissipate. He still wanted to pounce on Harry, but he knew neither of them had the energy to follow through.

Draco let himself fall backward into the chair behind him, grateful that he no longer had to hold himself upright. His legs were trembling and his breath was still coming in gasps. His heart hammered hard in his chest, his muscles sore.

Harry watched him through heavily lidded eyes, a strong wave of lethargy sweeping over him as he came down from his climax. He collapsed against the sofa, his hand still wrapped around his spent cock as he watched Draco recover.

"I see some things haven't changed since school, Mr. Potter," a horribly familiar voice drawled, causing Harry to yelp and scramble for cover. His lethargy forgotten, he pulled a pillow off the sofa, using it to shield his nakedness as best he could.

"Snape?" He sputtered, green eyes wide as he looked around the room.

Draco snickered from his place on the chair. Harry looked up, noticing the portrait of Severus Snape above the mantle for the first time. Had that always been there? He'd been in Draco's study several times over the last few days, and he didn't remember Snape being there. Harry squeezed his eyes shut, hoping the dour man would be gone when he opened them. No such luck.

"Eloquent as always," Snape sneered, managing to look condescending and superior even as a painting. Harry's eyes flashed as he stared the oil portrait down.

"He –" Harry looked at Draco, who was now openly laughing. "But –" The portrait had been a still life yesterday, Harry was sure of it. A laboratory scene, with several cauldrons and an empty wingback chair. He looked closer. The chair wasn't empty any longer. Snape sat there, his lips curled in a sneer Harry

hadn’t seen for years, not since he’d last visited McGonagall in her office at Hogwarts.

Hogwarts.

“You have two portraits,” Harry whispered, his voice still brittle with humiliation. Snape had just watched he and Draco –

No, he thought, his eyes narrowing as he looked over at Draco, who was hidden from Snape’s view by the back of the chair. Snape had just watched him. Just like he’d watched him all those years ago in the alcove at Hogwarts. Fresh embarrassment flooded over Harry, and his cheeks heated even more.

“Sir,” he said formally, inclining his head at Snape a though he weren’t sitting there completely starkers and the man hadn’t just watched him beat off.

Harry winced when his denims landed on the cushion next to him, followed by his boxers and his T-shirt. He looked up, glowering at a fully dressed Draco. He’d taken advantage of Snape’s distraction and retrieved his clothes.

“You,” Harry growled, clutching his pillow tighter. “You knew he was there!”

Draco flushed, shaking his head. He hadn’t known, but it wasn’t a complete surprise, either. He looked up at the portrait, pressing his lips together so he wouldn’t laugh.

“Sev, be nice,” he chided, retrieving a blanket from a hidden drawer and tossing it to Harry.

The dark-haired wizard took it gratefully, wrapping it around himself toga-style and grabbing his clothes from the sofa. He sent a hard look at Draco before stalking across the floor, opening what he assumed was the door to Draco’s bedroom so he could dress in privacy.

“Was it really necessary to tease my future husband that way?” Draco asked the portrait after the door had closed. He felt a little guilty that he hadn’t thought to ward the portrait, the only magical one in the chateau, though his remorse vanished when he felt a hand cup his arse. Fuck, he thought, struggling to keep his face blank as he spoke with his godfather. We didn’t cancel the spell.

“How was I to know Potter would be here?” Severus asked, shrugging negligently. “Besides, it wasn’t anything I hadn’t seen before. Although Potter has filled out rather nicely over the years.”

“Severus! ” Draco shouted, his outrage covering the gasp that had escaped his lips when he felt Harry’s hand caress his balls.

Snape smirked, enjoying the absolutely outraged look on his godson’s face. He knew Potter had told Draco about the unfortunate incident he was referring to – the wizard had asked him about it a few weeks ago, after discovering Potter’s identity and correctly guessing which professor the boy had been attracted to.

He watched Draco carefully, unsure of what part he’d played in Potter’s latest bit of exhibitionist wanking. Something was up, he knew, from the way his normally calm godson flushed suddenly. Severus cast a speculative glance around the room, but found Draco’s bedroom door still tightly shut. Not a spell, then.

“Sev,” Draco said again, his voice pleading. Harry’s fingers were wrapped around his cock, which was quickly filling with blood despite his best efforts to discourage it. He did not want to be talking with his godfather about Harry Potter wanking, especially with a hard-on himself.

“Draco,” Severus mocked, his tone matching Draco’s perfectly.

Draco groaned, his hands clenching into fists when Harry ran a teasing finger over his entrance. He’d cancel the spell, but he didn’t think he could do it without Severus noticing. He definitely didn’t want the man to have any idea of what was going on now.

“Severus,” he said again, his voice full of warning.

“Going,” Snape said, holding up his hands. He knew how much Potter meant to Draco, which meant he’d need to find a way to call a truce with the man or risk Draco removing the portrait. “Bring him to see me after you two are engaged.”

Draco nodded, willing to agree to just about anything if it would get Severus out of the room.

Severus studied his blushing godson for a moment longer.

“I don’t want to know,” he said, giving Draco a shrewd look before turning and walking out of the portrait.

Draco growled, grabbing his wand and quickly warding the portrait so Severus couldn’t come back. He tapped it against his bracelet, muttering the countercharm that severed the connection between the bracelets. The feeling of Harry’s hand on his cock vanished.

“Potter!” He bellowed, stalking toward the bedroom. He threw open the door, glaring at Harry, who was fastening the button on his denims.

“Draco,” Harry said with a smirk, clearly over his earlier humiliation. He let his gaze trail down Draco’s body, his smirk growing when he saw the bulge of Draco’s erection. “See you in a few days.”

Draco’s mouth dropped open, his hands fisting on his hips. Harry was just going to leave?

“Potter,” he snarled, his eyes glinting dangerously.

Harry laughed, waggling his eyebrows suggestively as he advanced, knowing Draco would have no choice but to step back and let him through the doorway. It was the first time he’d been grateful for the

no-touching rule.

He was still laughing as approached the fireplace, casting a wary glance up at the empty portrait before stepping into the Floo.

“I’ll see you at 2 p.m. Thursday,” Harry said, winking at the flustered blond. “Don’t be late.”

Back to Index

Chapter 26: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. The characters belong to JKR, not me.

***

“What exactly did you give him?” Ron asked, peering over at Harry’s slumped form.

Hermione shrugged negligently, chewing her lip as she thought about her next move. She and Teddy were playing a magical version of Clue, and it had come time for her to guess.

“Hermione?”

She brushed away Ron’s question, her eyes narrowing as she plotted. She looked up at Teddy, her face a mask of concentration. It was probably wrong to put so much effort into beating a 10 year old, but he’d won the past two games.

“Harry Potter in the Chamber of Secrets with the Sword of Gryffindor,” she said after a long pause, nodding confidently.

Teddy quirked an eyebrow, and Ron laughed at seeing such an adult expression on his face. He was still a year away from starting at Hogwarts, but he was clearly magically and emotionally mature enough to go. Harry and McGonagall had already intervened with Andromeda, begging the woman to let her grandson start in the fall, but she’d steadfastly held her ground. She wanted as much time with Teddy as possible, which meant no going away to school early.

Teddy opened the magically sealed envelope carefully, prolonging Hermione’s anguish. He had a pretty good idea what the solution was, and she was off by one important point.

“Aha!” He cried triumphantly when he read the words on the sheet. Hermione grimaced – she’d obviously lost. He handed her the small square of parchment. She groaned at the word that magically appeared, the moment he’d opened the envelope: Wrong.

She stuck her tongue out at Teddy, crossing her arms. She loved playing games with him – he was incredibly smart, and a better opponent than Ron was at almost everything but chess.

“Go on, then,” she said, her smile breaking through the solemn look she’d tried to force.

Teddy cleared his throat, straightening his shoulders. He’d definitely inherited Tonks’ flair for drama in addition to Remus’ brilliant mind.

“Ron Weasley,” he enunciated clearly, shooting Hermione a grin, “in the Chamber of Secrets,” he paused again, drawing it out even more, “with the Sword of Gryffindor.”

Hermione looked down at the square of parchment, laughing when it began to flash the word: Correct.

Harry had originally balked at the idea of a game based around him, but he'd agreed when the manufacturer pledged to donate a quarter of the proceeds to a home for children orphaned in the war. Harry Potter Clue had been the first game, but now nearly a dozen different Harry Potter-themed games graced the shelves of most wizarding toy stores.

"You win, you little monster," she teased, packing the tiny pieces away in the box with her wand. "I still say you cheat."

Teddy's grin widened, but he held his hands out in defense. "How could I possibly cheat?"

Ron ducked down, running a large hand through Teddy's pink hair. The boy had some of his mother's Metamorphagus talents, though it was limited to the ability to change his hair and eye color. They didn't know if he'd be able to shift more as he aged and came into his magical powers or not.

"I heard you whispering with Dumbledore," Ron murmured in his ear, smirking when the boy blushed. "Always meddling, that old man is."

The tiny Dumbledore figure waved his fist in Ron's direction, eliciting giggles from Teddy. He laughed harder when the small Hermione Granger shoved the Ron Weasley figurine, catching it off balance and sending it sprawling to the bottom of the box.

Hermione cast the charm to make the figurines go still before handing the box to Teddy. "No arguing. Time for bed. Head upstairs and I'll be up in a moment to tuck you in.

"Aunt Hermione," Teddy groaned, clutching the box tightly as he stomped up the stairs. "You don't need to tuck me in. I'm not a little boy!"

She laughed, wagging her finger at him. "You're a still a boy to me, Teddy Lupin, and don't you forget it! Now get to bed, and I'll be there soon!"

They could hear him laughing as he disappeared. Ron waited until he heard Teddy's bedroom door shut before he whirled around, his brow furrowed as he spoke sharply to his wife.

"What did you give Harry? He's dead to the world," he said, nodding to the unresponsive man on the sofa.

"Just a little Sleeping Draught," she said with a smirk. Ron raised an eyebrow, and she grinned. "Alright, alright. It was a Calming Draught mixed with Dreamless Sleep. God knows I don't want to be awakened by anymore of his dreams," she said, blushing as she looked away from the sleeping man.

They'd been staying with Harry for the last week, helping him keep within the courtship rules. She didn't know what had gone on a few nights ago, but Harry had stumbled out of the Floo flushed and in better spirits than he'd been in for weeks. The marriage contract he kept on the desk hadn't combusted, however, so she knew whatever they'd gotten up to had been within the letter, if not the intent, of the courtship laws.

Teddy's presence helped calm Harry's nerves, which was why the boy had been at Grimmauld Place all day and was spending the night. Draco wasn't due until the early afternoon the next day, and the Ministry official would be a few hours behind him. Hermione didn't think they had a prayer of keeping Harry in line until then without his godson's help.

"Think he'll sleep all night?" Ron asked, Levitating the dark-haired wizard carefully and directing him upstairs. He didn't want Harry spending the night on the couch.

"No," Hermione said, stifling a yawn. She hadn't been kidding when she'd said Harry's dreams had been waking them. She blushed darker, remembering the past few nights and the sounds she'd heard coming out of his room. "Silencing Charm?"

Ron nodded quickly, feeling his own cheeks heat at the thought of what they'd overheard. It had been incredibly embarrassing and erotic at the same time.

“It’ll all be over tomorrow, thank Merlin,” he said, waiting for Hermione to pull back the covers on Harry’s bed before depositing the sleeping man on the mattress. He pulled Harry’s shoes off, stepping back as Hermione Transfigured his clothes into pajamas.

“One can only hope,” she muttered, dousing the lights on their way out. She had a feeling things were going to get even more uncomfortable when Harry and Draco could touch each other freely. She just hoped they waited until everyone left before jumping each other tomorrow.

***

“What are you looking for?” Blaise asked, his lips quirking in amusement as Draco shot around the room, moving cushions and looking under furniture.

“I can’t find my wand!” Draco snapped, crossing the room again in a panic.

“Accio Draco’s wand,” Blaise muttered with an eye roll, holding his hand out to catch the piece of hawthorn that came hurtling toward him. “Honestly, Draco.”

The blond glared at Blaise, marching over to snatch his wand from the man’s outstretched hand. He’d been irritable for the past few days, since their chaperones – namely Blaise and Hermione – had decided it was inadvisable for Draco and Harry to see each other at all until the day the no-touching ban ended.

“Go say goodbye to Cal,” Blaise instructed, shooing the angry wizard out of the room. They had an hour to kill before they could Floo to Harry’s house, and he might hex the blond if he stayed underfoot. “I’ll go down and get Nev and Daphne.”

Draco nodded, striding out of the room without a word. He knew he’d been hard to deal with lately, but he was just so frustrated and excited. A tremor ran through him at the thought of finally getting to hold

Harry today. The relief was tempered with anxiety over viewing the Pensieve memories. He knew he had no hope of the Gryffindor forgetting the promise he'd extracted a few nights ago.

"Cal, how about a game of Clue?" He asked as he entered the drawing room, inclining his head formally to his mother as he passed her. "Not the Harry Potter version, Caleum," he groaned, rubbing his face briskly when he saw the game in his son's hands.

***

Harry might have tackled Draco the second he stepped out of the Floo had it not been for Ron's restraining hand on his bicep. The tight squeeze reminded him where they were and what they had to do. The magic of the ancient spells that forged the courtship and marriage contracts was enhancing the natural attraction and pull he and Draco felt for each other, which meant Harry was nearly jumping out of his skin with need.

"A few more hours," Ron whispered in his ear, his gentle tone a startling contrast to the vice-like grip he had on Harry's arm.

Ron's words, paired with the sight of the stone Pensieve in Blaise's hands, brought Harry back to his senses. He wanted to finish the courtship correctly. They'd be able to sign the contract in just a few hours, and then everything would be fine. First, though, he had to make sure Draco watched his memories.

"Are you ready?" He asked Draco, tentatively holding out a hand to the blond.

Draco swallowed, the need to feel Harry's skin against his own was almost overpowering. Neville's arm tightened around his shoulders, letting him move forward, but restraining him at the same time.

It was almost electric. Harry literally felt like his hand was on fire when his palm grazed Draco's, his magic

flaring and gliding along the other wizard's. Despite the shock, it wasn't an unpleasant feeling.

Draco held back a gasp, the white-hot thrill he felt ripple through him bore no resemblance to the mere tingle he'd felt when he'd first touched Patrizia after their courtship ended. But that had been an arranged marriage, and one he wasn't overly interested in to boot. This, though – this was completely different.

Pansy and Daphne both moved closer to each other, holding hands unconsciously. Oliver swung his arm around Pansy's waist pulling her tight against his chest as they watched the two men stare at each other. The purebloods in the room exchanged a significant glance that left Hermione anxious and annoyed. She placed a questioning hand on Ron's shoulder.

"That's –" Ron said quietly, his eyes locked on Harry and Draco, who were still holding hands. The sparks everyone had seen literally fly between their skin, had gone as quickly as they'd begun, but the sight left everyone speechless. He had no idea how to explain it.

"That's not what normally happens," he whispered, his lips grazing her ear as he spoke.

He could tell she had more questions, but Ron just shook his head. He didn't want to break the moment between Harry and Draco. No one did.

Blaise cleared his throat, nudging his shoulder against Draco's. The two men dropped their joined hands, their eyes wide with surprise and arousal.

"Do you want to do this here or somewhere else?" Blaise asked, gesturing with the stone basin in his arms.

Harry studied Draco for a moment, nodding as he came to some sort of silent decision.

"Here," he said, his eyes sweeping over the room. His study was the best choice – comfortable chairs and

a low table perfect for placing the Pensieve on. The blazing fire kept the room slightly warmer than comfortable, which would help combat the chill that usually followed viewing violent or upsetting Pensieve memories.

“Just Neville?” He asked, bracing for an angry outburst. They definitely still needed a chaperone – the little show with the sparks confirmed that – but he didn’t want everyone to watch as Draco viewed some of the worst moments of his life.

He expected them to argue, especially Ron and Hermione, but the others simply nodded, following Pansy’s lead as she retreated to the kitchen. Blaise gave them a grim smile before placing the Pensieve on the table Harry pointed to, and Ron gave his arm a reassuring pat before following everyone else, drawing the study doors shut behind him.

“That was –” Neville shook his head, still shocked by what he’d seen. “That was amazing. I’m privileged to have witnessed it. It’s not often you see such a strong reaction to the courtship bond.”

Harry smiled, his arm still tingling from the shock. He’d never seen it happen before, but then again, he’d never seen any courting couple pass through to the third stage. It wasn’t proper to have unmarried witnesses at the signing of the contract, so he hadn’t seen it when it happened for Neville or Oliver.

“The sparks were unusual, then?” He asked, his voice trembling slightly.

“Merlin, yes,” Neville answered, laughing slightly uncomfortably.

He could feel the tension radiating off both men, and it had a distinctly sexual feel to it. Plenty of anxiety as well, he could tell, but he had a hunch it was going to be a challenge to keep the two of them apart much longer. He knew Harry’s plans though, and he figured the Pensieve memories would help dampen their arousal.

“Shall we?” Neville asked, cocking his head toward the sofa. Harry and Draco could sit next to each other, and he’d take the chair next to it, close enough to intervene if necessary but far enough away to allow

them to comfort each other.

“Wait,” Draco said, his voice thick. He turned toward Harry, searching out both of his hands. He held them tightly, staring directly in to the concerned green eyes. “You know I’ve done this before,” he said, concentrating hard on not stumbling over the words. It felt important to get it out there. “These memories you want me to see – I assume they’re your past. Mine might not be as horrific as yours, but I still think you should know.”

Draco swallowed, steeling himself. “Her name is Patrizia Silvano, and she’s the youngest daughter of an Italian pureblood family from Venice.”

Harry nodded encouragingly, squeezing Draco’s hands. He hated that Draco had been married before, but how could he resent something that resulted in Cal? The boy was fast becoming like a son to him.

“We were married a year after our repeated seventh year at Hogwarts,” Draco continued, the words coming easier as he saw Harry didn’t recoil. The sooner he did this, the sooner they could get on with things. “It was an arranged marriage. Her father contacted my mother, and I agreed. We hoped it might salvage the Malfoy name, but it didn’t seem to make much difference.”

He tried to keep the bitterness out of his voice, pressing on. “She’s gorgeous. Tall, olive skin, black hair.” He laughed. “I never realized she bore a resemblance to you, but she does. I’m grateful for it now though, because Cal could easily pass for your son.”

Draco bit his lip, wondering if he should ask Harry what his intentions toward Caleum were. He passed over it, deciding it could wait until after the marriage contract was signed. He’d prefer it if Harry adopted Cal outright, but it wouldn’t be the end of the world if he didn’t. He knew Harry would likely want to have at least one child of his own, preferably two, to carry on the Potter and Black names. Harry was great with Cal, and Draco didn’t doubt he’d show the boy as much love as he did any biological children he might have, even if he didn’t legally adopt him.

“Patzie bores easily, and I didn’t do enough to keep her entertained,” he said, a small smile curving his lips. She’d hated living at Malfoy Manor, hated that Draco preferred quiet nights in to the glittering balls the rest of their social strata loved. “Cal was born in 2002.” His smile grew. “His birthday is in September.

He'll be six."

Harry nodded, his eyes warming at the mention of Cal. He squeezed their joined hands reassuringly.

"I hadn't intended to have children. I thought it might be best to let the Malfoy name die out with me," Draco said, shrugging lightly. "I still don't know if it was premeditated on her part or not, but after we'd been married a little over a year she announced she was pregnant."

"I was shocked, to say the least," Draco said, remembering his outrage. "After Cal was born, though – well, I wouldn't trade having him in my life for anything."

Harry nodded, taking Draco's words for what they were – a gentle warning that his son would always come first. That was fine with Harry, reassuring even. Draco was a great father. It was one of the things Harry loved most about him.

"He had me wrapped around his finger from birth," Draco admitted, grinning fondly. "I swore to do whatever was necessary to protect him. That included forcing everyone who knew about him to swear an Unbreakable Vow not to speak of him to anyone who didn't know," Draco said, breaking his gaze away from Harry to smile apologetically at Neville.

"We all did so willingly," Neville said softly, shaking his head to wave away Draco's apology.

"You may have, but Patrizia didn't feel the same way," Draco said with a grimace. "The life-in-exile bit got old for Patzie pretty quickly. She hated being cloistered in the chateau, which is where I insisted Cal be raised. She hated living with mother. She hated that I refused to go out at all anymore, other than to work and a few absolutely necessary social functions."

He shook his head ruefully, finally removed enough from the memories to feel sorry for his ex-wife. She'd married him hoping for an exciting life filled with luxury and entertainment, and she'd ended up saddled with a baby and a disinterested husband.

“We divorced in 2005. January,” he said with a grim smile. “Start the New Year off right, she’d said.”

He shook his head, clearing away the memory. “I haven’t seen or heard from her since. She’s under a stringent Unbreakable Vow that prevents her from talking about anything other than our first year of marriage. Nothing after Cal was born. She can’t speak of the chateau, either.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open in shock. How could she just walk away from Cal? The boy was perfect. His heart broke for the worry and pain his mother’s abandonment must still cause him.

“But, Cal?”

Draco shook his head and he heard Neville huff out an angry breath behind him. None of their friends understood how Patrizia could just walk away and never look back, but Draco had come to view it as a blessing in disguise.

“She signed away all her parental rights with the divorce,” Draco said with a sigh. “I bought her silence with a hefty settlement, and she was free to pursue the life she’d thought she was getting when she married me. It’s probably for the best.”

Harry’s green eyes blazed, and he gripped Draco’s hands almost painfully.

“Her loss,” he said clearly, his muscles tense. “My gain.”

Draco smiled, and Harry was blown away by the love and relief he saw in the blond’s usually closed-off expression.

“My turn at show and tell, then?” Harry asked, trying to lighten the mood a bit before plunging them into his memories of war and death.

Draco blew out a breath, laughing. He let Harry lead him to the sofa, pulling a small vial of swirling silver mist out of his pocket. He shared a look with Harry, nodding resolutely before uncorking the vial and tipping it into the basin.

The silvery liquid shimmered and rippled, a soft sparkling mist rising up out of the basin. Draco knew what he saw when he dove into the memories would likely terrify him. He was positive though, that whatever it was, whatever these dark secrets Harry had chosen to share with him, and not the rest of the world, it wouldn't change the way he felt about Harry.

"Let's go," he said, borrowing some of Harry's Gryffindor bravery and plunging his head into the basin.

***

Harry gave Neville a bleak smile before joining Draco in the Pensieve. It hadn't been his intent to view them alongside the other wizard when he'd extracted them, but he could see now it was the best way. He'd be able to answer Draco's questions along the way, and offer support to help him get through the worst of it.

Neville settled into his chair as Harry's body slumped over the Pensieve. The two men were entwined, their bodies touching from thigh to chest, their hands still tightly gripping each other's. Unlike everyone else, Neville had a very good idea of what they'd be watching. He'd been Harry's outlet over the years, the one the dark-haired wizard came to when things got to be too much, or when he couldn't deal with the nightmares and memories.

He waited until he was sure they were both in the trance-like state before rising, digging through the bag he'd brought with him for Calming Draughts and a slew of other potions. If they were watching what he thought they were, they were going to need them.

***

Harry found Draco stooped inside his old cupboard under the stairs, looking around in confusion.

“My room,” Harry said simply, ducking back out and into the corridor. It had been cramped when he was a child, but it was nearly impossible to fit comfortably in there now.

Draco followed, but paused at the door, his horrified gaze locked on the stained mattress in the far corner, the single, bare bulb hanging from the sloping, cobweb-covered ceiling and the neat row of cleaning supplies stacked against the wall.

“You lived in there?” Draco asked, his voice incredulous. He wouldn’t let a house-elf live in those conditions, let alone a little boy.

He backed out of the cupboard entirely, casting his gaze around the rest of the house. It looked nice enough. Small, but clean. There was no evidence that the family who lived there wouldn’t be able to properly care for a child.

“Until my eleventh birthday,” Harry murmured, and he could tell from his expression that Draco was imagining Cal living in conditions like those.

“Moving on?” Harry said quietly, grabbing Draco’s hand.

The smoky world around them swirled, the cool mist solidifying into a familiar Hogwarts scene. They were standing on a moving staircase, which deposited them in front of a large, scarred door.

Harry squeezed Draco’s arm reassuringly before pushing the door open. He didn’t flinch when a huge three-headed dog began to bark.

“First year, the Philosopher’s Stone,” he said, going on to explain the horrors he’d faced as a boy of eleven with no one but his two best friends at his side, the first of several encounters with Voldemort Harry had placed in the vial.

***

“ – so you see, it’s not alarming, so much as it was just surprising,” Daphne said, waving her arms vaguely as she spoke.

They’d been trying to explain the rules of courtship to Hermione for the last ten minutes, but she was still struggling to grasp everything.

“But sparks? Real sparks?” Hermione shook her head, unwilling to believe what she’d seen.

“Not common, but it happens,” Oliver said, his arm still around his wife. “Pans and I felt a tingle, but nothing everyone else could see.”

“It felt like a shock for me,” Daphne offered. “My mum warned me, so I was ready for it. No one told Nev, though, and he actually yelped when it happened.”

She grinned, rolling her eyes.

Hermione frowned, looking down at the hand that rested in Ron’s.

“We didn’t court,” Ron said softly, knowing what his wife was worried about.

“They signed the contract with more than just ink,” Oliver said, referring to the binding paperwork that

signaled a couple's intention to court. Harry and Draco would complete it by signing the marriage contract later in the day. "They left an echo of their magical signatures on the parchment as well. What happened today was their magic recognizing each other. It's a good sign."

Ron nodded. "Mum said Gin and Theo felt an instant connection, too. It's how she knew Theo was serious."

"Exactly," Daphne said, settling onto a stool at the kitchen island. "Can we eat? I'm starving."

Four sets of eyes stared incredulously as Daphne used her wand to Summon a jar of peanut butter and some crackers from Harry's pantry.

"What?" She asked, swallowing a sticky mouthful of peanut butter. "I'm pregnant. The baby doesn't care what's going on in there," she said, cocking her head toward the study. "She's hungry."

Pansy blinked, a huge smile splitting her face. "She?"

Daphne nodded, smiling as she popped another cracker in her mouth.

"Oh Daph, that's wonderful news!" Hermione gushed, forgetting her concern over what was playing out in the other room as she and Pansy rushed forward for more details.

***

Draco shuddered, and Harry wondered if it was possible to vomit in a Pensieve memory. He thought he was likely to find out soon.

“These H-Horcruxes,” Draco stammered, his eyes still locked on the rock where memory Ron had destroyed the locket only moments before, “That’s – why – how –”

Draco shivered and Harry wrapped his arms around him, transporting them to the next memory. It was no less traumatic, but he figured a change of scenery might shock some sense back into the blond.

“How could he do that? What was he thinking?”

Harry watched himself hiding from Death Eaters in Luna’s house with almost absent curiosity. He pulled his gaze away, blinking in surprise at Draco’s question.

“Well, he was insane,” he said slowly, wondering why Draco was questioning Voldemort’s motivations.

“No, Dumbledore,” Draco snapped, angry color flooding his cheeks, chasing away the deathly pallor.

“I don’t understand,” Harry said, his brow furrowed. He heard the ceiling collapse around them, stepping back so he could make out Draco’s words.

“You were just a child,” Draco spat, his eyes flashing. “You shouldn’t have had this pushed on you. Children, all three of you!”

Harry smiled grimly, shrugging. “It was the only path he saw,” he said softly, gripping Draco’s hand when the scene swirled around them again. Neither took any notice of the new memory, their attention focused on each other.

“You were a just child sixth year,” Harry said, hating the way Draco stiffened at the words.

They’d already viewed that memory, though Draco took no solace from the knowledge that Harry had been there as well. He already knew Dumbledore had been dying, and that he’d asked Sev to kill him so

Draco didn't have to. It was one of the first conversations he'd had with his godfather after his portrait woke.

"That was different," Draco hissed, shaking Harry's grip off. He didn't want to be touching him when he talked about his involvement with Voldemort. It made him feel dirty. "He was a sadistic bastard who didn't care what happened to his servants. Dumbledore was supposed to be protecting you!"

Harry shrugged, snatching Draco's hand back. He tightened his hold when the blond tried to squirm away.

"We were both pawns of powerful men, Draco," he said quietly. He saw Draco gasp when he recognized the interior of Malfoy Manor as the memory world swirled around them again. "Neither of us chose the path we took. We were both forced. I accepted my role, though. I've made peace with it, as much as that's possible."

Draco nodded woodenly, watching as memory Harry grabbed a house-elf and disappeared. He cringed as he remembered what happened next – what Harry didn't know. The horrendous torture they'd all suffered for letting Harry Potter escape.

He'd never accepted what had happened, he realized. He'd pushed it all behind him, refusing to deal with it. He'd used Dreamless Sleep until the nightmares had ended. He'd honed his Occlumency skills until he could even shield memories from himself. But he hadn't confronted them. Not like this.

"I'm sorry, Draco," Harry whispered, pulling him closer. The scene dissolved again, and Draco flinched as he saw Harry and his friends battling against a dragon, marveling – even through his horror – that they'd managed to ride it.

They were silent through a memory of a dingy pub in Hogsmeade. Draco closed his eyes when the memory shifted again; unable to watch one of his closest friends die again.

"I'm sorry," Harry whispered again, his lips against Draco's ear. "God, Draco, I'm sorry. I wish this wasn't

necessary. I'm sorry."

Though he hadn't thought it possible, things got worse. Draco watched, his stomach plummeting with each passing second, as Harry replayed the rest of the Battle of Hogwarts in precise, horrifying, sickening detail. All through it, Harry repeated his litany of apology, repeating the words over and over until they were nearly a meaningless hum in the background.

***

Neville checked his watch again, wondering how much longer the two wizards would be unconscious. They'd been gone more than an hour, and the Ministry official was due any minute. Their movements had gotten more frantic, so Neville figured they must be near the end. He shivered despite the warm room, drawing his robes around himself tightly.

***

"Mother?" Draco whispered, his throat raw from crying and screaming.

Harry simply nodded, letting Draco watch the events as they transpired.

"A life debt," Draco said flatly, his gaze trained on Harry's lifeless body in Hagrid's arms. "You testified for us because of a life debt."

"No," Harry whispered, the barely audible word full of misery and despair.

***

“I’m sorry,” Hermione said, smiling uncomfortably. Harry and Draco were fifteen minutes late, and everyone was getting restless. “More tea?”

“No, thank you,” Kingsley said, crossing his legs as he settled into the comfortable sofa. He’d arrived a little early, thinking the two young men would be anxious to sign the contract and get started on the next phase of their lives. Harry hadn’t told anyone Kingsley would be the one to administer the contract, but no one had been terribly surprised when he’d turned up. It would ensure the privacy Harry and Draco needed, since they knew they could count on Kingsley to keep a secret.

“Minister Shacklebolt, I apologize,” Neville said, startling everyone. No one had heard him slip into the drawing room. “Harry and Draco will join you shortly. They’ve been delayed, but it shouldn’t be much longer.”

Kingsley nodded, wondering what was going on. Knowing Harry, the man was doing his best to convince Draco not to marry him. He shook his head. He loved Harry like a son, but the man had such an infuriatingly black and white sense of right and wrong. He’d cut off his own leg before letting someone he loved make a mistake, and Kingsley was sure Harry was outlining all of the possible negative consequences of a union between himself and Draco. Of course, that was just Harry. Idiot, he thought fondly.

***

Draco gulped the potion Neville handed him, sighing in relief as the cool liquid soothed his raw throat and settled his roiling stomach. Another calmed his jangled nerves, and yet another relieved his throbbing headache.

Finally feeling more like himself, Draco opened his eyes, gasping in shock when he realized Harry was hovering over him, his green eyes wide with worry and – shame? What did Harry have to be ashamed of? He hadn’t been the one to do anything wrong. He hadn’t tried to kill Dumbledore. He hadn’t served

the Dark Lord, no matter how forced the service was.

“Draco?” Harry looked absolutely ragged, his normally tanned skin chalky. “Draco, I’m so sorry. God, I’m sorry! I didn’t realize it would be that hard – I didn’t think – I shouldn’t have –”

Draco swallowed, unsure of what to say. Neville grabbed Harry by the robes, forcing him back onto the sofa while he tipped a vial of potion up to his lips.

“Drink,” Neville said, his voice harsher than Draco had ever heard it. He saw Harry fight against Neville’s grip, but the other man was stronger. “Don’t be an idiot. Drink.”

Harry’s lips parted, and he swallowed dutifully. Neville reached behind him, two more vials in his hand. “Again,” he said, pushing the vial against Harry’s lips. “One more,” he said, tipping the contents of the last vial into Harry’s mouth.

Neville released Harry, letting the other man fall heavily back against the cushions.

“Listen up,” he said, his voice still hard. “I could leave you to do this on your own, but it will likely take forever and the Minister is already waiting for you.”

Draco’s brow furrowed in surprise. The Minister was administering their oath and overseeing the contract? He looked at Harry, shaking his head. Of course he was. It was Harry bloody Potter, after all.

“Don’t,” Neville said, the warning clear in his voice. “Harry, stop beating yourself up. You were right. Draco needed to know those things about you. He needed to see you do have a darker side, since he’s going to be the one to help you when you need someone to lean on when you get overwhelmed.”

Draco blinked. Harry got overwhelmed?

“Draco, you’re angry you had to find out about your mother that way, but it’s for the best. You needed to see it. And you need to trust that Harry didn’t show you to gain the upper hand. He hasn’t mentioned it to anyone but me, and I doubt Narcissa has either. She’s already canceled the life debt,” Neville continued, allowing himself a satisfied smile when Draco stiffened. Just as he’d thought – the bloody wanker was worried Harry had gone through with the courtship to satisfy the life debt. “She did it before he testified even, so forget that too.”

Draco let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding, looking from Neville to Harry. The other man looked much better than he had a few moments before, but still decidedly sick.

“You love each other, and nothing you could find out about one another would change that,” Neville said, gesturing between the two of them. “You’ve had a contentious relationship for years, and you’re worried some of that old animosity might resurface after the contract is signed. It won’t.”

He nodded toward Draco. “Draco, you have changed. The fact that I count you among my closest friends proves that.”

“Harry,” he continued, nodding at the other wizard. “You’ve been searching for a relationship like this for your entire life. Just enjoy it. You do deserve it.”

Neville waited for either man to protest, but they remained silent. He grinned triumphantly. He’d just averted a day or two long fight in under two minutes.

“The Minister is in the drawing room. Are you ready?”

Draco looked over at Harry, a tentative smile lighting his face. He saw Harry exhale then beamed as the other man’s lips curved as well.

“Gryffin?” He asked, standing and holding a hand out to Harry.

“Sly,” Harry answered, twining their fingers and letting Draco pull him to his feet.

Neville walked behind them, his smile brighter than anyone’s.

Back to Index

Chapter 27: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. Not mine. My most heartfelt thanks to Kamerreon for keeping me focused and on-track (as well as grammatically correct!).

***

Oliver drew his head back out of the fire, shaking some ash off his robes as the green flames dissipated. He’d promised Blaise updates on how things were going, and he’d just made his second Fire-call of the afternoon. No one knew what was keeping Harry and Draco, though they worried one of the men might be having second thoughts.

“I still don’t understand why he couldn’t stay,” Hermione said, a deep furrow forming as she frowned.

Before any of her friends could answer, Kingsley spoke up.

“Unmarried men and women aren’t permitted to witness the signing of a marriage contract,” he said simply, digging in his robes for a small book. He handed it to the curious witch. “Harry told me you’d

have questions, so I took the liberty of having my assistant compile a copy of the relevant laws for you."

Hermione looked down at the small bound volume, interest sparking in her brown eyes. Ron almost laughed, knowing she'd be up all night reading.

"Thank you," several people chorused at once, making Hermione blush. She hadn't realized how annoyed her friends had been with her constant stream of questions.

"Yes, thank you," she said with a self-deprecating grin.

"You're quite welcome," Kingsley said, uncrossing his legs. He'd been in the drawing room for nearly half an hour, and he was getting restless. "I must admit, I was surprised when Harry invoked the ancient courting laws. A brilliant move on his part, though. He'll be able to control what information gets out about his relationship with Mr. Malfoy, even after their marriage."

"That was the idea," Harry said with a small smile, giving everyone a tired wave as he entered the room. Both he and Draco looked exhausted, and Neville didn't look much better off. Kingsley stood immediately, striding over to grasp his hand.

"Thanks for coming, Kings," Harry said, squeezing Kingsley's hand affectionately. He reached behind him, grabbing Draco and pulling him forward. He'd never known the blond to be shy, but it seemed like he was hesitant to address the Minister on his own. "This is my intended, Draco Malfoy. Draco, I'm pleased to introduce you to Kingsley Shacklebolt."

"Minister," Draco said, inclining his head politely as he shook the larger man's hand.

Kingsley shook his head, refusing to release Draco's hand. "Please, call me Kingsley," he said, winking at Harry. "I've heard Harry speak of nothing else for weeks – I feel like we are already well acquainted."

Draco blushed slightly, meeting Kingsley's eye. "Kingsley, then," he said, his eyes widening in surprise

when the man tugged on his hand and pulled him into a loose hug.

“You’ll find that Harry has many surrogate parents,” Kingsley whispered in Draco’s ear. “My wife and I are among them. Welcome to the family, son.”

Draco was beaming when Kingsley released him. He watched as the man enveloped Harry in a bear hug, laughing along with everyone else when Harry’s feet left the ground.

“Enough pleasantries,” Kingsley said after he’d let Harry regain his balance. “I imagine you gentlemen are in a bit of a hurry to speed things along. Shall we?”

It was Harry’s turn to flush at the Minister’s words. He glanced around the room, pleased to see his friends had all gathered to offer their support. He’d read about the oath he and Draco were about to take, so he was fully aware of the effect it would have on both them and everyone else in the room.

“Before we start, I just want to thank everyone for coming to bear witness for us,” Harry said, smirking when he saw knowing smiles appear on everyone but Hermione’s faces. “It means a lot to me – and to Draco as well, I’m sure – to know we have friends who care about us as deeply as all of you do.”

Draco winked at Neville. “We should also thank you for standing by us through this courtship. It couldn’t have been easy for you, especially these last few days.”

“Merlin, no,” Ron grunted theatrically, and Draco wondered what had happened that would make Harry blush so spectacularly. He made a mental note to ask later.

They both turned to Kingsley, who had Summoned the marriage contract from Harry’s desk in the study, looking over it and nodding his approval. The two wizards had successfully completed all of the contract’s stipulations. He saw no reason their bond would be rejected, nor any reason that the couple couldn’t keep claiming rights under Delibero Pergo.

“Everything is in order,” he said, his voice taking on the slightly officious tone he used for Ministry business. “Mr. Potter and Mr. Malfoy, please take your places here,” he said indicating a tall table Harry had placed there earlier for that purpose.

Kingsley laid the contract down on the table, tapping it twice with his wand over the Ministry Seal. The seal glowed deep purple, accepting him as an official with the authority to oversee the oath.

“Harry James Potter, Head of the House of Potter, Head of the House of Black,” Kingsley intoned, nodding toward Harry, who tapped his wand against his family seals. The Potter Seal glowed a deep crimson, while the Black Seal glowed light green.

“Draco Abraxas Malfoy, Head of the House of Malfoy, Heir to the House of Black,” Kingsley continued, drawing a surprised look from Harry. Draco shrugged – he’d assumed Harry knew he was next in the inheritance progression as the eldest male descendant of the Black Line.

Draco tapped his wand on the Malfoy Seal, smiling when it glowed a vibrant green, darker than Harry’s Black Seal had. The Malfoy Line was undiluted – Slytherins since the inception of Hogwarts. Not like the Black Line, with Harry’s Gryffindor godfather.

“Mr. Potter, the contract has recognized and approved your magical signature. Do you stand before me ready to invoke the ancient rite of Promitto Intentio?”

Harry met Draco’s gaze, smiling reassuringly. His left hand gripped Draco’s, twining their fingers. “I do hereby swear a Wizard’s Oath that I intend to marry Draco Malfoy.”

Kingsley nodded solemnly, waving his wand in an intricate pattern. Harry repeated the pattern, closing his eyes as he felt energy snake around him.

“Mr. Malfoy, the contract has recognized and approved your magical signature. Do you stand before me ready to invoke the ancient rite of Promitto Intentio?”

Draco squeezed their joined fingers, his throat dry as he answered. “I do hereby swear a Wizard’s Oath that I intend to marry Harry Potter.”

He was unprepared for the jolt of magic that wrapped around him. It was so unlike what he’d experienced in the promissory ceremony with Patrizia. He’d felt the tingle of the ancient magic then, but nothing like this. He could feel their joined magic pulsing around them.

“As the Head of your respective families, the contract has recognized your right to swear your intent and has accepted those promises. You will hereafter be bound to each other for a period of thirty-six months. If after this time you are unwilling or unable to marry, the bonds will dissolve.”

Hermione bit her lip, her eyes wide as she followed the unfamiliar ceremony. She was bursting with questions – Why give them three years to break it off? What happened if they decided not to marry next week; would they still be bound and unable to marry another until the term expired? Why have a ceremony of intent at all? Was all this pomp and circumstance necessary? Couldn’t they just skip to a wedding ceremony? – but kept them to herself, knowing she’d have plenty of time afterward to investigate the matter thoroughly. She looked around, noticing for the first time that everyone else in the room was entranced, their postures stiff as though braced for some sort of blow.

“Spondeo Vinculum,” Kingsley murmured, a gasp escaping his lips when the invisible energy that had twined around Harry and Draco flared, clearly visible to everyone in the room.

Harry clenched his hand reflexively, curling it around Draco’s tighter as their joined skin heated. He could now see the magical energy he’d felt wrap around him earlier, pleased to note it was made up of the same crimson and green colors from the contract braided together. It pulsed around him like a living rope, the tendrils seeking out Draco’s solidly green bonds until the three colors came together as one and merged into brilliant silver, so bright it almost hurt to look at it.

Draco blinked as Harry became engulfed in a halo of riotous color, the silver of the bond snaking its way through blocks of deep purple and turquoise swirled with green, yellow and orange. The streaks of red were a surprise, but he couldn’t help but smirk when he saw pulses of pure white as well, something he was sure would be conspicuously absent from his own aura, which was also rendered visible by the spell. He couldn’t help but smirk at the mix of colors and the shocking streaks of white, irrefutable evidence

that the Goody Two-Shoes Gryffindor was essentially pure and innocent at heart.

He would have been shocked to see his own aura, which was an even mix of turquoise and green, heavily spotted with orange and purple and liberally spiked with various shades of red. The shimmering silver band of the bonding spell wove through his aura as well, drawing it in tighter and tighter until all of the energy was forced back inside his magical core.

Harry could feel it immediately – an almost physical ache inside him that demanded contact with Draco. Their joined hands were no longer enough and he whimpered when he felt pulled toward the blond as though they were magnets. The urge was nearly too strong to fight. Their magical cores were now bound and reaching out to each other, seeking to reunite with the familiar magical signature of the other.

Draco felt Harry's hand twitch in his own, and he clamped down on his urge to mold himself around the other wizard on the spot. Every molecule of air between them felt like an insult; he wanted nothing more than to insinuate himself into Harry's very being, joining their bodies as their magic had just joined.

He stood his ground, and he was proud of Harry for doing the same. They were excruciatingly close to finishing the ceremony, and both knew there was one final step that must be completed. Kingsley nearly forgot himself dumbfounded by watching what had to be one of the most powerful promissory bondings the wizarding world had ever seen. The spell was usually only partially visible, and he'd never heard of a witch or wizard's aura manifesting during the ceremony. His heart pounded as he watched the last of both Harry and Draco's auras recede, leaving only a shimmering silver glow covering the visible skin of their hands and faces. A silver bond was a thing to be coveted.

The room rang with absolute silence, the ragged breathing of the newly bonded pair loud within the confines of the drawing room. It was enough to snap Kingsley out of his stupor, and he grimaced slightly at his misstep before continuing.

"Harry James Potter, Head of the House of Potter and Head of the House of Black, your magic has accepted that of your chosen partner. Do you accept the awesome burden of your newly forged bond?"

Harry trembled slightly as he reined in his arousal, his jaw clenching with the effort of not claiming Draco's mouth. His vision had funneled in on the other wizard during the ceremony, and he struggled to

draw his consciousness back so he could focus on Kingsley's words. He was gratified to see Draco's wand shake slightly, glad he wasn't the only one affected. Seeing his future husband so vulnerable, strengthened Harry's resolve to finish the ceremony properly. Ironically, the naked longing he saw reflected in Draco's grey eyes made it easier to master his own reaction.

"I, Harry James Potter, Head of the most Ancient and Noble Houses of Potter and Black, do freely and gladly accept the yoke of a magical bond with Draco Abraxas Malfoy," Harry said, touching his wand to the bottom of the contract.

"Accipio," he said, relief surging through him when his name appeared underneath his wand, the ink glowing deep silver before turning black.

Kingsley turned slightly to address Draco.

"Draco Abraxas Malfoy, Head of the House of Malfoy and Heir to the House of Black, your magic has accepted that of your chosen partner. Do you accept the awesome burden of your newly forged bond?"

Draco swallowed hard, steeling himself as a gentle wave of magic washed over him. He straightened his shoulders, his eyes blazing with determination. They were so close to the end – to being engaged. Part of him wanted to throw Harry down right there in front of everyone and do whatever was necessary to satisfy the bond, but a bigger part of him – the part that was a Malfoy – prevented any such lewd display.

His composure returned as he made the conscious decision to finish the ceremony, his haughty Malfoy mask falling into place. Harry smiled warmly when he saw Draco's grey eyes shutter and become remote. Most would have been offended, but Harry knew the wizard well enough to know it was simply Draco's way of dealing with his surging emotions. Draco's wand did not shake as he placed the tip against the contract, his voice strong and clear when he spoke.

"I, Draco Abraxas Malfoy, Head of the most Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy and Heir to the most Ancient and Noble House of Black do freely and gladly accept the yoke of a magical bond with Harry James Potter," he said, noting with pride that his signature also registered in silver before fading to black.

Kingsley examined both signatures, nodding as he tapped his wand to the final blank on the parchment.

“I, Kingsley Alexander Shacklebolt, Minister of Magic, have hereby witnessed the completion of the ancient rite of Promitto Intentio between Harry James Potter and Draco Abraxas Malfoy and found both partners to have entered into the bond willingly and with no uncertainty or regret.”

He tapped the parchment again, the words he had spoken scrawling across the bottom of the contract.

“As I will, so mote it be.”

A powerful pulse of energy rippled through the room. At its epicenter, Harry and Draco both gasped, their bodies literally pushed together by the force of the magic. Face to face, they exchanged a startled glance before Harry broke into an enormous grin and brought his mouth down on Draco’s.

The air was electric, shimmering with the power generated from the ceremony. It was clear that Harry and Draco’s magic was extremely compatible, and that they were both very powerful wizards in their own right.

Kingsley cleared his throat, tapping the contract once again. It rolled up into a tight scroll and flew into his hand, which had been outstretched for it. He took one look at the two men in front of him before quickly stepping away, heading toward the Floo.

“Tell them I took this to the Ministry to file,” he said, pointing the scroll over his shoulder at the entwined couple. “I’m classifying it with top-level clearance, so it will disappear after its legitimacy has been registered.”

No one knew if Harry and Draco planned to go public with their relationship when they married or not, so Kingsley had taken precautions to ensure their secret would be kept if that was what they desired. The ancient laws required the successful courtship and promissory bond be registered with the Ministry, but once the magic involved was satisfied that had happened it didn’t prevent the destruction of the actual document afterward.

Kingsley risked a glance back at Harry and Draco, his face heating as he realized they had already shed their robes, still wrapped around each other in a passionate kiss, their hands ripping at their remaining clothing.

“Tomorrow,” he said, his voice sounding slightly strangled. “Tell them tomorrow.”

Neville laughed softly, his face buried in his wife’s hair. They, too, were wrapped around each other, though more decently than Harry and Draco. They darted for the Floo after Kingsley left, headed back to France. Draco had already made plans with his mother and Blaise to watch over Cal for the night, since he wouldn’t be returning until morning at the earliest.

“Hermione?” Ron whispered, and she shuddered as his breath caressed her ear. “That’s why only married couples are invited.”

She looked around, laughing when she saw Neville and Daphne disappear into the green flames. Pansy and Oliver were already halfway to the Floo. It was obvious that everyone had felt the same pulse of sexual energy when Harry and Draco had signed the contract. The irresistible pull the two men felt afterward seemed to be contagious.

“Let’s go home,” she answered, tugging him toward the green flames as Pansy and Oliver vanished.

***

Draco didn’t notice when everyone left, but Harry felt the tug of the wards announcing their departure. Without relinquishing his spot in Draco’s tight embrace, or un-molding his lips from the blond’s, Harry pointed his wand at the fireplace, warding it against any interruptions with a nonverbal spell.

His bedroom was set for seduction – a bath filled with scented oil charmed to stay the perfect

temperature, an array of massage oils and flavored lubricants to have fun with, the bed covered in sheets so soft they were like a cloud, sets of silk pajamas for both of them for after – but Harry didn't have the willpower to make it there. There was no way the two wizards would make it up a flight of stairs, nor did he think either of them was in any state to Apparate.

"Sorry," he muttered against Draco's swollen lips, the sincerity of his apology ruined by a sharp triumphant cry when he managed to wrest Draco's shirt off, buttons scattering across the floor.

"Sorry?" Draco echoed, squeezing his eyes shut when Harry's hot lips skated over his exposed collarbone, pressing a trail of kisses across his firm chest and licking the defined valley between his pectorals.

Harry groaned, using the flat of his tongue to sweep over one of Draco's small nipples. "Can't wait," he whispered, the rush of air against his wet nipple making Draco shiver.

"Who said anything about waiting?" he asked, his voice deep with arousal.

"Should be –" Harry threw his head back, losing his train of thought when Draco ground against him, the heat of his erection evident even through their trousers. " – romantic –" Harry gasped when he felt Draco's hands slide down his bare back, slipping beneath the waistband of his trousers and cupping his bare arse. " – the first time."

Draco chuckled, a dark sound that seemed to be directly tied to Harry's aching cock. He felt himself grow harder, something he'd not have thought possible just moments earlier, at the deliciously wicked laugh.

"First time," Draco murmured, sucking hard against Harry's neck while he thrust his hips into him roughly, eliciting a long moan from the dark-haired wizard. "Second time," he continued, punctuating his words with another hard thrust. "Third time," he gasped, panting as he thrust again, the resultant friction almost too much to bear.

"What does it matter? We don't need romance," he all but growled, pushing against Harry until the

other man lost his balance and sprawled across the sofa.

Draco followed Harry down, grateful for the blind luck that seemed to so doggedly follow Harry. The same good fortune Draco had cursed as a teen was now serving him well; if it had been anyone other than Harry, he was sure they'd be sprawled on the floor at the moment instead of on a very comfortable sofa.

Harry made a sound of protest, breaking away from a particularly bruising kiss.

"There's nothing wrong with romance," he said, his breath coming in tight pants.

Draco groaned, nestling his face into the curve of Harry's neck. How did he end up in this position? All he wanted to do was shag the man through the floor, and the infuriating Gryffindor wanted to talk about hearts and roses?

He didn't respond, edging back enough to fumble with the fastenings on Harry's trousers instead. This was no time for romantic gestures, not when he was poised on the edge of razor-sharp desire. Harry gasped when Draco reached his prize, long fingers delving into the now-open trousers and curling around his erection.

"Draco," he breathed, the sound barely audible. It was both exaltation and reprimand; Harry didn't want him to stop, but he also didn't want to consummate their bonding in such an unromantic – and undignified – manner.

Stormy grey eyes met his, and suddenly Harry felt like lying on a sofa in his drawing room in a tangled heap of half-clothed limbs, with the late afternoon sun casting weak patterns across the old rug he kept meaning to replace but never quite managed to, was in the most romantic spot imaginable. There was no soft music, but the harsh and rapid breathing of his lover, fiancé, bond mate, soul mate, was a sweeter melody than any he could recall. The flush of arousal that was slowly spreading across Draco's pale chest was more beautiful than the myriad of candles he'd charmed to flare to life when they entered his empty bedroom upstairs, the heady scent of their combined arousals better than the scented oils in the bath he'd drawn earlier. The slide of Draco's sweaty skin against his banished all thoughts of the soft sheets he'd envisioned them making love on – suddenly Draco's earlier words made perfect

sense. They had something deeper than the artifice of romance, something intangible that made every touch a sweet caress, every breath a declaration of love and every moan a celebration of their joined magic.

Draco felt Harry relax underneath him, reveling in the corresponding hot feeling of satisfaction sweeping through his own body, knowing his lover wanted him any way he could get him. He didn't put much stock in traditional romance, and he doubted he ever would. Oh, he realized Harry would need him to trot out the traditional trappings every so often – pretty words and unexpected gestures – but he also knew in that moment that Harry would accept him for who he was, as well as who he wasn't.

Draco had spent years playing the part of a devoted husband, but none of it had been true. He didn't intend to play the same role with Harry – he loved him too much to pretend. He would hurt Harry's feelings. He would forget anniversaries. He would interrupt romantic dinners to deal with business, he would go days on end without telling Harry he loved him. Of those things he was certain. It was in his nature to take things for granted, to overlook the importance of daily affirmations and whispered affections. But he also knew he would cherish every moment they spent together and love Harry more than he had ever loved anyone in his life, save Cal.

He would work his fingers to the bone to resurrect the Malfoy name so both Harry and Cal could be proud of it. He would make every single disappointment up to Harry in spades, because he loved him, cherished him, needed him. He would follow every missed anniversary with incredibly thoughtful gifts and gestures, late as they may be. He would feed Harry dessert in bed in apology for late nights at the office and business trips that took him to the other side of the world. He would show Harry how deeply he was loved every day, even if the words never made it past his lips.

Harry wasn't sure what emotions were flitting through Draco's eyes, but he knew he saw the love he felt reflected there, and that was all he needed to see. His eyes drifted shut as Draco's lips parted, his tongue darting out to lick a path up Harry's twitching cock, swirling around the head as though savoring the precome that had gathered there.

"Oh God," Harry groaned, his hands fisting in the fabric of the sofa. It was too good, too much. Draco's talented mouth, combined with the aftereffects of the binding spell, had Harry spiraling toward his climax much too soon.

Sensing Harry's imminent release, Draco pulled back. He claimed Harry's mouth in another brutal kiss, both of them desperate to meld into one being made up of two minds, two bodies and one heart. Harry didn't notice when Draco's arm dropped to the floor in search of his discarded wand, which made the tingle of the nonverbal Lubrication and Stretching Spells much more surprising – and arousing.

"Yes," he moaned, his hips bucking as the spells spread pleasurably through him, preparing him for Draco's cock.

Harry felt Draco's fingers slide into him, unerringly drawn to the tight bundle of nerves that made him cry out and squirm. Their mouths were still joined, tongues battling for supremacy. Harry shamelessly ground against Draco's fingers, his total focus centered on that amazingly talented hand and Draco's firm and insistent lips.

"Mmm," Harry groaned, feeling his arousal build, heavy and hot in his belly. He was hardly capable of coherent thought, but his brain hummed with the energy and pleasure of their lovemaking. As hurried as their actions were – Draco was still wearing his trousers, Harry's were pushed haphazardly over his hips, his legs restricted by the pool of fabric – he still wouldn't dare classify their actions as sex. It was lovemaking, pure and simple, Harry thought with a satisfied grin that was quickly lost in another of Draco's intoxicating kisses.

When Draco moaned and arched against Harry, a deliciously wanton sound so thoroughly unexpected from a man who was generally so composed, twisting his fingers in his arse with enough skill to make Harry see spots, he thought might come then and there. Nothing could possibly be better than this, Harry thought through the fog.

But then Draco was kneeling above him, wrenching Harry's trousers completely off. He didn't take the time to similarly divest himself, instead simply unfastening the button and zipper and taking his thick cock in his hand, a sigh of pure relief escaping his lips as he gave himself several experimental strokes. Harry watched, eyes heavily lidded with desire, as Draco pleasured himself, his own cock jumping at the sight as though the pale hand was fisting it instead.

Harry barely registered the whispered Lubrication Spell that slicked Draco's cock, his attention focused on the anticipation and desire rushing through him as Draco settled himself between his thighs, fingers raising a trail of gooseflesh in their wake as they ghosted along muscled thighs. Harry shivered, allowing

Draco to gently guide his legs up until they were resting flush against the blond's chest, Harry's stocking feet propped comfortably on his shoulders. Draco turned his head slightly, his eyes not breaking contact with Harry's, and pressed a kiss against a tanned calf.

He wanted to be inside Harry so badly he thought he might die from it, but Draco forced himself to take his time. He had gotten his way – they hadn't wasted any precious time relocating to what Harry would have deemed a more romantic spot – but that didn't mean he wanted to rush through their lovemaking. It was true that neither man was in any position to draw out the encounter, but that didn't mean he couldn't take the time to make sure Harry knew he was loved and cherished.

His heart was pounding in his chest, his body already slick with exertion though he'd yet to even enter Harry. Draco carefully positioned himself at Harry's entrance, teasing the loosened hole with the head of his cock before slowly - excruciatingly and punishingly slowly- easing it inside and past the ring of muscle that immediately tensed at his intrusion. He held his position, not even daring to breathe, until he felt Harry relax around him, gently, carefully, reverently pushing deeper until he was fully seated.

Draco stilled his hips, his eyes trained on Harry as he tried to gauge the other man's response. It was true that they'd never once talked of who would top or bottom, but this had felt natural and right. Draco didn't mind bottoming, and quite enjoyed it on occasion. Still, he always felt most in control when he was on top, when he could control the depth and pace of the strokes, when he was the partner responsible for bringing them both to the height of pleasure.

Harry groaned in frustration, wondering why Draco had stopped. They'd waited months to get here, and now that he finally had Draco inside him, Harry wanted him to move. He rolled his hips experimentally, hoping it would be invitation enough for the Slytherin to begin to thrust. Draco felt wonderful inside him, filling and stretching him almost to the point of pain. Harry relaxed into the burning sensation, which was already easing as Draco began to thrust in long, sure strokes.

It was lovely and tender and sweet, but it wasn't what Harry wanted. He thrust up again, his green eyes so dilated they were nearly black as he watched sweat roll down Draco's perfect face.

"More," he whispered, challenge sparkling in his eyes.

Draco nearly came undone at the word, snapping his hips back and thrusting harder, deeper. He bent Harry nearly in half, pounding into him as he leaned down to claim his mouth as well. Harry supported himself as best he could on raised elbows, his lips just barely able to meet Draco's in an unsatisfactory kiss.

Harry growled in frustration, pushing Draco back with his palms as he drew his body away from the blond's. Draco's confused frown became a smile when Harry pulled him down to the couch and straddled his lap, pausing so Draco could position his cock before sliding down onto it with a satisfied grunt.

Draco's eyes rolled back at the sensation of Harry sinking onto his cock, a guttural moan drawn from deep within him as he watched the man he loved ride him with abandon. Harry thrust up and down in his lap, knees resting on the cushions for leverage, and Draco wrapped his arms around Harry's waist, drawing him closer so they could resume their earlier attempt at a kiss.

Harry was covered in a sheen of sweat, his cock so hard he was nearly begging for release. He keened as he found just the right angle, bearing down on Draco as he fucked himself on the Slytherin's cock. He thought he was at the apex of pleasure when Draco's lips met his, and oh sweet fucking hell, how was it possible a simple joining of mouths could make it so much better?

Harry moaned, his hands scrambling for purchase against Draco's shoulders, his thighs burning with the effort of his enthusiastic thrusts. He knew he was close, and he told Draco so, nearly unintelligible words whispered against swollen lips and swallowed almost as quickly as they had been uttered.

Draco shifted Harry slightly so he could work a hand between them. Harry found his cock tightly trapped between Draco's hand and his own belly, the former wrapped tightly around it and moving in time with Harry's own strokes. He tried to cry out Draco's name as his orgasm overtook him, to tell him he loved him, but his lips were unable to form the words. He felt as though he was riding a wave of climax that had been building for weeks, months, years. How long had he been harboring secret affection for the snarky Slytherin who had made his school days such hell? If he was honest with himself, and in this position he could hardly be anything but, it had been well before they left Hogwarts.

That realization gave Harry the impetus he needed to demand obedience from his lips, a fountain of adoration pouring forth from his mouth as he came.

Draco would never be completely sure if it was in reaction to Harry's starkly honest and beautiful words or a simple physical reaction to the dark-haired wizard's channel constricting almost painfully around him as he came, but Draco followed Harry into the abyss of a mind-numbing orgasm. As he thrust up violently into Harry, a kaleidoscope of color bursting behind his eyelids as he came, Draco would have been shocked to know that similar promises of love, devotion and loyalty were falling from his lips as well.

Back to Index

Chapter 28: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. Not mine.

***

They made it up to the bedroom eventually, partaking in the scented bath Harry had drawn (perfect for sore muscles) and the soft sheets he had procured (deliciously soothing against sex-chafed skin). Harry stretched and yawned, resisting the urge to ruffle the blond hair on the pillow next to his.

They'd chosen not to sleep in the delectable silk pajamas Harry had purchased, preferring as much skin-on-skin contact as they could get to keep the bond happy. Even in sleep, Draco stirred, wrapping an arm tighter around Harry's torso and hooking his foot around Harry's leg.

The dark-haired wizard squirmed, feeling foggy from oversleeping. They'd spent the entire night making love, finally falling asleep sometime around dawn. He looked out the window, frowning at the pitch black expanse outside. He had no idea what time it was, but he was sure it was late – probably the middle of

the night.

Harry eased his way out from Draco's grasp, wincing as his muscles protested when he stood. They'd been a bit over-enthusiastic in some of their positions the night before, and he was suffering for it today. He grinned as he thought back to some of the more promising ones they'd tried, making a mental note to use them again – soon.

He ducked into the bathroom to relieve himself and cast a few freshening charms. Draco was still out cold when he left the room, padding naked downstairs. The Floo was still warded against company, and the house-elves could care less about his nudity. He figured Draco would prefer him naked, anyway, so he didn't waste time with clothes.

Draco woke to the smell of crisping pancetta and strong coffee. He allowed himself a languid stretch and debated heading downstairs to pounce on Harry. His hand settled on the sticky mess that covered his abdomen, remnants of last night's sex marathon. They'd been too exhausted to even manage a weak Cleaning Charm before falling asleep. He grimaced, deciding he had time for a quick shower before heading down to find Harry.

***

Harry stuck a spatula in the pocket of his apron, whistling softly to himself as he opened the oven door and checked on his frittata. It was browning nicely around the edges, but a deft shake of the skillet's handle proved it wasn't set in the middle yet. He shoved it back inside, letting the door slam as he turned to check on the coffee.

He grinned when his eyes lighted on Draco, who was standing in the doorway of the kitchen clad in black silk pajamas. His hair was still damp from his shower, framing his face in messy blond tendrils that Harry was quite sure were not usually allowed to air dry.

"You're naked!" Draco cried, his eyes still wide from watching Harry, clad only in an apron, bending over the stove.

Harry slid his hand into his pocket, grabbing the silicone spatula by its wooden handle. He was a bit of a gadget buff, and his kitchen was stocked with Muggle appliances and tools. He slapped the flexible yellow head against his open palm, a wicked grin stealing across his face.

“Yes. And?”

Draco gaped, his grey eyes darkening with lust as he watched Harry slap his palm repeatedly with the spatula. His mouth went dry as he imagined the feeling the silicone would make against his arse.

“But – you’re cooking,” he said, aware his voice had taken on a whiny quality.

“I repeat: And?”

“You can’t cook naked,” Draco said, his burgeoning erection tenting the silk sleep pants.

Harry quirked his eyebrows thoughtfully, spinning to check on his frittata again. Draco licked his lips when Harry’s bare arse was on display as he bent to see to it. He carefully lifted the finished egg dish out of the oven, resting it on the range so it could cool.

“Looks like I can cook naked,” he drawled, nodding toward the pancetta and goat cheese frittata.

Draco’s eyes glazed over as he noticed the front of Harry’s apron was tented as well, swallowing hard at the sexy sight in front of him. He assumed they’d be living at the chateau after they were married, but Draco vowed to find a way to make Harry cook naked for him again. Maybe they could keep this house just for that purpose?

“You’ve got thirty seconds before I sink my cock into that naked arse of yours,” Draco growled, his eyes flashing.

Harry laughed, grabbing his wand and casting a Warming Charm over their breakfast. It could wait, but Draco obviously couldn't.

"Twenty seconds," Draco rasped, his hand stealing down the front of his silk pajamas and wrapping around his leaking cock.

Harry laughed again, fumbling to untie his apron. He lifted it over his head, tossing is onto a chair before pushing past Draco and running for the stairs. He was too old to be fucked on a kitchen table, he thought as he tore toward the bedroom.

***

"We really should think about Fire-calling someone and telling them we're still alive," Harry panted, his legs trembling as he slid to the shower floor.

Draco had made good on his promise to fuck Harry, and the dark-haired man had returned the favor a bit later during their shower. He fervently hoped their uncontrollable urges would calm soon, since he didn't know how much more he could take. He was edging toward thirty, and at the moment he felt every one of his twenty-eight years.

"Are we?" Draco gasped, rolling his shoulders under the scalding hot spray. Every muscle in his body ached.

"It's got to slow down, yeah?" Harry asked, accepting the hand Draco offered to help him stand. They leaned against each other under the shower for a moment, propping each other up. "I mean, we're not kids anymore –"

“Hey!” Draco cried, pushing at Harry weakly. “You make it sound as if we’re old.”

Harry laughed, pressing a kiss to Draco’s warm, wet neck. His eyes were closed, and if he wasn’t careful, Harry worried he might fall asleep right there.

“I just meant I’m not used to walking around with an ever-present hard-on,” Harry murmured in Draco’s ear. “It’s like being sixteen again.”

Draco let out an exasperated sigh when Harry’s breath against his ear made his cock twitch. Though he didn’t voice it, he was hoping the same thing Harry was – they definitely weren’t fit to be around other people at the moment, and he’d really like to see Cal soon.

“That’s what Pepper-up Potion is for, Potter,” he growled, pulling the other man fully under the spray and devouring his wet mouth.

***

“ – three days, Draco,” Blaise said, his tone somewhat awestruck. From the sound of it, Harry and Draco had been going at it nonstop since the bonding ceremony, with no hint of slowing down.

Draco smirked, winking at his oldest friend. “Jealous?”

Blaise laughed, a rich sound that Draco had missed over the last few days. “Hell yes, I’m jealous!”

Harry wrapped his arms around Draco’s waist, crouching down so he could see Blaise in the Floo. They’d already called Hermione and Ron, letting them know it might be a few more days before they were ready to see anyone.

“How’re things, Blaise?” he asked, not wanting to mention Cal’s name. Draco was getting antsy at not seeing his son, and Harry could only imagine what Cal must think of the situation.

“Fine,” Blaise said, a sad smile on his lips at Draco’s pained expression. “You’ve owled him several times a day, and he loves the present you sent him, Harry.”

Draco turned in Harry’s arms, shooting him a questioning glance.

“A junior potions set,” Harry said with a shrug. He’d had George pick one out and Neville had delivered it. “You mentioned he took after you in potions, so I thought he’d like his own mini lab.”

Blaise laughed, shaking his head. “A mini lab?” he asked incredulously. “That thing took three adults four hours to set up! He’s been engrossed in experiments ever since it came. He may give you a run for your money, Draco. I have a feeling you won’t have the highest Malfoy Potions N.E.W.T. score in a few years.”

Draco grinned, pride filling the empty parts of his heart. He missed Cal fiercely, but he and Harry were still working out the bond. Until they did, it was a bad idea to have anyone else – even his son – in the room. They’d tried going out for a coffee the day before but hadn’t made it three steps past Harry’s house before a woman had winked at Draco and Harry had almost exploded with jealousy. The bond needed to settle down so not everyone looked like a threat. The scene had been repeated in the afternoon when they’d tried to have Neville come over for a visit, this time with Draco feeling possessive and jealous.

“Is he around?” Draco asked, peering deeper into the room through the Floo.

“He’s out in the vineyards with Nev,” Blaise said. “Call tonight before bedtime? I’ll make sure he’s here.”

***

“Who’s today’s test subject?” Draco asked, looking up over the copy of the Daily Prophet he was reading. Miraculously – or maybe not, considering who had performed the ceremony – news of their engagement had not been leaked.

“George,” Harry said absently, typing furiously as he finished his thought. He had a deadline at the end of the week, and he was struggling to meet it.

“Did Hermione get the flowers I sent?” Draco asked, lowering the paper.

Harry sighed, looking longingly at his laptop before setting it aside. “Yes. She said thanks.”

Draco snorted, reaching for his cup of tea. “No need to thank me,” he said bitterly. He’d nearly hexed her for touching Harry’s arm during their now-daily test of the bond yesterday. “I’m just glad I didn’t hurt her.”

Harry smiled, kicking Draco lightly under the table. “She knew you didn’t mean it,” he said, returning his attention to his laptop screen. “It’ll settle down soon.”

Draco growled in frustration, pushing away from the table to pace around the kitchen.

“It’s been nearly a week,” he said, forcing himself to take a calming breath. The Healer they’d consulted with via Fire-call had suggested meditation and relaxation techniques, saying those would help them master the impulses the bond awakened. She was Harry’s personal Healer, sworn to secrecy with an oath even more stringent than the normal Healer’s Oath. “But you’re right. It will eventually pass.”

Harry sighed, closing his laptop lid. He wasn’t going to get any work done with Draco so agitated. He crossed the room, wrapping his arms around the other man, stilling his nervous motions.

“Close your eyes,” Harry said, his voice low and soothing. He tightened his arms around Draco, letting him feel the warmth of his body. “Just let everything go.”

He felt Draco relax against him at the same time the Floo came to life. He could have cursed George’s poor timing. He nearly dropped Draco, who was leaning heavily against him, when he heard Hermione’s voice from the study instead of the one he was expecting.

“Harry? Draco? I have some books I think you two should take a look at,” she called from the other room. She knew enough to stay there until they came to her – the last person who had surprised the couple, Ron, had been Stunned.

“Just a minute,” Harry responded, doing the same deep-breathing exercises he could hear his bond mate going through.

“Can you do this?” he asked Draco, his voice low.

“I think so,” Draco whispered, straightening when Harry dropped his arms. “Just don’t get between us. Let me stand between you and Hermione.”

They’d found a few ways to lessen the bond’s response to other people, though nothing failsafe enough to risk going to see Narcissa or Cal. Harry knew how frustrating it was for Draco not to be able to see his son, and they’d been working hard on their meditation and relaxation techniques and Hermione had been researching the bond and how to minimize its effects.

“We’re coming in,” Harry called, holding Draco’s hand tightly in his own as they made their way to the study. He was both relieved and alarmed to see Ron standing next to her, both of them nearly pressed against the wall.

“I’m sorry to drop in on you like this,” Hermione said with an apologetic smile, “but I found something I

thought you should look at straightaway."

She held a book out in her arms, waiting until Harry Summoned it from her. There was no question of one of them getting close enough to take it the normal way – it simply wasn't safe.

"There's a chapter on promissory bonds in there," she continued, still eyeing the couple warily.

Harry noticed Ron had edged up so he was blocking her slightly with his body. He felt no tug on his bond, no reason to think they were a threat. He glanced at Draco, who looked similarly untroubled.

"I brought Ron because the bond will accept that we are not a threat since we are married," she said, receiving a tight smile and nod from Draco. "We still won't stay long. If what I've read is true, you two are physically uncomfortable in the presence of others, yes?"

Harry nodded. He could feel the bond buzzing in the back of his mind, and his magic was agitated. Despite that, he still felt no threat from them.

"I'm afraid there's only one remedy," she said, biting her lip. Draco was leafing through the chapter on bonds, half-listening to what she was saying. "You have to get married."

Harry frowned in confusion. "Well, yes," he said slowly, looking over at Draco. He looked confused as well. "We are going to get married. Just as soon as we can manage being around other people."

Hermione shook her head, wringing her hands. "No, your bond won't calm down until you are married," she clarified, wincing at the shocked looks on Harry and Draco's faces. "I'm so sorry, but you'll have to be married immediately if you want the bond's reactions to diminish."

Harry took a step closer to Draco, taking his hand again. Though he doubted it was real, he could have sworn he could hear Draco's rapid heartbeat. Then again, it could just have been the echo of his own.

“Immediately? But how?” Harry looked down at the floor, afraid he might lose it if he looked anyone in the eye. “Alone, then. No friends, no f-family?”

Draco squeezed Harry’s hand reassuringly as his soon-to-be-husband stuttered over the last word. He knew the bulk of Harry’s anxiety was over him, since this meant he couldn’t have his mother or Cal at their wedding.

“A simple ceremony with Kingsley, then,” Draco said, his voice rough. “We can re-take our vows in front of all our friends and family at a later time.”

Hermione nodded, tears clouding her eyes. She wanted Harry’s wedding to be special, but circumstances were preventing that. It was a complicated, just like most of the rest of Harry’s life. Just once she’d love for her friend to have a normal experience.

“Maybe not totally alone,” she said, smiling sadly at them. “I’ve already spoken with Kingsley. We think if he’s there in his capacity as Minister your bond will allow it.”

Harry nodded woodenly, his shoulders straightening with resolve. He looked over at Draco, who had a similar fierce expression. If this was what needed to be done, it’s what they would do. They’d be married in the end, and that was all that mattered.

“When is he free?”

***

Twenty minutes later, Kingsley stood in front of the same tall table they’d used for the promissory ceremony. Harry had dragged it into the study, thinking it would be best to minimize the amount of time the wizard spent in the house and limit his access to the room with the Floo. It seemed safest, just in

case the bond didn't accept him as a non-threat. His wife stood off to the side, looking both sad and excited for the man she considered a son and his bond mate.

Pansy and Oliver were there, pressed against the far wall, holding hands. Ron and Hermione had stayed, and they were closest to Harry and Draco, standing next to the Floo. Neville and Daphne stood behind Harry's desk, watching with guarded expressions. Hermione had lobbied to invite George and Angelina and Ginny and Theo, but Harry hadn't wanted to risk any more guests. He figured their presence at the promissory ceremony had to mean something, and it was likely the bond would see them as safe for the wedding as well.

"I'm sorry to be rushing this, gentlemen," Kingsley said softly, pulling Harry's attention back to the task at hand.

He shifted closer to Draco, their hands still tightly joined. "It is what it is, Kings," Harry said with a nervous laugh. He just wanted this to be over with. "Let's just do it, shall we?"

Kingsley nodded, placing a piece of blank parchment on the table in front of them.

"I, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Minister of Magic, bear witness to the joining of two kindred spirits, two bonded souls, Harry James Potter and Draco Abraxas Malfoy."

The parchment shimmered, the words "Certificate of Binding Marriage" appearing across the top in regal script.

"Do you Harry James Potter, Head of the House of Black, Head of the House of Potter, swear on your magic that you have no other bonds or entanglements that would prevent you from legally wedding Draco Abraxas Malfoy?"

Harry cleared his throat, pressing his wand against the parchment.

“I, Harry James Potter, Head of the House of Black, Head of the House of Potter, do so swear on my magic that I have no bonds or entanglements that prevent me from offering my hand in matrimony to Draco Abraxas Malfoy.”

Harry’s names and family seals appeared on the parchment, earning a satisfied nod from Kingsley.

“And do you, Draco Abraxas Malfoy, Head of the House of Malfoy, Heir to the House of Black, swear on your magic that you have no other bonds or entanglements that would prevent you from legally wedding Harry James Potter?”

Draco swallowed, sending up a silent plea to Merlin that his divorce had been properly handled.

“I, Draco Abraxas Malfoy, Head of the House of Malfoy, Heir to the House of Black, do so swear on my magic that I have no bonds or entanglements that prevent me from offering my hand in matrimony to Harry James Potter.”

He sighed in relief when his name and family seal appeared next to Harry’s. He felt Harry squeeze his hand reassuringly, though he knew the man had harbored similar fears.

“Mr. Potter, you may now complete your vow of intent.”

Harry’s wand trembled slightly as he raised it.

“Draco Abraxas Malfoy, I seek to be of one mind, one spirit and one life with you for all eternity.”

He registered the gasps of everyone in the room but Kingsley, though he was focused completely on Draco and the spell they were about to invoke. No one else had known of their intent to pursue the highest level of all wizarding bonds.

“Vester Mens Mentis,” he said, laying the tip of his wand against Draco’s forehead. “Meus Mens Mentis,” he continued, repeating the same motion against his own forehead.

“Vester Pectus,” he whispered, tapping his wand over Draco’s heart. “Meus Pectus.”

“Vester Animus,” he continued, his voice barely audible as he circled Draco’s heart with the tip of his wand. “Meus Animus.”

Harry’s wand tip glowed bright silver when he finished, and runes appeared on Draco’s skin, etched in silver over the places Harry had tapped his wand. Hermione strained forward slightly to read them, smiling as she recognized the symbols for intellect, heart and soul.

Kingsley motioned for Harry to tap the parchment once more with his still-glowing wand. The words he had just spoken transferred to the page in silver script.

“Mr. Malfoy, if you would.”

Draco’s gaze never left Harry’s face as he raised his own wand.

“Harry James Potter, I seek to be of one mind, one spirit and one life with you for all eternity.”

“Vester Mens Mentis,” he said, brushing a lock of Harry’s thick hair out of the way so he could lay the tip of his wand against his forehead. “Meus Mens Mentis.”

He followed the same pattern Harry had, placing his wand against his own forehead after finishing with Harry.

“Vester Pectus,” he said, tapping his wand over Harry’s heart before mirroring the gesture on himself.

“Meus Pectus.”

“Vester Animus,” he continued, his voice steady as he circled Harry’s heart with the tip of his wand and then did the same thing to himself. “Meus Animus.”

The same silver runes appeared on Harry, and Draco touched the tip of his wand, also glowing silver, to the parchment. His vows appeared there as well.

Kingsley placed a hand on both men, careful to gauge their reactions. This far into the marriage ceremony it shouldn’t cause a problem, but few things ever went according to plan when Harry was involved. He nearly sighed in relief when both Harry and Draco nodded slightly, looking up to meet his eye.

“Today we witness the joining of a silver-bonded pair,” Kingsley said, his deep voice reverent. “As is their right as a couple of such distinction, Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Potter have chosen an eternity bond. Few in the wizarding world are granted the opportunity to even consider such a bond, and fewer still have chosen to invoke one.”

Kingsley paused, his gaze traveling around the room. He knew how much Harry had been looking forward to a big wedding ceremony, and he wanted to give him as much of the pomp and pageantry as he could, even here in amid only their closest friends in Harry’s study.

“Iugo Saecula Saeculorum,” he said, releasing the couple.

He was prepared to see a physical manifestation of the bond after what happened at the promissory bonding, but Kingsley was still awed to see their auras swirl around them. The silver of the Promitto Intentio was still there, but it seemed to be weaving the two auras together, combining them until none of the colors were distinct.

Harry felt like he was enveloped in a warm cocoon of dancing color. The runes were warm against his skin, pulsing as though they had a life of their own. It seemed like an eternity passed as he and Draco stared at each other, their skin reflecting flickering colors from their joining auras. They’d discussed this

over the last week, so sure in their love and devotion to each other that nothing less than an eternity bond would do. It would be impossible for them to divorce, and they'd be bound together even in the afterlife. You'd better age well, Potter, Draco had threatened, I won't have myself bound to an ugly ghost.

Draco had no words to describe the awesome surge of power he felt when their auras separated and merged with their magical cores once more. He felt warm and secure and full, as though part of Harry was now inside him. He didn't have to try to cast anything with Harry's wand; some part of him knew the slender piece of holly would respond just as well for him as it did for Harry. His own wand twitched slightly in his loose grip as though seeking out its other master's hand.

He heard Hermione's hushed whisper that no one had thought to buy wedding rings for them, a laugh bubbling up in his chest. Harry smirked as well, and Draco knew he'd heard his friend's lament, too. What's more, he could feel Harry's amusement through their bond. He stared at his husband in awe, knowing his emotions were being channeled to Harry as well. He had no hope of retaining even a shred of his Slytherin Ice Prince self with Harry now; the man had a backstage pass to all of Draco's innermost feelings.

Harry laughed softly, and Draco's eyes widened. It wasn't possible for their bond to transmit thoughts or images, though in that moment he could swear the Gryffindor was reading his mind. His emotions must have been crystal clear for Harry to have picked up on his internal disappointment at losing the ability to use his Malfoy Mask with his husband.

"Mr. Potter, if you would please exchange rings with Mr. Malfoy," Kingsley said, his snicker barely hidden. He had obviously overheard Hermione's comment as well. "Please repeat after me: I give you a symbol of my love, devotion and fidelity."

Harry grinned, pressing his wand to Draco's ring finger.

"I give you a symbol of my love, devotion and fidelity," he said, his smile growing. "Insignio Vinculum."

Silver light shot out of Harry's wand, winding around Draco's finger. When he lowered it, the runes that had marked Draco's forehead and chest disappeared, etching themselves in a thin band around his ring

finger. The silver tattoo looked just like a ring.

“Mr. Malfoy, please repeat after me: I give you a symbol of my love, devotion and fidelity.”

Draco’s eyes sparkled as he raised his wand to Harry’s hand, resting it on his ring finger.

“I give you a symbol of my love, devotion and fidelity,” he murmured, the words loud enough to reach the entire room but spoken only to Harry. “Insignio Vinculum.”

As the silver tattoo on Harry’s ring finger faded from blinding to merely conspicuous, Kingsley clapped both men on the shoulder and forcibly turned them toward the room.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to introduce Messieurs Potter-Black.”

Harry was grinning like a loon, and Draco was absolutely beaming. They looked out over their friends, proud to be able to share this moment with them, even if it was sooner than planned and a much smaller gathering than anticipated. Draco felt a twinge of sadness that Caleum hadn’t been there to see them marry, but he knew the boy wouldn’t mind the fact that he hadn’t been there to sit through the stuffy ceremony. He’d be so over the moon at having Harry as a part of their permanent family – “for keeps”, as Cal had put it last week – that it wouldn’t matter a bit that he hadn’t been there to see it.

“May the blessings of Merlin be with you,” Hermione said as she wrapped her arms around Harry in an exuberant hug.

Harry tensed, waiting for a surge of jealousy from Draco but feeling only love and happiness through their bond. Hermione had been right – the bond was completely satisfied with their fidelity now that they were married.

She grabbed Harry’s hand, taking a closer look at the tattoo on his finger. “It’s brilliant,” she said, kissing

Draco on the cheek when he joined them. “Congratulations.”

“Stop hogging the newlyweds,” Pansy complained, sidling up to them and kissing both men on the cheek. “May the blessings of Merlin be with you.”

She winked at Draco, raising an eyebrow at his silver tattoo.

“A silver bond,” she marveled, shaking her head. “Who’d have imagined it? A silver bond from a match made over the internet!”

Oliver laughed, shaking both Harry and Draco’s hands before stepping back, making room for Daphne and Neville, who were both gushing over the eternity bond.

“We’ve been passionate about each other since we were eleven years old,” Draco said dryly, drawing a groan from Harry. “It’s true. It takes passion to hate that fervently.”

Everyone laughed, including Harry. He wrapped his arm around his husband’s waist, keeping him close.

“Seriously, though, the silver bond was a surprise. Our lives have been interlinked since before we were even born, though, so perhaps the soul bond shouldn’t have shocked us so much.”

Harry pressed a kiss to Draco’s cheek, inhaling the spicy scent he loved so much.

“We couldn’t pass up the chance for a true eternity soul bond,” Harry added, feeling a pulse of affection come through the new bond.

“Let’s see how Slytherin he can be now that he can’t hide things from me!” Harry laughed, ducking when Draco pretended to choke him.

Back to Index

Chapter 29: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. If you haven't figured out yet that I'm not JKR, well, you haven't been reading closely enough! Thanks again to Kamerreon for her fabulous beta skills!

***

" – and then I mixed the other two together, and it exploded!"

Harry laughed, rolling his eyes when Draco launched into a detailed explanation about the ingredients Cal had been experimenting with and telling him exactly why they had exploded. The boy definitely had potions genius potential. Even Snape thought so. He'd been – Harry searched for the right word, but kept landing back on nice, which hardly seemed possible, but it was true. The dour Potions Master had actually been nice to Harry when he'd had a long chat with the portrait last week, thanking him for furnishing what he called a 'decent-enough children's potion laboratory' for Caleum.

Harry knew that was high praise indeed from Snape, so he chose not to tell him it had been George who had picked the set out. He could use any leg up with the portrait he could get, and he was not above claiming that success as his own. After all, it had been his idea, even if he hadn't been involved in its execution.

Harry focused on the manuscript he was proofing, his attention drifting in and out of the conversation Draco and Cal were having, enjoying watching the light and dark heads bent together over the work

bench. The enthusiasm was clear in both their voices.

"– mustn't ever combine these –"

"– Uncle Ron said there was a potion that could turn C.C.'s fur orange –"

" – proper Potions Master always cleans his cauldrons –"

" – Mamie wouldn't let me have a silver knife to chop –"

Harry chuckled, turning back to the pile of parchment in his hands. James Evans' latest book was almost ready to go to press, and he'd never been more satisfied with one of his manuscripts. The publisher had loved the change – from single Auror to family man – his main character had undergone this time, saying it would open up the appeal of the series to a new audience.

Harry snickered, remembering Draco's reaction to seeing some of their daily interactions reflected in the pages of the latest book. He'd been flattered and offended, just as Harry had predicted. They'd fought about it briefly, but since Harry could tell Draco was actually quite pleased with it because of the emotions coming through the bond, the fight hadn't lasted long.

Harry looked up when Narcissa swept into the room. She still looked every bit the haughty pure-blood he'd thought she was, though he'd learned the public persona was quite different from the caring and warm Mamie she was around the chateau.

"Neville needs you in the greenhouse," she said, settling on the floor beside Cal, heedless of the wrinkles the position made in her silk dress.

"Both of us?" Harry asked, his attention back on the manuscript. They'd been working on details for their upcoming wedding ceremony for more than a month, and Harry felt fairly useless in every area but the

food.

“Yes,” she said curtly, fixing him with a glare. She wanted this wedding to be everything Harry envisioned, and she’d been working tirelessly with Draco to make sure his stubborn husband had everything he wanted.

“Alright,” he sighed, marking his place in the thick stack of papers and setting them aside. He rose and stretched, holding a hand out to help Draco up off the floor.

***

“These are untraceable?” Harry asked, looking up from the pile of creamy parchment invitations on the table in front of him.

“Completely,” Kingsley assured him, his white teeth gleaming as he grinned. He was beyond pleased to be officiating another wedding ceremony for Harry and Draco – this one the glamorous affair both men deserved, full of family, friends, laughter and champagne.

Harry nodded, running a finger over the silver lettering. Any of their friends who hadn’t known about the silver bond would know the moment they laid eyes on the invitations. If they ever went public with their marriage, Harry and Draco would be forever listed in the pages of wizarding history, one of only a few dozen silver bonded pairs since the time of Merlin, who had supposedly started the practice.

The wedding was in two weeks, on Christmas Day. Harry knew it was a risk to invite so many people, but he truly trusted every one of the friends they were inviting. The location of the chateau would remain a secret, entrusted only to those few who already knew. The invitations were Portkeys that would bring their guests directly to the ballroom where they were having the ceremony and reception.

He knew Kingsley planned to blanket the chateau in several high-level Secrecy Spells, which would prevent any of the guests from talking about the marriage with anyone who didn’t already know. It was a

good precaution, since several of the guests would be children who could easily slip up accidentally.

Harry smiled, excited for the afternoon to finally arrive so he could introduce Cal to Teddy. He couldn't wait. Despite their age difference, he was sure the two boys would get along fabulously. Andi had already agreed to let Teddy stay over at the chateau while Harry and Draco went on their honeymoon, giving the boys a chance to get to know each other. Harry wondered if Narcissa knew what she was getting herself into – either boy could be a terror in his own right, and together Harry was sure they'd have the start of the next generation of the Marauders on their hands.

***

"You're wrong!"

"That was mean!"

"You don't' know anything!"

"I –"

Neville burst into the room, ready to pull Teddy and Caleum apart if he had to. From the ruckus he'd heard from the other room, he was sure the two boys were at each other's throats. He skidded to a stop in the middle of Draco's study, shocked to see the bickering boys sitting next to each other, Teddy's arm wrapped around Cal's thin shoulders, arguing with a portrait.

"What is going on in here?" He asked, his gaze flicking from the boys on the floor to Snape's portrait above the fireplace.

"These insufferable brats –"

“Uncle Sev, that’s not true!”

Snape glared at Cal, rolling his eyes. “As I was saying, these precocious boys, is that more to your liking, Caleum?” Cal nodded, his arms crossed tightly over his chest. “Were telling me of their plans to –”

He broke off when Teddy gestured frantically, dislodging Cal from his side with his flailing arms. Snape sighed dramatically, shaking his head.

“Oh alright,” he muttered. “It was nothing. A minor disagreement. Now that the boys know my opinion on their little farce, I’m sure they’ll talk to Draco about it before they do anything irreversible.”

Neville looked troubled at Snape’s words, but was reassured when Cal jumped up from the floor hugging his legs.

“It’s not bad, Uncle Nev, I swear,” he said earnestly, his grey eyes beseeching. “Please don’t tell father or Harry we were arguing with Uncle Sev. It makes father angry, and Uncle Sev doesn’t really like Harry anyway, so I don’t want to make them fight.”

Neville nodded, ruffling Cal’s dark hair when the boy released his leg. He didn’t know what he’d just agreed to, but he was sure it was something he’d probably regret.

***

Harry groaned as Draco kissed a path down his jaw. He pushed at him weakly, not sure if he really wanted him to leave or not.

“I thought we agreed not to see each other the night before the wedding,” he whispered, closing his

eyes as Draco began to suck lightly on his neck.

“No, you agreed to that. I made no such promise,” Draco corrected, pressing a kiss to Harry’s slack lips.

“Mmm,” Harry moaned appreciatively when Draco’s cool hand slid into his pajama bottoms, wrapping around his erection.

“Doesn’t seem like you’re too dedicated to the rule, either,” Draco murmured with a wicked smile, giving Harry’s cock a particularly hard stroke.

“You have no appreciation for tradition,” Harry chided, lifting his hips obediently when Draco started to pull the silk over his hips.

Draco silenced his husband with another kiss, breaking away after a moment to finish removing Harry’s pajama bottoms. He tossed them to the foot of the bed, where they joined the ones he’d shucked before climbing in with Harry.

“A Muggle tradition,” Draco whispered, the disdain clear in his muted voice. Harry opened his mouth to protest, the words dying on his lips when Draco bent and wrapped his lips around his cock.

“Silly Muggles,” Harry agreed, his hips bucking up to seek deeper entrance into Draco’s wonderfully soft and wet mouth.

He moaned when Draco laughed, the vibrations sending shivers of pleasure through him. Just as he approached his orgasm, the wet heat disappeared. Harry’s eyes flew open, his stare accusing as Draco sat back on his heels.

“I happen to think we should stick with the tradition,” Draco said, wiping his mouth delicately as he hopped off the bed, pulling his pajama bottoms on over his bobbing erection. He’d pay for this little stunt in many ways, he knew, but it was worth it. He could take care of his own problem with a quick

wank, and Harry was awful at holding grudges.

“What?” The word was barely a whisper, but filled with incredulity and need.

“I said I think we should stick with the tradition,” Draco drawled, making his way to the bedroom door. He’d be sleeping in one of the guest quarters tonight, as per Harry’s ridiculous plan. “It’s obviously important to you, and as your husband, I want nothing more than to… satisfy… your every wish.”

Harry sat up, glaring at the blond in the doorway. He quickly covered himself with the duvet when it was clear that Draco was about to open the door.

“Draco!” He hissed, wary of being overheard. Narcissa’s and Cal’s bedrooms weren’t very far from theirs, and most of the guest rooms were full, too. Most of their friends had chosen to come a day early to help with wedding preparations. “You can’t just leave!”

Draco smirked, and Harry fell back against the pillows, realizing he wasn’t going to come back. He could feel the smug satisfaction, tempered with arousal, flowing through their bond.

“Fine!” he groused, throwing a pillow at Draco’s retreating form. “But I won’t forget this!”

He could hear Draco’s laugh echo down the corridor as he fumbled for his wand, shutting and locking the door. He threw back the duvet, fisting himself roughly until he felt Draco’s rising arousal through the bond. He held on until his husband was close, too, letting himself go so they could come together. As mad as he was at Draco, he didn’t want to deny himself the closeness and satisfaction that followed when they came together. He’d start on Draco’s punishment later.

***

Draco straightened Cal's collar, grateful that Harry hadn't insisted on Muggle formalwear for their wedding ceremony. His husband had displayed more spite – and potions skill – than he'd anticipated in extracting his revenge for last night. Harry had managed to get one of the house-elves to slip an Erigo Potion into his tea this morning, and he'd been battling a persistent erection ever since.

The dress robes hid his arousal, and he'd been slipping away periodically to make good use of the arousal-dampening spell Sev had taught him all those years ago. Still, he'd been uncomfortable all day. He'd popped into his potions lab just before lunch, hoping to brew the antidote, but found that Harry had gotten there first, removing several of the key ingredients he needed to make it. The black-haired menace had even raided Cal's junior potions lab, making sure there was nothing there that could help Draco in his current state.

As uncomfortable and frustrated as he was, Draco couldn't help but be proud of his husband. It had been an entirely Slytherin prank, and he'd executed it well. He just hoped Harry gave him the antidote before they had to walk down the aisle. He'd rather not have to hobble.

***

They'd debated renewing their vows, but Kingsley and Hermione had been quick to point out reciting the ancient spells again might have unforeseen consequences. No one had ever invoked Iugo Saecula Saeculorum more than once, and with Harry's luck, something horrible would happen.

Harry and Hermione had been in favor of having a traditional Muggle ceremony, but Draco and Narcissa had been strongly against it. In the end, they'd decided to write their own vows, being careful to avoid any words that might have magical implications.

Draco smoothed his robes, relieved his erection had finally waned. Blaise had found him about an hour ago, handing him a purple vial with a smirk. Draco downed it without a word, handing the empty vial back to his best man and stalking off to find his son. He hadn't been successful, but since Harry was missing as well, Draco assumed the two were off somewhere together and hadn't worried.

Now, though, ten minutes before the ceremony was about to start, he was beginning to get anxious. He hadn't seen Blaise, Cal, Harry or Kingsley for more than an hour. He could feel Harry through their bond, so he knew the man was happy and excited – if not for that reassurance, Draco might have torn the chateau apart looking for him.

He looked up as Ron ducked through the door, looking dashing in the black dress robes Harry had chosen for him. Both Ron and Blaise would be standing up for them at the ceremony, but they'd chosen not to have any other attendants. Draco had figured Harry would want a huge wedding party to accommodate all of his friends, but the other man had surprised him yet again, deciding instead to have only Ron and Blaise.

"Are you ready, mate?" Ron asked, and Draco had to bite back a laugh. He never thought he'd see the day when Ron Weasley called him mate with no sarcastic undertone.

"I am. Do you know where everyone else is?"

Ron's eyes flicked away, and Draco's suspicions grew. The redhead obviously knew something, something important.

"They're waiting just inside the doors," he said, avoiding Draco's gaze.

Draco studied the reticent wizard in front of him. Whatever Harry and his friends were planning, Draco knew he had no hope of forcing it out of Ron.

"Let's get started, then."

***

Draco and Blaise walked down the short aisle, stopping when they reached the bank of floor-to-ceiling windows at the far end of the main ballroom. Narcissa and Daphne had completely transformed the room. The trees outside the large windows had been covered in fairy lights, which twinkled beautifully against the dark night. Inside, large potted evergreen trees guarded each corner, decorated tastefully with soft lights and flowing ice blue and silver ribbons.

Silver was the predominant color in the room, celebrating the couple's rare bond. It could easily have been overdone and tacky, but there was no chance of that happening with Narcissa Malfoy at the helm. She'd spent days poring over plans with Daphne, occasionally joined by Luna and Hermione and even more rarely, Draco or Harry. The effect she'd managed was elegant and glamorous, with just the right amount of sparkle and glitz to add an almost fairytale quality to the room.

Harry and Ron followed, taking their places in front of Kingsley. The Minister had eschewed his traditional black Ministry robes for resplendent crimson, the same robes Arthur also wore. The traditional robes marked them as Harry's fathers. Kingsley's wife, Artentia, and Molly were wearing gorgeous silk dress robes in the same color. Draco turned slightly to smile at his mother and son, who were both wearing deep green robes that marked them as his family.

"We are gathered here today to celebrate the union of Draco Potter-Black and Harry Potter-Black," Kingsley said, winking at the two men in front of him. "Unfortunately, these gentlemen were in such a rush to be married that we couldn't invite everyone to the original ceremony."

Quiet laughter erupted in the ballroom, and even Harry and Draco snickered. Everyone assembled there knew exactly why they'd been forced to marry so suddenly.

"Be that as is may, we are still honored to be here with them to watch as they reconfirm their love and commitment to each other," Kingsley continued. Draco noticed a sly smile on the older man's face, and his unease ratcheted up a notch. Something was definitely up.

"Before we hear the vows they have written for each other, however, there is one other vow that must be taken first," Kingsley said.

Murmurs shot through the audience, and Draco turned to face Harry fully, his confusion clear on his face

and through their bond. There were no other vows they could take – they were already bonded for all of eternity. What was Harry doing?

“Caleum Alexander Malfoy, please step forward.”

Draco’s eyes widened as he realized what was happening. He couldn’t believe they’d managed to hide this from him. He felt the hot prick of tears, swallowing hard to regain his composure. Harry’s hand, warm and comforting, slid into his, giving him a gentle squeeze. He could feel his husband trying to calm him through their bond, and he was grateful. Without Harry’s calming influence, he might embarrass himself in front of all their friends.

“If this isn’t what you want –”

Draco cut Harry’s whispered words off quickly, placing his fingers over his husband’s lips. This was something he wanted, and he knew Cal wanted it, too. He just hadn’t realized Harry would want to do this so soon.

“It was his idea,” Harry murmured, Draco’s fingers tickling his lips. “He and Teddy came to me more than a month ago. He wanted it to be a surprise.”

Draco closed his eyes, willing the tears away. He was no longer the Head of the Malfoy family, having renounced the name and put the title – along with the deed to Malfoy Manor and a significant amount of money that was set aside for only the heir to the family – safely in a vault for Cal, should the boy choose to take it up when he came of age. He was officially the Head of the House of Black now, Harry’s wedding gift to him. He stalwartly summoned his Malfoy mask, even though he had no claim to that family any longer. He still had his pride, and he’d be damned if he was going to show this much emotion in front of dozens of people, even if they were their friends and family.

Kingsley knelt before Cal, placing his wand against his heart.

“Caleum Alexander Malfoy, you have petitioned the Ministry to allow Harry James Potter-Black to adopt

you. Is this your wish?”

Cal looked impossibly small standing there before the Minister, his body dwarfed by the large man in front of him. Still, he held his head high, his thin shoulders squared as he answered him.

“Yes, sir, that is my wish.”

Kingsley ruffled his hair reassuringly, standing so he could press his wand against Harry’s heart.

“Harry James Potter-Black, Head of the House of Potter, you have petitioned the Ministry to adopt Caleum Alexander Malfoy. Is this your wish?”

Harry was staring at Cal, and the two of them were absolutely beaming. No one in the room could doubt the affection they felt for each other.

“Yes, Minister, that is my wish.”

Kingsley turned to Draco, resting his wand over his heart.

“Draco Abraxas Potter-Black, it is the wish of your son, Caleum Alexander Malfoy, and your husband, Harry James Potter-Black, that guardianship over your son be shared with Harry James Potter-Black. He will be granted full rights as your son’s father, and will be recognized by the law and your son’s magic as such. Is this your wish?”

Draco swallowed hard, worried he wouldn’t be able to force the binding words out of his mouth. Harry squeezed his hand again, and he felt Cal’s small hand slide into his as well.

“It is my wish,” he whispered, his throat aching with unshed tears. His family.

Magic swirled around them, less impressive than the scene that had unfolded at their bondings but just as final. Draco felt his chest warm where Kingsley's wand had pressed, disappearing as quickly as it had started.

Kingsley looked out over the group, pitching his words so they could all hear.

"If there are any here who have legitimate claim to Caleum Alexander Malfoy and who do not wish this bond to continue, please speak now."

Draco looked over his shoulder, his eyes finding his mother and Blaise. As Cal's grandmother and godfather, they were the only two who could object. He saw nothing but pride and joy in both their faces. They had obviously been in on the secret as well.

Kingsley knelt before Cal again, his wand pressed to the same spot. "Ascio Paterna. "

Harry dropped Draco's hand, kneeling beside Cal. Kingsley moved his wand, pressing it against Harry's chest. "Ascio Filius. "

Draco saw a thin blue light snake around them, circling them once and evaporating, leaving only a silvery mist behind.

Kingsley stood, grinning widely.

"I am pleased to present Draco and Harry Potter-Black and their son –"

Cal tugged on Kingsley's robes, interrupting the Minister. He bent, listening intently as the boy whispered in his ear. He chuckled, standing once more.

“– their son Caleum Potter-Black.”

Draco grinned like an idiot. They’d never discussed Cal taking their name, and he’d thought the boy wanted to keep his Malfoy heritage. He loved his grandmother very much, and Draco was surprised his son was willing to turn his back on her name. She had taken his resignation as Head of House well, but he figured that was only because she put her hopes of reviving the family name on Cal. One glance at his mother proved him wrong; she was beaming, tears streaming down her face as she hugged Blaise.

He knelt down next to Harry, wrapping his arms around both his husband and his son. He was happier than he’d ever been before, and they hadn’t even exchanged their renewal vows yet.

***

“You’ve definitely got the makings of a Slytherin on your hands, Harry,” Neville said, tickling the boy in Harry’s arms.

“You don’t know the half of it,” Harry groaned, earning himself a playful push from his son. “Teddy’s the one who helped him come up with the plan. I’m adrift in a family of Slytherins!”

He heard Draco laugh behind him, leaning back into his husband’s warmth. He angled his head back, kissing Draco on the mouth. Cal protested, earning himself a loud, smacking kiss on each cheek from his fathers.

“What Harry’s not telling you is that he’s not really that out of place in this family,” Draco smirked, laughing when Neville’s eyes widened. “Didn’t he ever tell you the story about the Sorting Hat…?”

Back to Index

Chapter 30: Must Love Quidditch

***

See disclaimer in Chapter 1. I don't say I own them; you don't sue. Thanks go to Kamerreon for her awesomeness!

***

December 28, 2010

Harry was exhausted. The kind of bone numbing tired he'd only experienced in his hunt for Horcruxes and after the final battle. His muscles ached, his head throbbed – it even felt like his teeth hurt.

What in Merlin's name was I thinking when I agreed to this? Harry wondered, his stomach clenching at the sound of uncontrollable giggling outside his door. His brief reprieve was over.

"Why are you out of bed?" He bellowed, forcing his tired body up off the bed and wrenching the bedroom door open.

Two rambunctious boys, one with black hair, the other with pink, were hopping around the hallway. Literally hopping, since their legs seemed to have been turned into frog legs.

"Ribbbbbiiiiittt!" Caleum screamed, reaching Harry in one large hop.

"We're frogs," Teddy said calmly, flexing his slimy green legs as though nothing was wrong.

“You’re frogs,” Harry repeated flatly, his headache blooming even more.

“They wanted to be frogs!” Victoire whined from the stairs. She was sitting on the top step, her silvery blonde hair brushing the ground.

She was Bill and Fleur’s oldest, just a year younger than Teddy – and apparently very magically talented. She and Teddy were the only ones who had wands. He was a second year, and she a first. They were staying at Grimmauld Place – where Harry, Draco, and Cal stayed when they were in London – for a few days over Yule break.

“You gave them frog legs on purpose?” Harry asked, forcing himself to keep the hysteria out of his voice.

“Not just us!” Cal piped up, hopping further down the corridor. A door creaked open and Percy’s oldest daughter, Molly, hopped out. The seven year old bounced down the corridor to Harry, her tight red ringlets jumping with each movement.

“And Fred and Roxie?” Harry asked, afraid of the answer. Fred and Angie’s twins were a right menace, and he had a hard time believing they hadn’t played a large role in this fiasco as well. It had been Draco’s idea to have all the older cousins over for a few days, saying it would be fun for Cal and Teddy.

Harry glowered at the group, a sour expression on his face. Fun. Right.

“No, they don’t have frog legs,” Cal said seriously, and Harry breathed a sigh of relief. It was going to be hard enough to end Transfiguration Spells on the others, though how a first and second year had managed it was beyond him –

“They wanted frog tongues instead, so that’s what they got.”

Harry groaned, letting his head hit the doorframe with a 'thunk' at Cal’s words. Perfect.

“Draco Potter-Black, so help me Merlin, if you ever desert me on another Weasley weekend we’re finished, eternity bond or no,” he muttered darkly as he Summoned his wand from his bedside table, stalking out into the hallway to set the children to rights. He’d use a Sticking Charm to keep them in their beds if he had to.

***

March 14, 2011

“Luna, I don’t know what to say. She’s –”

Luna smiled softly, nuzzling her face against the warm bundle in her arms before handing it over to Harry. Draco stood behind him, a look of complete awe on his face.

“She’s perfect. Absolutely perfect, and one hundred percent yours,” Luna said, her eyes sparkling with pride and unshed tears. “You two are excellent fathers, and I know she’ll be loved and cherished.”

“I have no words for what you’ve done for us,” Draco said softly, and Harry could feel his frustration at not being able to thank the woman properly through their bond. He sent back a pulse of love and excitement, hoping to calm his husband. “This is more than I would ever have asked of anyone. Thank you.”

Luna watched the little family, knowing she’d made the right choice. It was hard to give the little girl up, but she’d come into this knowing she wouldn’t be the baby’s mother. Harry had been stunned when she’d approached him nearly a year ago with the offer to bear a child for him to continue on the Potter line. With her blonde hair and light eyes, there was a good chance the child would look like a blend of Harry and Draco, just like Cal did.

Harry buried his nose in his daughter’s tufts of blonde hair, inhaling the sweet scent of baby that was more intoxicating than anything he’d ever smelled before. He loved Cal, and that wouldn’t diminish one

bit with the arrival of their daughter. He met Draco's eye, seeing nothing but love reflected back. He'd worried, back when Luna had first approached him, that Draco and Cal would be upset if he chose to have a child. He'd been blown away by their response – both father and son had been enthusiastic from the start.

They're amazing, these Malfoy men, Harry thought, smiling when his son walked into the room with Narcissa. He came straight to them, pressing a soft kiss to his sister's downy head before doing the same to both of his fathers.

Luna startled everyone when she cleared her throat, clearly fighting back tears. Her husband, Rolph, sat at her side, stroking her hair lightly.

"Have you decided on a name?" She asked, wiping away a stray tear with the back of her hand.

"We thought we'd let Cal make the final decision," Harry said, his voice hoarse with emotion. "He's been there for all of our discussions about what to call her."

Cal beamed, stroking a finger down his sister's cheek. He looked at her speculatively, his brow furrowing as he thought.

"She doesn't look like a Lyra," he said quietly, studying his newborn sister's face closely. "Vela isn't right, either."

He looked up at his fathers, hesitating briefly. He'd paid special attention to his Astronomy lessons with Mamie over the last few weeks, eager to learn more about his and his father's namesake constellations. When he'd learned he was going to have a sister, he'd focused even more on learning some of the more obscure ones. He'd liked his parents' choice of Lyra or Vela before he met his sister, but neither of the names seemed to fit the blonde-haired, green-eyed baby in his dad's arms.

"How about Carina?" He offered, his eyes returning to the baby.

She looked so much like his father, just like he looked so much like his dad. Caleum smiled, happy that their family was complete at last. He and his father had been waiting for this moment for years, though apparently dad hadn't realized it. He smirked at the memory of his dad worrying they wouldn't want to take Aunt Luna up on her offer – how could he not have known they were missing a piece of their family?

"Carina Luna Potter-Black," Draco said, his voice clear in the silent room. "Heir to the Potter family name. I think it suits her."

Harry could feel the hot prick of tears, but he made no effort to stop them. Everything he'd ever wanted was right here in this room.

"It's perfect," he murmured, pressing another kiss to his daughter's head before handing her to his husband so he could gather his almost-too-big son in his arms for a hug.

***

September 1, 2013

"You could wait another year. You're not technically eleven yet," Harry said, shifting Cari to his other arm when she began to kick, begging to be let down.

"Dad, " Caleum hissed, his jaw set angrily. They'd already had this discussion several times, and he was so embarrassed that his dad was bringing it up again – this time in public.

Harry grinned, letting Carina down so she could run across the crowded train platform to see Teddy, who was walking toward them. He was a fifth year, and a Slytherin prefect to boot. Cal watched his approach warily, worried his older cousin might take up his dad's case.

“Harry,” Teddy said, his deepening voice startling Harry. When had the skinny little boy become a man? He leaned in, returning Cari to Harry's arms and pecking him on the cheek.

“Cal,” he said, earning Caleum’s eternal gratitude for extending a hand for a manly shake instead of giving him a kiss as well. After all, he had his reputation to think of.

“Aunt Hermione said to tell you they’ll all be waiting for you back at Grimmauld Place,” Teddy said, shifting nervously from one foot to the other. He agreed with their plan, but he worried what affect it would have on Caleum. He’d be the one to bear the brunt of it, Teddy knew.

Harry nodded, settling Cari on his hip. He looked around the platform, wondering if Draco would make good on his promise not to come or not. He couldn’t imagine not being there to see Cal off, but he knew they had said a private goodbye earlier that morning.

“He’s not coming, Dad,” Cal said, sounding exasperated as only a
I’ll-be-eleven-in-two-days-dad-I’m-not-a-baby boy could.

“I just thought he might,” Harry said easily, returning his emerald gaze to his son. He was already dressed in his Hogwarts robes, too excited to wait until he got on the train to change. He had a small cage with a tawny brown owl, a large trunk filled with books he couldn’t wait to study, and all the supplies he could possibly need.

“Aunt Minnie said you two were coming tonight for the Sorting anyway,” Cal said, rolling his eyes.

No other parents got to see the Sorting. He sighed, well aware of why they were coming. He could only imagine the shocked whispers and rumors that would start when his name was called out. His fathers had managed to keep news of their marriage and his adoption quiet, but he’d decided he wanted to go to Hogwarts without a cloak of secrecy surrounding who his family was. He was proud of both of his fathers, and he wanted the world to know who they were.

A shrill whistle blew, and Teddy grabbed the handle of Cal's trunk, motioning for the younger boy to follow him. Cal wrapped his fingers tightly around his owl's cage, giving his father and sister an awkward one-armed hug before dashing off after his cousin.

Harry watched until the train pulled out of the station, full of pride and anxiety. As the heavy smoke cleared, he saw most of the other parents had left. No one had recognized him, thanks to a light glamour that hid his more recognizable features. Cari had laughed when he cast it, filling his bedroom with delighted giggles and cries of 'Silly Daddy! Silly!'

He indulged himself for a few more seconds, already missing his son terribly. He wasn't surprised when Draco materialized next to him, his bright hair spelled brown and his distinctive eyes hidden by sunglasses. He handed their daughter over wordlessly, knowing his husband needed the comfort her small, warm presence could provide.

"I knew you'd be here," he muttered, wrapping his arm around Draco's waist as they made their way through the barrier into King's Cross Station.

***

Harry fidgeted nervously in the small room behind the staff table. He could hear the Sorting begin out in the Great Hall, his body rigid with anxiety as he waited for his son's name to be called – and the uproar that would likely follow.

"You're driving me spare," Draco hissed, glaring at him from the corner. He'd pulled back the velvet curtain that separated the room from the Great Hall, watching the students surreptitiously.

"I can't help it," Harry muttered, his brow creased in a deep frown. "He's so young. We should have held him out a year. He's only ten!"

Draco groaned, letting the curtain fall back into place. The hat had just placed Elphias Abbott in

Hufflepuff, so he figured they had time to rehash this old argument for the last time.

“He’ll be eleven in two days,” Draco said, his tone exasperated.

He knew Harry wanted to keep Cal close as long as he could. Hell, he wanted to keep Cal close, too. But they couldn’t keep hiding him away, especially when Cal wanted the world to know who he was and who his fathers were. Keeping him back a year from Hogwarts on a technicality would have done more damage than good; Cal was much too smart to wait another year to start his formal education, and it was past time he had friends his own age. He had Teddy and Victoire, who were older, and scads of younger cousins, but no one who was close to his age.

“I know,” Harry whispered, his shoulders slumping.

This wasn’t about Cal going off to Hogwarts, not entirely. He was just so worried about what the press would do when they found out who Cal was, and by extension, that Harry and Draco were married. They’d enjoyed several blissful years without the spotlight of the media on them, but that would all change in just a few minutes.

“He can handle it,” Draco assured him, resting his hands comfortingly on his husband’s shoulders. “We can handle it.”

***

Harry stood at a podium outside Grimmauld Place, his vision spotted from the myriad of bright flashes in front of him. He’d avoided public functions – as Harry Potter, at any rate – for five years, and the wizarding press was absolutely desperate for new photos of him.

He cleared his throat, casting Sonorus so the throng of reporters who had gathered on the front step could hear him easily. Hermione had called a press conference after last night’s Sorting so Harry and Draco could control the information that got out. They were having it at Grimmauld Place because

neither Harry nor Draco planned to reveal where they had been living for the past five years, keeping the chateau a safe place for their family to retreat from the public eye.

“Thank you for coming today,” Harry began, glaring at several reporters who started shouting questions about Cal. “I have a statement to give you, and after that will be available to answer a few questions. I will only answer reasonable questions, and this will be your only chance.”

The crowd quieted, cameras and Quick-Quotes Quills ready.

“As most of you probably know, my son began his first year at Hogwarts yesterday,” Harry said, pausing until the wave of shouting died down. “Questions at the end. My son, Caleum Potter-Black, was Sorted into Slytherin with nine other students. His father and I were pleased, especially since it means his older cousin, a Slytherin prefect, can watch out for him.”

Harry sent another glare at the reporters when they began shouting out questions again, waiting until they had stopped before continuing. He murmured something in Hermione’s ear, and she disappeared inside the house, returning with Draco and Carina.

The reporters went wild again, shouting questions at the small family. Hermione lifted her wand, blanketing the crowd with a strong Silencing Spell.

“I’m sorry that was necessary,” Harry said, the smug tone of his voice assuring them he was not the least bit apologetic. “This is Draco Potter-Black, my husband, and Carina Potter-Black, our daughter. She is two.”

He saw several reporters, Rita Skeeter among them, desperately trying to shout out questions. The Silencing Spell held, and Harry smirked.

“Draco and I want our son and daughter to have normal lives. We ask that you respect our privacy. Hogwarts’ wards have been strengthened, and the Hogsmeade Council has passed an ordinance that requires all members of the press to have a permit to conduct any interviews or take any photos in the town.”

Harry's smirk grew when he saw the outraged faces of many in the crowd. Luna, standing toward the middle of the pack, was the lone exception. She was smiling broadly, sending the occasional wink to her goddaughter.

"I can tell you know that permission will not be given to photograph or speak with Caleum, and the same will go for Carina when she reaches Hogwarts."

He turned to Draco, who nodded tightly. A short question and answer period was necessary, or else they risked an irate press that would dog them for the foreseeable future. They were sure to be besieged with crowds wherever they went, but they hoped that by giving the press conference they might have some semblance of peace from the press.

"I'll allow six questions," Harry said, studying the crowd carefully. Every reporter there had raised their hand, eagerly waving it to garner his attention.

"You in the green coat," he said, pointing to a short man in the front row. Hermione lifted the spell, allowing him to speak freely while the rest of the reporters were still Silenced.

"T-thank you, M-mister P-Potter," the man stammered, clearly out of his league.

Harry smiled, taking pity on him. "It's Mr. Potter-Black, actually. Which paper are you from?"

The man blushed, and even his Quick-Quotes Quill trembled as it hovered next to him.

"Wizarding World News, s-sir."

"Alright, then," Harry said, nodding to him. "Your question?"

The man straightened, pulling the courage to address the Boy Who Lived from somewhere.

“Sir, are you really married to Mr. M-malfoy?”

Draco shot them all a wolfish grin, quirking an eye at Hermione. She cast Sonorus on him, since his arms were full of a squirming toddler.

“It’s Mr. Potter-Black for me, as well,” he said, smirking when the man actually flinched when he looked at him. “Harry and I aren’t just married, we share an eternity bond.”

He relished the stunned looks on everyone’s faces, already predicting what tomorrow’s headlines would bring. “Boy-Who-Lived to spend eternity with Death Eater,” was his best guess.

Harry grinned, pressing a quick kiss to Draco’s lips before turning back to the crowd.

“Ms. Skeeter, why don’t you have a go?” Harry said, waiting for Hermione to lift the spell on the woman.

“Harry, many have said you left the wizarding world five years ago because you couldn’t handle the pressure of being the Boy-Who-Lived. Is that why you took up with a Death Eater? Are you rebelling against the society that has made you an emblem of national pride?”

Harry laughed, shaking his head. “You never change, do you Rita?”

She merely shrugged, not looking the least bit ashamed of herself.

“I am no longer the Boy-Who-Lived,” Harry said, his voice strong and clear. “I did my duty to the wizarding people of Britain during the Battle of Hogwarts. Today, I stand here as Draco’s husband and Cal

and Cari's father. Hermione's friend. Nothing more."

Skeeter looked as though she was about to follow up with another question, but Hermione's quick Silencing Spell stopped her.

"I'm sorry, we only have time for one question per reporter. As it stands we won't even be able to give everyone that chance. I'm sure you understand," Harry said, shooting the woman a wicked grin. "You in the black cloak. Your question?"

The large woman stepped forward so she'd be close enough for Harry to hear.

"I'm Nellie Ireson from Witch Weekly, " she said, nodding her head politely toward Harry and Draco. "Our readers would like to know what you've been doing since the war, Harry. Have you simply been living off Mr. Malfoy's – er, Mr. Potter-Black's – money?"

Harry chuckled, and he heard Draco's rumbling laugh next to him. Honestly, Harry thought ruefully, fighting the urge to roll his eyes. Everyone has to know Draco and I only started dating a few years ago – she can't have forgotten the Delibero Pergo already, could she?

"I have my own inheritance, Ms. Ireson," Harry said, giving her a cheeky grin. "But I do have a job."

He and Draco had agreed he might as well reveal his identity as James Evans if the opportunity presented itself. His books had risen in popularity over the years, and he couldn't go anywhere in his glamour without being mobbed. It was almost as bad as going out as Harry Potter.

"I'm a writer. You've probably heard of me – I go by the penname James Evans."

More shocked looks and frantic scribbling. He almost felt sorry for them. He and Draco were dumping so much newsworthy information on them all at once that they'd likely have a hard time figuring out what

to lead with.

“Since this press conference is about our family and not my career, I’ll have to ask that any questions about my books be directed to my agent,” he said, nodding toward Hermione. “Hermione Granger-Weasley can answer any inquiries you may have.”

Hermione nodded, cringing inwardly at the influx of Fire-calls and owls she knew her office would be getting over the next few weeks.

“Alright, who’s next?” He looked around, pointing at Luna. She grinned back at him, asking her question before Hermione had a chance to pretend to lift the Silencing Spell. She’d been exempted the first time around.

“Harry, is there any truth to the rumor that you and Draco plan to have more children?”

Draco laughed out loud, shaking his head at the blonde. He couldn’t believe she’d asked that. Then again, it was Luna. She rarely did things like that without good reason, and he figured she must have foreseen that this was a good time to share their news. He shrugged at Harry. Why not? What did they have to lose, after all?

“Yes, that’s true,” he answered, his eyes sparkling as he looked at the woman currently carrying Draco’s child.

Luna nodded serenely, making a note on her legal pad. He was sure it was either a doodle of one of her mythical creatures or a reminder to pick something up at the market – after all, she already knew she was pregnant with their next child. She had no reason to be scribbling furiously like all the others.

Draco’s hand found Harry’s under the podium, squeezing it tightly. Just a few more questions, and they could head back to France. Neither missed living in London, though they did make it a point to stay in one of the Malfoy flats in the city several times a year. Never Grimmauld Place anymore; that was why Harry was so willing to have the press conference there. With any luck, the media would camp out in

front of it, hoping for a glimpse of the family, never realizing they didn't actually live there.

"You in the purple hat. You have a question?"

–The End –

Back to Index