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Chapter 1 to 27

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Chapter: 1

**Warnings**: Some coarse language. Slash.

**Pairings**: Eventual HP/DM.

**Notes**: The three fairytales and the poem that appear in this fic are original work written by myself.

It was his first day of school.

As a professor.

He had put up a long and energetic fight with McGonagall. Too young. Inexperienced. No qualifications. Didn't think he was the teaching type.

Nevertheless, McGonagall said. Nevertheless.

He couldn't argue with 'nevertheless'. It was ridiculous. Eventually Hermione took him aside.

"Look," she said. "You love Defence Against the Dark Arts. The students will think you're cool. You're a natural, remember Dumbledore's Army? And it's either this or you sit around reading fanmail all day."

Harry had seriously considered just returning to his old Auror job. After eleven years as the youngest on the team, he could say he'd enjoyed it. But he'd had enough of it all now. Enough of the fighting and duelling and scars and complicated strategies. After Harry had captured the last Death-Eater on the run he had decided to resign and have a calmer life, as such. He wanted a practical job, an interactive job, not some respectable, dull Ministry desk job. But not something quite as full-on as being an Auror. And Hermione, as if reading his mind, smiled widely.

"This is perfect, Harry. A perfect opportunity. You'll get to practice spells, teach others, and help children. You're patient, understanding and thorough."

"I'm twenty-nine. I'll be the youngest person there. I'll feel stupid."

"No you won't," Hermione said sharply. "And what about Nev, teaching Herbology? He's exactly the same age as you."

"But –"

"No excuses."

"I just –"

"You'll love it."

Harry groaned and sunk into the couch. "You've made up my mind for me, haven't you?"

"Yes," Hermione said unapologetically. "It will be fun. Anyway, you need more of a..."

"Life?"

"...change," Hermione finished. "Meet new people, that sort of thing. Who knows, you might even meet someone, at last."

"Let's not make this personal," Harry said hastily. Ever since he'd broken up with Ginny, Hermione kept trying to get them back together again. When Harry finally voiced his annoyance, Hermione changed tack by trying to set him up with other people. He'd like to know who Hermione thought he'd 'meet' at Hogwarts, anyway. McGonagall? Neville? He snorted.

"...alright, I'm just saying. So will you take the job or at least consider it?"

Harry sighed and fiddled with his sleeves. Finally he looked up at her, beaten. "If I take it, you must promise to stop trying to find someone for me."

"Okay," Hermione said, smiling and holding her hands up. "No more meddling."

"Okay," Harry said defeatedly. "I'll take it."

He portkeyed to Hogsmeade where he met Headmistress McGonagall.

"Professor," he said.

"You may call me Minerva, Potter," she said, tapping her cane lightly on the cobblestones and smiling.

"Yes, Professor," he replied, knowing he would never dare call her that. Old habits die hard.

"This way," McGonagall directed, although Harry needed no guidance. He knew the path to Hogwarts by heart. "You must forgive me my slow pace," McGonagall added. "Age adds to the mind but detracts from the body."

"You're not so old," Harry said loyally. McGonagall raised an eyebrow and kept walking.

They silently approached Hogwarts, and McGonagall stood for a moment on a grassy knell, regaining her breath and letting Harry gaze for a moment. He was glad of the opportunity to gather himself as he stared at the beautiful castle and grounds spread below. *All the memories*...he pushed them back fiercely. There was where he lazed by the lake and there was where he faced Voldemort. There was where he laughed with friends and there was where his fellow students died.

He realised McGonagall was looking shrewdly at him and he turned to smile faintly at her.

"Hasn't changed a bit," he murmured.

"Yes, patched up well after the Battle," McGonagall said and he realised she too would look upon Hogwarts and have memories both fond and devastating.

"Never thought I'd be coming back here," Harry added nervously. Even from here he could see the charred spot outside the Forest where he had hung limply in the air above a triumphant Voldemort. As if reading his thoughts, McGonagall gave him a sharp look.

"We didn't idolise the place," she said. "There are no statues or monuments there."

"Thank Merlin," Harry mumbled and to his surprise McGonagall laughed.

"We did have a Reflection Pool built in the rose gardens," she said. "We had a small plaque placed by it, with the date of the Battle and the names of those who died fighting." There was a pause, then she started forwards. "Shall we continue, Potter?"

They made their way down to the gates. They were solid, beautiful and looked as strong as ever. He couldn't imagine that eleven years ago, they had lain mangled and torn asunder from their hinges.

"Nervous, Potter?" McGonagall asked kindly as he paused, staring up at the gates.

"Yeah...I just don't...I don't want any students looking up to me," he finished lamely, unsure how to put it into words without sounding big-headed. The last thing he wanted was a room full of

Colin Creeveys gazing up at him in awe.

"Oh, don't worry about that, Potter," McGonagall said assuredly. "You'll just be another Professor to them. If you behave correctly."

*Behave correctly*. Harry had the absurd feeling he was being admonished for something he had yet to do.

They had entered the grounds now and were already approaching the great sandstone steps. They were intact, slightly worn but otherwise perfect. Harry remembered them crumbling, the walls of the great castle pocked by lethal curses, the floors slippery with blood...

"We must remember to move on," McGonagall said gently. "Hogwarts has recovered. The students are very happy here. Our past students gave their lives so these students could have a future here. A worthy sacrifice."

Harry tried to smile, pushing down the lump in his throat. McGonagall was right. The fact that these hallowed halls were once again filled with laughter and learning was owed to the students.

They walked down the corridors. All was quiet. It was the thirtieth of August and the students were to arrive in just two days, bringing with them the bright-eyed bustle and chatty joy of youth, but for now the castle was silent and still, waiting.

"All the staff are here," McGonagall assured him. "Of course, Grimble and I remain here all year round to maintain the school."

"Grimble?"

"Herbert Grimble, the caretaker."

"Filch is gone?"

"Happily retired," McGonagall said dryly. "Now, here is your office."

She unlocked a heavy wooden door which Harry recognised straight away. His heart jumped painfully as he remembered that once upon a time, Remus Lupin had used this room. Here his treasured belongings had lain: scattered books, tattered cloaks...the grimy Grindylow tank...

It was empty and bare now, the stone walls unadorned and the window thick with dust. The only furniture was a battered desk in a corner. Harry ran a hand almost tenderly over it, remembering Lupin's books and papers stacked upon it.

"I'll get Grimble to reinstate the heating spells for the floor," McGonagall said, her voice echoing. "The stone gets rather cold in winter."

Harry walked to the window and gazed out. It looked directly onto the Quidditch pitch, bringing a faint smile to his face.

"*Scourgify,*" he murmured, the dust disappearing, the window becoming gleaming and clean. Dusk was already settling in, the stars winking at him through the glass. His breath ghosted across the window and for a moment he saw his own face staring back at him, stars shining through his pupils.

"This door leads to your chambers," McGonagall called, opening the door. It creaked slightly and opened to reveal comfortable sleeping quarters. There was a large, four-poster bed; a low table and armchair and a wardrobe and a fireplace. A door in the corner led off to a small bathroom.

"Your classroom is on the third floor, seventh along from the portrait of Uric the Odd," McGonagall said as he pulled a tiny, shrunken trunk from his pocket and placed it on the bed. "You'd do well to acclimate yourself with the room before the students arrive."

"Yes, Professor."

"Very good. If you need anything at all, don't hesitate to ask. The password to my office is Whizzing Fizzbees."

Harry smiled faintly, then turned to face her. The room was dark now, silhouetting him against the dark blue dusk outside.

"Thankyou, Professor."

"I'll talk to you tomorrow," McGonagall said before departing. Harry listened to her footsteps fading down the hall, then gently closed the door to his office.

His office. What a strange phrase. It was impossible to think of himself as a professor. Professor. Such a strange title, that he surely had not earned!

He sighed and began the long task of unpacking.

He spent most of the next day organising his room and had nearly completed it when somebody politely rapped on the outer office door. He hurried out of his sleeping quarters and opened the door.

"Ah, Potter. You've been busy, I see." McGonagall stepped in and looked around. Harry had indeed been busy and his trunk had held a truly remarkable amount of stuff. There were bookshelves lining the room, filled with the many texts he had gained over the years. Posters and framed newspaper clippings lined the walls:

*'Mad-Eye' Moody Honoured In Auror Memorial Service.*

*Albus Dumbledore Scholarship Announced.*

*Shacklebolt Sworn In As Minister!*

McGonagall glanced away from a diagram of a Doxy and took a seat opposite Harry's desk.

"Lovely office."

"Thanks Professor," Harry said.

"Now as you know the students will be arriving tomorrow," McGonagall said, adjusting her spectacles. "And I'm sure you'll do an admirable job of educating them."

Harry smiled nervously, tapping his fingers on the mahogany desk.

"We all have our individual teaching methods," McGonagall went on. "But I feel obliged to give you some advice, Potter – and pay attention, because it is vital your first day goes smoothly."

"Yes, Professor," Harry said anxiously. Why had he agreed to this at all? Who was he kidding? He couldn't teach at all!

"The first thing is to never show any sign of stress or nerves," McGonagall said. "Always remain calm at all times."

"No nerves," Harry repeated, feeling queasy. "Right."

"Secondly," McGonagall went on, "do not try and win the children over. Never indulge them, spoil them, or try to be on their level. You are not here to be their friend, you are here to be their professor. Do not try to chat to them or allow them get away with mischief in the hopes of gaining their favour and cooperation. It would be easy for you, as a younger professor, to slip into the role of friend or fellow student but I beg you not to indulge either yourself or them."

"Alright."

"Of course," McGonagall went on, "this does not mean you must be completely strict or aloof. If a child seeks counsel or advice, you may offer it. However it is important that you recognise that if a student is experiencing difficulty in their personal life and wishes to be advised or assisted, you discuss it with Poppy or myself and we will take over. You are not in a position to deal with such cases."

"Of course, Professor," Harry said. Should he be writing this down? He was certain he would be an absolute failure his first day.

"Now," McGonagall said. "Onto the more practical things. If Hogwarts is to be evacuated – a

spell has gone wrong, Fiendfyre, that sort of thing – a general announcement will be made. Your class is to proceed to the Quidditch pitch and you must take attendance to ensure everybody is present and safe."

"Alright."

"If a student is ever hurt in your class – again, through a spell, magical creature or fellow student – you must isolate the injured student at once. If the injury is minor and they are able to walk, have another trustworthy student escort them to the hospital wing. If the injury is more problematic or restricts the student's movements, you are to escort them to the hospital wing yourself in the safest manner possible and return to your class immediately. You must ensure the class remains calm and under control at all times."

Harry nodded, trying frantically to remember it all.

"When you receive the list of students' names," McGonagall added, "you will receive additional details. What house they are in. Any medical conditions. And, of late, if their parents or other immediate family was involved in the Battle. This is, of course, to practice sensitivity around the student. For example, if you are to be explaining Unforgivable Curses, you will know that one of the students had a mother whom was killed by one of the Curses. You may choose to take the child aside before the lesson, discreetly, and ask if they would like to be excused from the class."

"I'll try to remember that."

"And do not let such documents fall into student hands. You'll have a mischief-maker in every class. Cast a Scrambling Spell on the document so that only you may see it, for example."

"Alright. Thankyou, Professor."

McGonagall nodded once, briefly. "I think that covers all major points, Potter. Don't be afraid to deduct house points or hand out detentions. It's far better to have a reputation as a strict teacher than as an easy-going teacher. Over time, you will learn their tricks and ways. They will try to distract you, to worm out of lessons. Never accept homework excuses. Never listen to sob stories. Never, ever divulge personal details. They may ask if you have a family, where you live, have you travelled, do you have any pets, were you at the Battle, what was it like fighting, and more. Always avoid such questions and make it clear you will not answer them. Some will be harmless, some will just be efforts to procrastinate and distract you, some will be attempts to get a rise out of you or anger you. Never, ever answer them or allow yourself to be antagonised by them."

"Yes, Professor."

"Alright. I think you're ready."

Harry stared at her, terrified. She smiled calmly at him.

"I'll see you at the staff dinner tonight, Potter."

"Er...yes..." Harry scribbled a note, having forgotten about the dinner already. By the time he looked up, she was gone.

He sagged over his desk. He was going to be an absolutely terrible teacher.

"Hermione! *Hermione!*"

"Oh, Harry!" Hermione dropped her toast and scrambled over to her fireplace, kneeling in the hearth. "How are you? Settled in alright?"

"Hermione, I can't do it. I'm resigning!"

"What happened?" Hermione asked, aghast. Harry's face was positively white and she couldn't think of anything that may have happened. The students were not even there yet.

"McGonagall came into my office yesterday," Harry said desperately. "She went on about all these things, and I don't think I'll be able to remember any of them, the students are all going to hate me or think I'm boring –"

"They won't think you're boring," Hermione said soothingly, but Harry cut her off.

"You're just being nice, Hermione! I'll end up like Professor Binns, they'll all fall asleep in my class -"

"Harry, I think you're over-reacting."

"I can't do it! I can't! I'll end up accidentally killing someone -"

"At least you won't be boring then."

"This isn't funny!" Harry yelled. "I'm going to be the worst teacher ever, I'll -"

"Harry," Hermione said. "Harry."

"Yes?" he asked grudgingly, forcing his voice to be calm.

"You've fought Voldemort. On numerous occasions. Are you telling me you can take on the world's darkest overlord, and not a class of eleven-year-olds?"

"Yes, because -"

"Have you seen Neville yet?"

"Yes," Harry said. "At the staff dinner last night."

"Really? And how is he?"

"Good," Harry said suspiciously. "We had a really nice talk. He said it'll be great having an old friend around. We can swap notes on students."

"So, Neville enjoys his job?"

"Yes."

"So Neville can be a successful teacher, and you can't? Forgive me, but I thought *you* taught *him*. Didn't you? Didn't you teach him the Expelliarmus?"

"Well...maybe...sort of..." mumbled Harry, his fears beginning to dissipate. He began to feel slightly embarrassed. Perhaps Hermione was right and he was just overreacting.

"Looking forward to the Feast tonight?" Hermione said warmly.

"No. They'll all be gawking at me."

"Of course they will. Remember how we used to stare at the latest Defence teachers?"

"Yeah," Harry admitted, smiling.

"See, we were students too, once."

"I feel sorry for our professors now," Harry laughed. "I'd hate to have me in my class."

"Let alone Ron," Hermione said, and they laughed together. "He sends his greetings, by the way. Says he hopes you don't get hit by Dungbombs or anything on your first day."

"Will I? What should I do if that happens?" Harry asked, panic beginning to seep back in.

"Oh, come on Harry. Get a grip. You'll be fine."

"Yeah, alright," Harry said dubiously, but seeing Hermione's reassuring smile and hearing her welcoming voice had soothed a lot of his frayed nerves.

"Just sit up at the staff table and give them the Severus Snape look," Hermione teased. "They'll be terrified of you in no time."

"I wish," Harry said dryly. "Now there was a man who could command respect."

"And terror. Poor Neville's hands used to shake in Potions. Listen, Harry, I've got to dash off to work, but I'll talk to you again tonight, alright?"

"Alright. Go on, get out of here," Harry laughed and Hermione waved farewell as Harry popped his head back out of the fire and stood up. He surveyed his new office, calmer then he had been over the past few days.

"I'll be fine," he told himself. "Just fine."

"Have a seat, Harry! Grubbly-Plank's bringing the first years in now," Neville said cheerily, patting the seat beside him. Harry climbed into it awkwardly.

"This feels so odd," he mumbled. "Sitting up here."

"Oh, yes, but you get used to it. Look, you can see *everything* from up here! I never realised. To think of all the times as a student when we used to whisper away, and the whole time the professors saw everything."

Neville was right, Harry *could* see everything. He glanced around the empty seats and tables and gave a jolt as he saw a grumpy-looking man carrying in a little stool and a hat.

"The Sorting Hat?"

"Oh, yes. Like an old friend," Neville said comfortably. You could still see the old scar stretching right round his face, crossing the bridge of his nose and just under both eyes – a thin and painful white line. As if sensing his glance, Neville rubbed the bridge of his nose absently.

Neville had told him once that whilst the Sorting Hat flamed upon his head, it had whispered words of courage and bravery to him. *You are too strong for his torture*, it had told him. *But he is not too strong for yours. Fulfill your promise and destroy that which is most precious to him.* And that was when Neville had raised the sword in all his blinding white pain and brought it down upon Nagini.

Harry tried to shake away the memories, sitting back abruptly as chatter filled the corridor.

"It's the sixth and seventh years," Neville said. "You can tell. They're much more cool and confident."

Certainly the students who entered were clearly nearing their late teens. They barely spared a glance for the staff, smiling and murmuring amongst themselves. Eventually the earlier years filed in, waving excitedly to friends and sorting themselves out, arguing over seats and bragging about their holidays. A few of them gazed up at the staff table and, upon spotting Harry, nudged their friends discreetly.

"Just glare at them," Neville said and Harry was suddenly very glad he had Neville there with him. He grinned and couldn't help but wink at a grinning second-year Gryffindor who waved back proudly, nudging his impressed friends. Eventually they settled into their seats, the Gryffindor turning round often to glance at Harry.

There was a sudden silence as Professor Grubbly-Plank appeared, a thin line of whey-faced students behind her. She had a long list and cleared her throat.

"Aaronson, Ethan."

A petrified first-year edged forwards. Harry raised his eyebrows. He certainly could not recall ever being so tiny.

"Hufflepuff!"

The first year raced with relief towards the Ravenclaw table and was quickly re-directed towards the Hufflepuff table to shouts of laughter.

They went through the list, a few familiar names bringing a smile to Harry's face. Then Neville suddenly leant forwards.

"Hullo," he said. "This is interesting."

"What is?" Harry asked, leaning forwards too. He frowned, seeing a flash of white-blond hair.

"Malfoy?" he asked stupidly, then –

"Malfoy, Scorpius."

"That can't be Malfoy's child, can it?" Harry whispered to Neville.

"Impossible," murmured Neville. "He would have been born close after the Battle."

"A Malfoy child, born out of wedlock?" Harry shook his head. "I don't think so."

"Can you image Malfoy as a teenaged father?" Neville laughed quietly. "Perhaps this Scorpius is a cousin."

"I don't think so," Harry said confidently, having studied the Black family tree extensively.

McGonagall sent a quelling look towards them and they quickly quietened down. Harry silently searched for the supposed Malfoy student, glancing upon the Slytherin table. Then Neville nudged him and gestured discreetly.

There he was.

Sitting miserably at the Gryffindor table, next to Harry's cheerful godson.

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Chapter: 2

"Hermione?" Harry called, his knees in his hearth again.

"She's not here." Ron's freckly face appeared.

"Ron!" Harry said warmly and Ron grinned.

"Yeah, you'll have to chat to me. Disappointing, I know, but..."

"Ron, I've got news," Harry burst out. "Malfoy's got a son."

Ron stared at him for a moment. Then a very happy and evil grin spread across his face. "Really? But he would've had to been born -"

"Yeah, a few months after the Battle."

"All those raging hormones," Ron snickered. "Who d'you think the unlucky mother is?"

"Dunno, but they must've married, he's got the Malfoy surname," Harry mused.

"Another little Slytherin prince."

"Gryffindor," corrected Harry.

"What?"

"Gryffindor. He was Sorted into Gryffindor."

There was a tiny pause before Ron rolled around, his eyes tearing up with laughter. Harry couldn't help it, a smile reluctantly tugging at his mouth. Eventually Ron calmed down, wiping at his eyes, still chuckling.

"I'm the happiest man alive," he told Harry. "I think I'm going to die from sheer joy. Kill me now, because it doesn't get any better than this."

Harry couldn't help but laugh too.

Nevertheless, he tried to take a professional stance. He had his weapon in his hand: the list of students. He entered the classroom and leant on his desk. He tried not to be overwhelmed by the sea of faces staring at him. Seventh-years. Easy, Neville had told him. Seventh-years were easy-peasy. Not noisy and lovestruck like sixths years, who seemed to be permanently embroiled in their little soap-opera worlds. Not sarcastic and mean like fifth-years, who just wanted to be rebellious smart-arses. Fourth and third-years were alright, they got bored easily and thought it was uncool to be clever, so he would have to work a bit to get answers out of them. First and second years were the worst. Over-enthusiastic and high expectations. Wanted exciting explosions and colours and loud sounds. Expected to do complicated magic straight away and assumed they were stupid or slow if they didn't get something right the first time. Delicate egos, Neville told him. Their self-esteem changed quicker than the weather.

So here they were, the mature seventh-years. Easy. Easy-peasy, Harry lied to himself.

"I'm Professor Potter," he said. "Your new Defence Against The Dark Arts teacher. This term I plan to have a balance of theory and practical work. The first lesson in the week will be theory and the second will be prac."

The class seemed unfazed by this, nodding slightly to show their approval of his plans. Harry carried on in a firm, clear voice that covered his nerves. "I understand that you have previously had some lessons in Dark creatures."

This time there was a better reaction with some nodding and calls of dissent.

"Werewolves, sir!"

"Vampires."

"Bogarts, sir, they're the worst."

"Well," Harry said, "What about creatures which are slightly harder to fight off? Does anybody here know what a Lethifold is?"

A ramrod-straight arm shot up. "Please, sir, it's a creature that closely resembles a shadow and kills its victims by suffocating them whilst they are sleeping."

"And what's your name?" he asked her.

"Gwen Thwistle, sir!"

"Also known as the teacher's pet," somebody sniggered. Aha, thought Harry. We have our Hermione Granger. He looked at her name, noting her house was Hufflepuff.

"Very good. Ten points to Hufflepuff," Harry said.

"That's unfair, sir, she gets all the answers right, we don't have a chance!" a Gryffindor called out.

"Alright. Here's a question for you, then, Mr...?"

"Llewellyn."

Harry cast another glance at his paper. George. George Llewellyn. Gryffindor.

"Alright, Llewellyn. How do you repel a Lethifold?"

"Oh, sir! Professor Potter, sir! Professor! Sir!" Gwen's hand waved madly around like an angry flagpole. Harry tried his best to ignore her.

"Uh," Llewellyn mumbled. "Um...with a spell?"

"Yes, and can anybody name the spell?" Harry asked, taking the attention off Llewellyn and allowing him to save face.

"Oh, sir, please, Professor, I know the answer -"

Was Hermione ever that annoying? Harry was certain she didn't constantly call out, at least. To his relief he spotted a hand timidly rising up, slowly and carefully.

"Yes, up the back there?"

"A Patronus, sir?" the owner of the hand whispered, before drawing back quickly as though expecting Harry to shoot off a curse at them.

"Yes, correct, Miss, er -"

"Viney, sir," somebody else called out. He consulted his list once more. Vivienne Topham-Viney. Slytherin. She had wispy hair and large, apologetic eyes. What on earth was she doing in Slytherin, Harry did not know.

"Miss Viney. Ten points to Slytherin."

She did not look happy at all, retreating far back into her seat and looking as though she was trying to become invisible by sheer will. Harry kindly took the spotlight off her.

"So, a Patronus. Who here can produce a Patronus?"

Three or four hands were raised, Gwen's among them.

"A corporeal Patronus?" Harry pressed on and Gwendolyn took her hand down with great reluctance. Nobody's hand was up now.

"I hope," Harry said, "that by the end of the term, when I ask that question, every single hand is raised."

They broke into hushed and excited whispers.

Harry exhaled in relief.

Next up he had the fourth-years. Neville had warned him, echoing McGonagall's words. Be careful with this lot, Harry told himself. Don't let them try any mischief. Don't let them get to you.

"Good morning," Harry said to the sea of faces. "I'm Professor Potter, and I -"

"As in Harry Potter?" somebody called out; a squinty-eyed Slytherin that Harry hated instantly.

"Yes, and I -"

"Did you fight in the Battle, sir?" asked a long-haired Gryffindor girl.

"What was it like?"

"Yeah, did you kill anyone?"

"I'm not here to discuss my personal life," Harry said helplessly.

"Aw, sir, how're we s'posed to learn Defence? You should share your experiences, sir, we'd learn from them," the Slytherin called out to a chorus of 'go on, sirs!' from the rest of the class.

"Look, let's get on with the lesson," Harry said.

"Be a sport, sir, I heard you killed a million Death-Nibblers at once!" a Hufflepuff called out.

"It's Death-Eater, idiot," jeered a Slytherin.

"Language, please," Harry said in his best angry voice but they just chatted over the top of him.

"You'd know, wouldn't you, I heard your whole family is Dark -"

"Say that to my face!"

"Which one?"

The laughter and jeers erupted and the insulted Slytherin rolled up his sleeves.

"Bring it on, you stupid Gryffindor -"

"Who are you calling stupid? I heard your mum's actually a troll -"

"You tell him, Ewan!"

"Get him, Marcus!" – to which Marcus lifted his wand, quick as lightning, and opened his mouth –

There was a sudden whooshing noise; a bright light sizzled briefly and Marcus's wand was in Harry's hand. The class blinked in amazement.

"Wow, sir, that was dead awesome, sir -"

"I never even saw your wand, Professor -"

"Unfortunately, Williams here," Harry indicated Marcus, "will have to have a theory lesson, as his wand will remain confiscated until the end of my class."

"Sir!"

"And ten points from Slytherin."

"Marcus, you idiot," hissed his fellow students. Ewan beamed.

"And ten points from Gryffindor," Harry added. Both houses were quiet now, glaring at each other.

"Good," Harry said. "I see we have achieved silence. Thankyou. Please remember that in this classroom, you will only perform magic *with my permission*. Is that clear?"

"Yeah," they mumbled.

"Good. And now perhaps we can actually begin the lesson."

"Yeah, sir, tell us about you fighting at the Battle," a Gryffindor began.

"Five points from Gryffindor," Harry said.

"Why?" the outraged student demanded.

"One of my rules," Harry replied smoothly. "I will deduct five points for every question asked that is off-topic."

"That's unfair, sir," the Gryffindor mumbled, but without malice and Harry knew he had them under his control now.

"Now, our first lesson: Identifying the side-effects of Dark spells," Harry said, his voice smooth and calm.

His heart, however, banged wildly around his chest like a galloping Thestral.

It was a wonder all teachers didn't head into early retirement, he thought.

Yesterday had gone well. However, he wasn't breaking out the champagne just yet, for today his first lessons involved classes of first and second years and that meant dealing with an itty bitty Malfoy. Just what he needed. The little toerag looked just like his father - the same pale, pointed face and fine hair, the same cold grey eyes. A right little hellraiser, Harry thought. Full of snide remarks, little sneers and annoying little smirks. The little twerp would need a strict professor, would need to be kept in line and disciplined properly. The ego would need to be deflated as soon as possible.

Yet to his surprise, the first year class was devoid of Scorpius. Instead he arrived with the mixed-house second year bunch. Teddy was grinning amongst them, next to Scorpius. Was Scorpius playing some sort of game? Having a bit of fun with that stupid new professor, see how far he'd get? Switching classes? Harry's eyes narrowed.

"Good morning," Harry said coldly to the sea of faces that awaited him. He'd never learn all their names, he was sure. "I am Professor Potter, your Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher."

He paused, but they were silent. He was thankful that Teddy had taken his job seriously, telling Harry he intended to be very professional about it all and didn't expect to be treated any differently. Harry stared at the silent, expectant faces before him – Teddy grinning at him for a second – before Harry allowed himself a quick glance at Scorpius. But the boy was silent, neither muttering nor smirking. Harry carried on. "I understand that your last professor, Aftinwold, taught you the basics of Dark magic and how to recognise most Dark spells and potions. However, you are yet to learn of Dark objects and Dark creatures."

Everyone swapped terrified looks. Evidently the world was full of Dark things. A boy eyed his quill forebodingly.

"Of course," Harry went on, "the key thing here is recognising Dark objects and creatures. Spells and potions can be thrown upon you unexpectedly or can be used stealthily. However, Dark creatures can be easily avoided if you know what you're looking at and so can Dark objects. We

will begin by learning to identify both. Defence is your last option, avoidance is your first."

He suddenly became aware of the light tap-tapping of a quill against a desk. A Slytherin sitting next to Scorpius gave him an annoyed look.

"Malfoy," he said, and the boy jumped. "If you could please desist from making that noise, thank you."

"Sorry, sir. I have an attention problem."

A quick glance at the student records told Harry that Scorpius was not lying. There was a small note next to his name: *Suspected ADHD. Currently off medicated potions.*

"Very well," he said. "However I still ask that you try and focus. Now, the easiest Dark thing to identify is the creature. And whilst I am using the word 'Dark', that is not strictly true. Any creature can be dangerous if it so chooses to. However some creatures are more...inclined to be malevolent towards witches and wizards. For example, Grindylows." He paused. The tap-tapping was back again.

"Malfoy. I have already asked once that you desist."

"Yeah, but sir -"

"I will not ask again. Now, if you open your textbooks to chapter three – *Misty Moors and Fetid Fen* – we'll read through the first paragraph together. Copsley, you begin."

As the Ravenclaw talked, Harry followed with his own textbook but kept glancing at Scorpius. The boy was constantly fidgeting, looking bored and glancing around trying to catch fellow students' eyes. Copsley finished his paragraph and Harry spoke.

"Malfoy, the next paragraph please."

"I don't want to."

"Malfoy, that was not a request. That was a demand."

"I hate reading this shit, it's boring -"

The class gasped; a group of Ravenclaws looked collectively outraged.

"Sir, he swore sir!"

"Sir, he said the S word!"

"I heard him myself, thankyou," Harry replied. "Malfoy, I do not want to hear language like that

again. It's unnecessary, uncouth and unwelcome."

"Sorry, sir," Scorpius said. It was impossible to tell whether he meant it. Harry decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.

"That's alright. Now read out the paragraph, please."

"But sir -"

"Five points from Gryffindor. Now read it out or you'll receive a detention."

Scorpius frowned, then looked at the page.

"In...the...duck -"

"Dark," Harry corrected, quelling the sniggers around the classroom.

"...Dark...shed-ohs...in the dark shadows...many mall-or-vent..."

"Malevolent."

"...malevolent..." mumbled Scorpius.

Harry stopped him after a long and painful paragraph.

"Thankyou, Malfoy. Ten points to Gryffindor."

The outraged Copsley opened his mouth but Harry beat him to it.

"And ten points to Ravenclaw. Now, can anybody tell me where the Grindylow may be found?"

Later, as the students filed out, Harry sat at his desk and sighed. He didn't know why he had awarded ten points to Scorpius. Well, yes he did. Pity. He couldn't help but feel a stab of pity. Why couldn't Scorpius read properly? He came from a very well-bred, educated and aristocratic family. Harry knew Malfoy would have given his son the best and most expensive education he could afford. He would want his son to brag and pomp his way around Hogwarts, to impress with his wealth, his good clothes, his aristocratic manners, his cleverness. Yet Scorpius was reading like an eight year old! And he spoke very differently from what Harry had imagined. No smug tone or fancy words, no upper class accent. He spoke frankly, coarsely and mumbled with his words.

And it was more than that. Harry checked the student record, making sure Scorpius was legitimately in second year. And there it was, his birthday.

*2nd May, 1997.*

He had been born on the eve of the Battle.

Something was amiss.

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Chapter: 3

"Congratulations, Potter, on your first successful month."

"Thanks, Professor," Harry replied with embarrassment. He was sitting opposite McGonagall in the staff common room, half-listening to Penelope Clearwater's ranting. She was Professor Clearwater now. She taught Muggle Studies and sometimes filled in for Professor McGonagall's Transfiguration classes. Harry found her quite likable, if a little unprepared for teaching. She was the second youngest professor and had begun at Hogwarts last year. Her past teaching experience had been lecturing to university Muggles and Harry got the feeling she was used to smart, quiet, mature students who took notes and asked no questions. Not exactly the best qualification for working at Hogwarts, but who was Harry to judge?

"...that ridiculous Malfoy child. What a horrendous little trouble-maker," Penelope was saying. "Do you know what he handed in for his first assignment? A very crude diagram of the male reproductive system. You cannot imagine how distressed I was. I had to give him a week's worth of detentions. And his English is terrible. Mumbling and mispronouncing his way through all the textbooks."

"Maybe he needs some extra tutoring," Harry suggested.

"He does it all for attention," Penelope carried on, ignoring him. "He enjoys showing off to his foolish friends, Lupin and Mancini. And just the other day I caught him vandalising a desk. Of course the desk just leaped up and began beating him over the head but I have absolutely no sympathy. I've already set the second assignment, and if he does it again..."

Harry felt guilty. He had set the first assignment for his second-year class just last week. Was Penelope already setting out second assignments? He really needed to get a move on.

"I've got Scorpius handing in his assignment today," Harry said, trying to keep his voice light and unconcerned.

"More likely as not, he won't even bother handing it in." Neville joined in the conversation. "I'm still waiting for the first assignment – and that was due two weeks ago."

"Nasty piece of work," Penelope nodded. "In any case, I should be dashing off to class." She stood up and left. Harry turned worriedly to Neville.

"I've got my second-year Defence class next, what should I do?"

"Whatever you want. You're the teacher."

"Thanks, Neville," Harry sighed, opening the staffroom door.

"You're welcome."

Harry set off down the corridor, slightly anxious, and entered the classroom to sit down and wait at his desk whilst his class filed in.

"I hope you have all remembered that your first assignment is due today. When I call your name, please place your assignment on my desk," he called out. "Aaronson."

A Ravenclaw brightly bounded up, holding a suspiciously thick stack of parchment.

"There you go, sir, I hope it's not too long, I ended up going over the two-feet limit, but honestly there was nothing I could cut out, sir, it was all really important -"

"Thankyou, Aaronson. You may return to your seat," Harry said dryly. "Atkinson."

A shy Hufflepuff girl sidled up and slowly pushed her roll of parchment on top of Aaronson's as though afraid the pile would explode.

"Thankyou," Harry said, adding a tick next to her name. "Clark."

He went through the register, the ticks adding up beautifully. Not a single assignment missed, until –

"Malfoy."

Scorpius got up, smiling, and handed a piece of parchment to Harry who read it carefully. It simply listed a lot of obscene and badly misspelled words. Harry got out a red quill.

"Ah, I see you've already got that wrong. The K comes *after* the C. And this one here, that's one vowel too many. But you've made a very good effort."

Scorpius grinned at him.

"However, I think you may have got the topic confused. You were supposed to research bad spells, not bad words. How about you meet me at my office at six o'clock so we might go over the topic again?"

"Ah, sir, that's not fair, Leo didn't do the assignment at all - "

"Thanks a lot!" hissed Leo. Harry didn't mind Leo. He was a Gryffindor, quite short and slender. He had black tufty hair and most of the time wore a mischievous little half-smirk, reminding Harry sometimes of Sirius. He wasn't so bad though. Harry was onto him. Leo might play stupid a lot but he knew the right answers and he knew when to stop fooling around. Penelope was under the impression Leo was a bad influence on Scorpius and advised Harry to split them up in class like she did. However Harry just let them sit together anyway. Honestly, he couldn't be bothered trying to split them up. No doubt both Scorpius and Leo would kick up an unnecessary fuss about it.

"Sir, I can explain sir, see, my mum, she's really crook -" Leo began.

"Alright, Mancini. I haven't got to your name yet," Harry said mildly, and Leo subsided, glaring at Scorpius.

"What? Not my fault you're stupid," Scorpius said. Leo rolled up his sleeves. Teddy looked anxiously between them.

Harry sighed. It was clearly going to be one of *those* days.

He'd forgotten about Scorpius's detention until the boy barged straight into his office without knocking. Harry had his feet up on the desk, marking assignments. He was careful not to jump or flinch, remaining seated and calmly underlining sentences.

"Scorpius, I would appreciate it if you could knock. And what's this I hear about you bullying a little first-year?"

"We were only having a bit of a joke, sir, you know, just mucking around."

"I don't think the victim found it very amusing," Harry said.

"Well, he just can't take a joke then, can he?"

"Well, would you find it funny if somebody stole your favourite quill and dropped it in a toilet?"

"Yeah," Scorpius sniggered. "A favourite quill, that's just stupid -"

"Scorpius, we have a zero tolerance policy on bullying. Professor McGonagall asked me to give you a detention with Grimble tomorrow night."

"Sir, I already got all this shit happening, I gotta try out for Quidditch tomorrow -"

"No. Detention. And mind your language."

"Sir, it's not fair, you hate me 'cause I'm in Gryffindor -"

"I was a Gryffindor myself, actually," Harry laughed. "Now could you please hand in your assignment?"

"Nah, I can't sir, I'm stupid. Why don't you write it for me, sir? You're smarter than me."

"I think you're pretty smart, Scorpius," Harry replied.

"Nah, I'm dead stupid. I can't even write properly. Dobson told me I'm gonna be famous as the only squib in Hogwarts."

"Well, don't listen to Dobson," Harry said, circling a word on a seventh-year assignment.

"I don't sir, his mum's a troll with a wig on."

Harry stifled a laugh. "Don't be unkind."

"It's true, sir."

"You're on thin ice, Scorpius," Harry said although he was smiling. "How about I make a deal with you?"

"Yeah?" Scorpius was suspicious, his grey eyes narrowed, and Harry was suddenly reminded strongly of Draco.

"When your writing improves you'll submit any assignments you've missed."

"Yeah, alright sir," Scorpius said after a moment of thought. "Shake, sir?" He spat on his hand.

"Er, no, thankyou. I'll take your word for it."

"Alright, sir."

"Good," Harry said. "I'll see you in class on Tuesday."

Hopefully, he thought. Privately he wondered if Scorpius would survive the rest of the school year.

He talked it over with McGonagall. Scorpius's odd inability to write and read, the deal they struck, Harry's idea of giving the boy extra tutoring if McGonagall had the time. Surprisingly, she agreed that something had to be done.

"The boy does need a bit of extra tutelage. I'll schedule an extra class in for him. And Potter?"

"Yes?"

"I'm really quite busy these days."

"Alright," Harry said cautiously, certain something horrible was about to happen.

"I'm too busy to be balancing my Head of House duties with my teaching and headmistress duties."

"Oh."

"I'd like you to take over as Head of Gryffindor House."

"Oh." Harry's face scrunched up unhappily. "I'm not sure I really..." he trailed off as McGonagall glared. "Er...I mean...thankyou for the offer, I'll take on the duties," he mumbled.

"Good. I'll see you on Saturday to discuss what the duties are." She dismissed him with the practiced ease of a professor who has been casually ridding their office of students for years, but he lingered.

"Professor?"

"Yes?"

"I'm just wondering why Scorpius was placed in second year?" Harry asked. McGonagall looked at him for a long moment, then spoke.

"He has already completed first year at another institution," she said at last. "He was expelled from Durmstrang last year."

"Expelled!" Harry was amazed. "Whatever for?" The only student he had ever known for being expelled was Hagrid and that was for apparently opening the Chamber of Secrets. What on earth could Scorpius have done?

"Too much mischief," McGonagall said, looking at him over her spectacles. "One thing after another. It finally escalated when he levitated a student out a third-storey window." She saw Harry open his mouth and quickly went on. "The student was safely retrieved and unharmed but...not the sort of publicity Durmstrang needs, considering their...*reputation*."

Harry didn't say anything. He was thinking of the kind of wizards who levitated people.

"Don't look like that, Potter," McGonagall sighed. "He was only eleven. Just thought it was a bit

of a lark."

"So did the Death-Eaters," Harry snapped back but she just sighed again, tapping her wand lightly on the armchair.

"Potter, you must understand Scorpius is not responsible for his father's actions. You mustn't judge him. And besides," McGonagall said, smiling faintly, "I recall that a particular professor once judged you on *your* father. You must know how unfair and disadvantageous it feels."

Harry couldn't argue with that one. He rapidly changed tack.

"What about other students?"

"What about them?" McGonagall asked.

"Their safety, their wellbeing. Did you consider that?"

"Of course, Potter," she snapped in reply. "Our students' safety is our foremost concern. We did take a risk accommodating Scorpius, but he seemed genuinely willing to turn over a fresh leaf -"

"His behaviour seems to indicate otherwise."

"Nonsense," McGonagall said dismissively. "The boy just needs a firm hand, a father figure."

"He already has a father figure," Harry sulked. "And look where it got him."

"Potter," McGonagall said warningly. "Parenting methods are irrelevant to this conversation. I will not have any scapegoats here."

"No, Professor," mumbled Harry.

"And don't let it get in the way of your teaching," McGonagall added. However her expression softened slightly as she looked at the sullen man in front of her. "Scorpius tells me you're his favourite professor."

"No, I'm just the one he dislikes the least."

"He tells me he quite enjoys your classes. Says the other teachers don't think he's very funny, they take him very seriously and yell at him a lot. But you just laugh at him, and you don't mind him sitting next to Mancini."

"See? He just likes me because I'm letting him get away with things," Harry muttered dispassionately.

McGonagall just smiled.

Harry was unhappy. When he meant Scorpius needed extra tutoring, he meant McGonagall should teach him. But apparently Harry was just the man for the job, and even worse - Leo could also do with some assistance in spelling and writing and one or two Hufflepuffs wanted help with their reading. There were also two Slytherin boys that reminded Harry eerily of Crabbe and Goyle. So his free Friday period was given up to this peculiar assortment of various students with English issues.

"Alright, what's missing from this sentence? 'Some potion are really dangerous.'"

"Dangerous, sir, that's a big word, sir."

Harry couldn't tell if Leo was being serious or just trying to patronise the slower members of the class.

"Yes, Mancini, I suppose."

"Can you spell it for me, sir?"

"Mancini, it's on the board already. Just copy it down," Harry said, trying not to snap. He wasn't here to teach English, for Merlin's sake! He was a *professor*. He had more important things to do. Like head down to the pub, for example, or write Hermione a letter.

"Fucking?"

"What, Malfoy?"

"Is 'fucking' missing? 'Some potion are really fucking dangerous'."

"No, Malfoy. That's not quite the answer I was looking for. And please mind your language."

"Alright, sir. Sorry, sir." As always, Scorpius's face was nothing but sincere.

"Ah, I got it, it a 's', it missing, sir. It gotta be plural," said one of the slow Slytherins.

"Yes, that's right. Ten points to Slytherin."

"What's a plural, sir?"

"Malfoy, you know what a plural is. We went over it last week."

"Yeah but I forgot."

"Can I see your notes from last week?" Harry requested suspiciously.

"He didn't take any notes, he just drew stupid Quidditch pictures everywhere," Leo piped up.

"Shut up, Leo!"

"Why don't you, you stupid tosser?" Leo shot back to Scorpius; Scorpius gave him a sullen look but said nothing, refusing to bite back and scribbling down the sentence from the board instead. Harry was impressed.

"Very mature of you, Malfoy. Five points to Gryffindor."

"Oh, sir!" Leo was indignant. "What about me, sir? Look, I'm writing down the sentence too."

"What about me, sir?" asked Collette, a first-year Hufflepuff. "I didn't retaliate when Leo undid my plaits. Can I have ten points?"

"I only gave Malfoy five," Harry said. He disliked Collette, and considered her to be a blatant opportunist. She was the sort that would wear her hair in plaits until she was at least twenty, in the hopes of everyone mistaking her for a small child and being as nice and forgiving as possible.

"But sir -"

"Sir, where's my points?"

"Sir -"

"It's not fair, sir -"

At that moment the clock chimed four o'clock and the students joyfully leapt up, yelling and jostling each other, leaving scraps of parchment, broken quills and disaster in their wake. Harry was left alone without thanks or praise.

"I want a raise," he muttered.

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Chapter: 4

He did get a raise, quite an impressive one.

"You've got three jobs now," McGonagall said. Privately Harry thought Head of House wasn't really a job. He just had to do a few rounds of the Gryffindor common room every now and

again, sort out any scuffles that occurred. He learned quickly to never take the fifth and sixth years seriously. There was always some urgent knocking of his office door, some girl in floods of tears, babbling hysterically. Harry would rush off only to find a group of indignant, outraged girls all pointing fingers at each other and going on about petty fights and made-up rumours and other nonsense. Now when he got the urgent knocking and the teary-faced girl he just sighed and carefully made a note of where he was up to in the assignments.

He was presently doing just that: marking the assignments (Teddy's assignment was excellent and Harry guiltily gave him an E; he decided to ask McGonagall to read over it to rule out any bias). Scorpius had finally been able to submit the missed assignment. It was only two feet long (it had been set at three feet) and at first glance, Harry thought it had been written all backwards as a joke. However he soon realised it was just Scorpius's Merlin-awful grasp on spelling and grammar. He also seemed to view the comma as his mortal enemy. However once Harry got over the smorgasbord of bad grammar he realised Scorpius actually had made a half-effort. He'd obviously read the set textbook, for example, and had attempted to use references for the large chunks of texts he'd taken.

Harry sighed and reached the end of the parchment. Certainly an O, E and A were out of the question. A crueller teacher might slap a T on it without hesitation but Harry couldn't quite bring himself to, somehow. But he wasn't going to indulge Scorpius and give him high marks just for handing something in. In the end he settled for a 'P', inking it in hesitantly and writing in some comments underneath:

*Malfoy, it's good you've made the effort and you clearly know the basic material. Your grammar still needs a little work and perhaps next time you should try reading a few other textbooks, to get some more ideas on the subject. Otherwise a decent attempt. In particular, I commend you on your excellent paragraph on Grindylows.*

"Professor!"

Harry sighed as a rain of knocking pattered on his door.

"Yes?"

The door opened and two sixth-years came in, bursting with self-importance and urgency. Harry sighed.

"I'm a little busy. I'm sure Jones and Wilkinson can sort out their relationship problems by themselves," he said dryly, cleaning his spectacles.

"Oh, sir, it's not that, sir..." one of them babbled, dabbing at her eyes dramatically. "It's Whitby, sir, in a right royal state..."

"Whitby?" Harry said. Oh, one of those soap-opera girls. "I'm sure if you all sit down and discuss the problems nicely..."

"But sir -"

"...then everyone will forgive each other and be best friends again," Harry said a little sarcastically. He really wanted a night off.

"No, sir, it's Thomas Whitby, sir, Suzette's brother -"

"What?" Harry leapt to his feet. Boys hardly ever got into all that melodramatic nonsense. Something serious may have happened.

" – yes, sir, he's bleeding -"

"What happened?" Harry raced to the door, pulling it open and pelting along to the Gryffindor tower.

"Just a nosebleed, sir, but -"

"A brawl?"

"Scorpius punched him! *Twice*!" the other girl piped up, a tad over-excitedly.

"Oh, *wonderful*," Harry groaned. The girls babbled over the top of each other, fighting to get the information out first, racing alongside him.

"Yeah, he started it, see -"

"We tried to stop him sir, honest we did, but he's got such a temper -" The girl burst into tears. "Oh, I do hope they haven't killed each other!"

"Don't be ridiculous, calm down," Harry ordered, stepping through the portrait. The common room was silent and still, faces turned towards him. Some were pale and still, others full of mischief and smirks, some just excited. Whitby was surrounded by his mates on the far side of the room, nursing a bloody nose and a black eye, filled with outraged indignation. Scorpius, apparently unscathed, was sitting by the fire. Leo and Teddy were with him. Leo looked angry but Teddy looked satisfied, grinning in Whitby's direction. Scorpius just looked resigned, as though he knew no matter what happened he'd be in trouble.

"Alright, what happened?" Harry asked.

The room broke into excited chatter but Harry shushed them quickly.

"Whitby?"

"I was just sitting by the fire, sir," Whitby said earnestly (and slightly thickly, as blood bubbled),

"when Scorpius came out of nowhere and started yelling it was his spot, sir, he threw a punch, sir, I was completely unarmed -"

"He's lying, sir!" Leo hollered, leaping up.

"Sit down, Mancini."

"But sir -"

"I said sit down!" Harry snapped.

"No, he's lying, he -"

"Look," Harry said evenly. "I'm just going to accept the fact it was one of those silly little scrapes over nothing, alright? So you can both apologise to each other and I can get back to my office."

"Sorry, Scorpius," Whitby said, rolling his eyes.

"Good. Now apologise, Malfoy."

"Sorry, tosser," Scorpius muttered.

"Malfoy," Harry snapped warningly.

"Alright. I'm sorry."

"Sorry what?" Harry prompted.

"I'm sorry Whitby can't duck in time."

Leo and Teddy stifled grins; Harry was ready to Stun them all just to get rid of them for the evening.

"Malfoy, that isn't acceptable. Again."

"I already said sorry!"

"Malfoy, one more time or it's detention."

"Alright, alright," muttered Scorpius. "Sorry Whitby." He managed to fit so much sullen venom into those two words that Harry expected to see a trail of green vapour in the air.

"Good," Harry snapped. "Now I'm going back to my office, alright, and I don't care if you've all gone mad and are cursing each other into little piles of ash – just don't disturb me, alright? I mean it. First person who starts anything, I will personally see to it that their week is filled with

misery and despair. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir," they mumbled. The seventh-years all swapped grins: *Oooh, you've really pissed the professor off this time! You lot are in for it now...*

Harry ignored them and went straight to bed with a headache. He was beginning to seriously doubt Scorpius's ability to last the school year. Besides noting Scorpius had a mean left hook, Harry had noticed that although Leo had jumped hotly to his friend's defence, Scorpius had just sat there and grudgingly accepted the punishment. He had not even bothered to offer his side of the story.

He was clearly used to people not believing him.

Harry didn't know if it was because of the brawl yesterday but Scorpius seemed even more fidgety and disruptive than usual.

"Alright, so we've covered Grindylows, Doxies, Red-Caps and Hinkypunks," Harry announced. The class had wanted to cover more exciting creatures like Dementors and Bogarts but Harry personally thought that could wait til third year. Their skills just weren't developed enough yet, despite their outrageous claims of defeating four chimaeras when they were six and so on. "I think we've nearly covered the creatures unit, excepting the last one on the list – the Blood-Sucking Bugbear. The first thing to know is that these creatures can disguise themselves to resemble normal, domesticated animals like a cat or dog; however there are one or two discrepancies. Malfoy, stop chatting to Mancini, please. Now, can anyone name them?"

"Oh, they make a really peculiar noise, I think. Don't they? Some sort of barking sound..."

"Absolutely, Thompson. Five points to Ravenclaw. Anybody else?"

"They've got forked tails I believe, sir."

"Correct, Dobson. Five points to Ravenclaw, again. Malfoy, please stop talking while I'm talking. Now, there's one more difference...come on...obvious one..."

A Slytherin boy rifled urgently through his notes and shot his hand up triumphantly. "When they get cold they exude a pale pink vapour, sir!"

"Yes, they do. Five points to Slytherin. Now, as they can tuck their tails away and can remain silent, the best way to tell if it really is a Bugbear is to throw a bucket of cold water over them. Malfoy, I've warned you twice. That's it. You can sit next to Dobson, please."

"Oh, not Dobson sir, he's a twat -"

"Just sit next to him, please."

"I want to sit next to Leo and Ted, I hate Dobson -"

"Malfoy, I asked you twice not to chat to Mancini. If you won't listen to me, I'll have to sit you next to Dobson."

Scorpius grudgingly collected his things, mumbling and grumbling, and sat next to a very unhappy Dobson. Leo and Teddy pulled faces at him which Harry decided to generously ignore.

"Alright, so that covers all the basic aspects of the Bugbear. Once you've thrown the cold water on it and noted the pink vapours, it'll probably be quite enraged," Harry said, to a few chuckles. "Retreat quickly and aim the Petrificus Totalus curse at it, the one we practiced last lesson. Once hit by the curse, it will be frozen for some time and you may simply pick it up and lob it away, kill it or just owl it off to someone you don't like." The class laughed appreciatively and Harry went on. "The Blood-Sucking Bugbear is known for its remarkable memory and once repelled by a witch or wizard, it will not return to the dwelling."

"*Ouch!*"

Harry glanced up. Dobson was looking outraged, a feather quivering in the back of his hand.

"Sir, Malfoy stabbed me with his quill!"

"I didn't sir, it slipped, sir, he's just making up shit -"

"Malfoy, language."

"Sorry, sir," Scorpius said and as ever, Harry didn't know whether to believe him.

"Don't disrupt my class again and please do not antagonise Dobson."

"Sir, what's antagonise?"

"Malfoy!" Harry said exasperatedly. "Look it up later, you're disrupting my class! If you don't want to learn, stop wasting everyone's time and just leave."

"Yeah, cut it out Malfoy, some of us are here to learn," somebody snapped.

"Yes, you're being a little inconsiderate," somebody else piped up.

"How are we supposed to learn with you interrupting all the time?" another called out. Scorpius got up angrily.

"Fine, I'll just leave then!" He looked to Teddy and Leo.

"Well, to be honest," Teddy said quietly, "I want to actually pass that test on Monday."

"Yeah, it's kind of important." Leo squirmed. Scorpius said nothing, kicking over his chair and storming out, slamming the door behind him. The class tittered but Harry quelled them with a glance.

"I think that's enough drama for today. Let's just get on with it. Alright, so let's move on to our revision of the Kappie."

The class ran through the revision nicely. Harry had managed to teach them well, despite Scorpius's eagerness to interrupt and annoy. He excused the class early.

"Don't forget the test next week! And I don't want to hear any excuses about wands not working properly or other such rubbish!"

They laughed and waved, disappearing out the door and into the crowds already filling the corridor. Harry arranged his papers, thanking Merlin he had a lunchbreak between his second and fifth year classes. He looked up as a shadow wavered across his desk: Teddy, looking worried.

"Hey, Harry?"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry about Scorpius." Teddy looked quite earnest and Harry sighed.

"Don't worry about him, Ted. The important think is to focus on your own education."

"Yes, I suppose," Teddy said, still looking a little unhappy.

"And you're doing an excellent job," Harry went on. "I'm really proud of you."

Teddy finally smiled at that and waved goodbye, racing out of the classroom to catch up with his friends. Harry looked around the empty room then began packing up his things before walking out, locking it behind him with a simple spell. The fifth years had taken to sneaking in during break and kidnapping his Grindylows and he was keen to avoid such mischief, although they were rather good-natured about it.

"Sir?"

Scorpius had appeared, not looking at him and pulling his sleeves over his hands. It was a fidgety habit he had when he was angry, Harry had noticed. The sleeves were stretched now and unsightly. His first thought was that his parents were misers. Then he realised his parents probably didn't know. Scorpius didn't seem like the sort of child who would write home demanding new robes. Actually, would Scorpius ever write home? Scorpius loathed writing. Too many stupid 'bits and pieces', apparently. Commas, apostrophes and all that annoying stuff.

"Sir," Scorpius said now, glaring at the floor. "Could I get my stuff out of the room before you lock up, sir?"

"Oh, yes, of course." Harry stood back and let Scorpius gather his things from his desk, shoving his textbooks roughly into his bag. "Ah, now, before I forget -"

"I didn't do anything, sir!" Scorpius protested.

"Yes, I just -"

"They're always trying to blame shit on me -"

"No, Scorpius, I just forgot to give you your assignment back." Harry handed it over and Scorpius took it without a word, stuffing it straight into his bag without looking at it.

"Aren't you going to read through that, Scorpius?"

"No, sir. Why would I do that? Teachers just write mean shit all over it."

"Language, Scorpius. And how do you know I've written mean remarks all over it?"

"It's covered in red ink, sir, dead giveaway. All my assignments are covered in red ink, sir, that Clearwater, she's a real bitch, sir, isn't she?"

"I'm not in a position to criticise my colleagues, Scorpius," Harry said lightly. "And don't forget your remedial writing class on Friday. If you miss it again, you will have detention."

"That was Leo's fault -"

"Don't blame Leo," Harry sighed. "I know it was some mischief you were up to. Don't do it again or I'll have a word with McGonagall."

"Ah, sir, you sound just like Clearwater, sir -"

"Good," Harry said. "She's an excellent, articulate professor."

"No she's not, she's a bitch."

"Detention," Harry ordered. "Five o'clock Friday evening. You can report to Grimble's office."

"You can take your detention and -"

"Five o'clock," Harry snapped over Scorpius's stream of abuse and strode away, fuming. The impertinent little sod! Perhaps he really was like Malfoy and Harry just had too much pity for

him. He flung a handful of powder into his office fireplace and hoped Hermione would be about. She worked night shifts at St. Mungo's and kept very odd hours.

"Harry?" Hermione's sleepy face appeared.

"Oh, did I wake you?"

"I was just dozing on the couch. It's not a problem. Is there anything wrong?"

"Yes. That Malfoy boy."

"Oh, you're not still having problems with him, are you?" she asked anxiously, padding over to the far side of the kitchen and beginning to prepare a hot chocolate.

"Yes. He walked out of class today, then bailed me up in the corridor and started calling Penelope Clearwater a bitch."

Hermione's expression didn't change as she idly poured some milk into a mug. Harry was suspicious.

"You don't think she's a bitch, is she?"

"Oh, Harry...it's just...Neville pops in sometimes, and the things he's told me...well, she's not a bitch, just a little...unprepared. She's not used to troublemakers. She's used to quiet little university Muggles, scribbling down everything she says without question. She's really not suited to teach children such as Malfoy."

"I suppose."

"She gets very stressed, Neville tells me. Starts yelling at Malfoy, getting impatient with him, shouting and giving him enormous amounts of detentions."

"What sort of detention?" Harry said ominously, an image of Umbridge suddenly in his mind. Hermione shook her head quickly.

"Oh, just organising old files and the like. But quite unnecessary, Neville thinks. She doesn't know how to handle him." Hermione paused, looking at his downcast expression. "You know, Harry...you could always discuss any behavioural problems with his parents."

Harry stared.

"Oh, Hermione. I do *not* want to go there."

"Alright, your call," Hermione shrugged, but Harry thought he detected a note of unhappiness.

"I don't particularly care, anyway," Harry snapped. "The little troll can go Avada Kedavra himself, for all I care."

But the words sounded empty even to him.

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Chapter: 5

However, Scorpius redeemed himself directly after Friday's class. He had been particularly quiet and alert, volunteering several answers for the first time ever. As the class was dismissed, Scorpius approached Harry.

"Oh, Scorpius, you were very good in class today. But you're still not getting out of tonight's detention," Harry warned, packing up his books.

"Yeah, I know sir, I just wanted to say I'm sorry about Tuesday."

"Tuesday?" What happened Tuesday? Scorpius had been the usual git. Nothing different.

"Yeah, sir. I didn't mean to piss you off, sir. Or say you were like Clearwater, sir, you're nothing like her. You're real nice. You give me good marks."

"Good marks?" Harry said, bewildered.

"Yeah, sir, you gave me a pass," Scorpius said excitedly. "And you told me my Grindylow shit was good."

"Your Grindylow *information* was good."

"That's what I said, sir," Scorpius said dismissively. "Anyway, thanks sir. That was really nice of you."

"You're welcome," Harry said, bewildered. "Although I didn't give you the grade because I'm nice. I gave you a passable grade because you did passable work."

"Yeah, okay," Scorpius said before Leo bounded up beside him, out of breath and grinning dangerously.

"Scorpius, the Slytherin boys have taken over our corner in the courtyard again!"

"The fuckers!"

"*Scorpius!*" Harry said, outraged, but Scorpius was already racing around the corner, parchment and quills flying. And he didn't know why but Harry found himself trying to stifle a smile.

Harry liked Mondays.

He had his seventh year class which he had to admit he adored. They were quiet, hardworking and serious. They had their NEWTs and they knew they had to work hard for a good future. They lacked the drama of the sixth and fifth years, the immaturity of the fourth and thirds, the irritating over-enthusiasm of the second and firsts.

They were currently holding their practical lessons, in which the seventh-years were doing an amazing job. Harry was impressed.

"You need to raise your wand a little higher, Robinson. The Expecto Patronum charm will prove very ineffective if the wand movement is lacking. Viney, you need to really put a bit more effort in. The Expecto Patronum requires mental effort as well as physical effort. Concentrate!"

Gwen Thwistle gave a tiny cry as a silvery owl swooped from her wand.

"Oh, sir, I did it! A corporeal Patronus! I'm so happy!"

"Keep being happy, then," Harry laughed. "That's the key." He continued walking around the room. Nearly everyone had a Patronus by this point, although some were not producing anything. At the end of the class he noted their downcast faces and tried to inject some encouragement into the lesson.

"Don't worry if you're still having difficulty. You're all doing a wonderful job. Some professors I know still can't produce Patronuses so everyone here is doing extremely well just for getting this far. Remember Christmas break is in just a couple of months and it would be great if you could add in some extra practice and all be able to produce a Patronus by next year."

They beamed at him. Harry couldn't help thinking, guiltily, that they really were his favourite class.

On Friday, Harry decided to set a task: his English students had to write a letter home.

"I dunno 'bout no letters," one of the Slytherins grunted. However Leo seemed excited about it whilst Scorpius was indifferent.

"My parents write all the time, but I never reply 'cause I'm too busy. It's real nice of you to put the lesson aside," Leo told Harry. Harry couldn't be bothered explaining it *was* actually a lesson. Besides, it was better if they all just assumed they were slacking off. He rolled his eyes as he

walked around the room.

"How's your letter going, Miller?"

"It's private, sir!" Miller said, shooting his arm across his paper. Harry stifled a smile.

"Of course. If you need any assistance, just call out."

"That's alright sir, I'll get you to read through it after I've finished," Miller said earnestly. Harry struggled not to laugh.

"Alright. Yes, Webb, what is it?" Harry asked a frowning Slytherin.

"How do you spell 'squid', sir?"

"Er...s-q-u-i-d..." Harry said.

"Oh, great. Thanks. And what about 'grapefruit'?"

Harry spelt it out for him. Ask no questions, he told himself. You probably don't want to know.

"Alright, time's nearly up," Harry called and Miller hurriedly presented his letter. Harry sighed and set about introducing the full stop to the parchment whilst Scorpius tried to shove Miller out of the way.

"My letter now, sir, I gotta go, come on, it's nearly four..."

"Patience is a virtue," Harry said, carefully adding an apostrophe.

"What's a virtue?" Scorpius asked.

"I heard it's a venereal disease," Leo told him. Harry snorted and they looked at him.

"What, sir?"

"Oh, nothing. Malfoy, hand over your letter."

"Finally!" Scorpius hastily threw it down; Harry examined it briefly.

*Hey Dad, I hope you are well I am well everything is real nice. I got into quidditch which is wicked, im the chasser the captin says I have real good aim. I do alright to in class I got my assinemunt back from my defence teacher, I past and he says I write good about gryndilows. Anyway Im sorry I didn't reply to youre letters sooner, you know I hate my letters but my defence teacher, he real nice and given me extra lessins. Anyway I got to go coz I got quidditch training witch is fun.*

*From Scorpius.*

"A very nice letter. I'm sure your father will be very happy to receive it."

"He better be," Scorpius said. "He knows I hate writing."

"I think he'll be very impressed," Harry said, handing it back to him. "I've circled all your mistakes. Make sure you re-write it out nicely and send it out."

"Oh, sir, I don't want to copy it out again! Can't I just send it out?"

"No. Re-write it. And congratulations on your Quidditch title."

"Oh, thanks sir. I've got my first match tomorrow, on Saturday," Scorpius said. "Clearwater gave me a detention and said I couldn't go to Quidditch but I'll be playing anyway. It's real important I think."

"Yes," Harry said. "Quidditch is important. But it's quite irresponsible of you to get a detention on the day of your match. I'm sure you'll get into a lot of trouble about it."

"Yeah, but -"

"And I'm sure your team will be disappointed."

"I guess," Scorpius mumbled.

"It's alright," Harry said. "I know how it is. I used to play."

"I know, sir. My captain, Creevey, she says you were the best. She said you were the world's best seeker and you were a wicked captain too."

"Creevey?"

"Yeah, sir. Francis Creevey. She says her brothers were in Gryffindor and they used to go to all your matches and write home about it."

"Oh. Well, good luck on Saturday," Harry said, recovering from the nasty surprise.

"Thanks, sir." With that, Scorpius sped away, his letter crumpled in one hand and something which looked suspiciously like a Weasley Wizarding Wheeze in the other.

Harry had qualms about the match. Scorpius had a short attention span, a quick temper and a slightly vengeful streak. Harry wouldn't put it past him to cheat or beat his way out of a mess. He

could already see the outcries...

But it did go smoothly. It seemed to be a particularly rough game of Quidditch; the two Bludgers constantly and narrowly missed players and Scorpius was tumbled around by gusty winds, once slamming into another player accidentally. To Harry's surprise despite a bloody nose Scorpius just zoomed away, giving his nose a quick wipe on his sleeve and arriving just in time to nab the Quaffle from underneath an opposing Chaser's hand. He passed it to a teammate who managed to score a goal.

However, there were more surprises . The timid Topham-Viney girl was the Slytherin seeker and she was an excellent one. She was a very thin, lanky and delicate-looking student and Harry thought that did not bode well. Seekers were, traditionally, short in stature but sturdy, whereas she looked as though one gust would be enough for her to tumble from her broom. Yet she clung on firmly, gazing around the pitch and at other players and the match ended when, to Harry's surprise, she put up a spirited fight against the opposing seeker although she failed to beat them to the snitch. She used better techniques to turn the wind to her advantage but the Gryffindor seeker was more confident and far more at ease on his broom.

Harry rose and cheered with the rest, but had to leave regrettably early. It was his day off, and he promised Hermione he would meet her in Diagon Alley.

"So, how's teaching, Professor?" Hermione teased him as he laughed and idly browsed the apothecary.

"It's good. I love my seventh-years. They're the ideal class."

"And what happened to 'oh, I'll never be able to do it'?"

Harry just laughed and measured out a kilo of Gillyweed. His Grindylows always wanted more food and he wondered how to sell them off to somebody else.

"How are the rest of the teachers?" Hermione asked lightly.

"Yeah, alright."

"What about Wanda Westbrook?"

Harry frowned and rifled through his memories. Wanda Westbrook. Wasn't she that busy little Arithmancy teacher?

"Alright, I suppose," he said slowly, bringing his purchases to the counter and handing over some galleons. If Hermione was going to play matchmaker, he was not going to make it easy.

"She's an old friend of mine."

"You never mentioned her," Harry said dubiously.

"Oh, well. You know. Ooh, there's a new display in Flourish and Blotts!" Hermione exclaimed, wandering out of the apothecary and blinking in the light. "Anyway, she's expecting a little boy in March. Isn't that wonderful?"

"I guess." Harry was getting more and more confused, giving Hermione odd looks as she peered into the window of Flourish and Blotts.

"There's a new edition of *Shadowcatcher: Fighting With Light* out, Harry, you should really get that. You need to be ahead in Defence texts."

"Yeah...so, Westbrook is expecting?" Harry prompted her.

"Oh, yes. She'll be off for maternity leave soon. By Christmas, I'd say."

"Oh. And this has to do with me, because...?" Harry asked, absently following Hermione into the bookshop and accepting a book she passed to him.

"Well, let's just say you'll be seeing a familiar face soon!" Hermione winked.

"A familiar face? What are you talking about? Hermione!" Harry called but she was gone, disappearing into the crowded Fiction section.

He sighed.

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Chapter: 6

"I heard Westbrook is starting her maternity leave next week," Neville observed, buttering some toast.

"Yes, Hermione mentioned it to me," Harry muttered. "Any idea of the substitute teacher?"

"None so far." Neville raised his voice slightly over the noise of the breakfasting students. "Why, did Hermione drop a clue?"

"She said I should be expecting a 'familiar face'."

Neville shrugged, raising his eyebrows. "No idea, Harry. Maybe one of the old Gryffindors?

Dean or Seamus?"

"I don't think so, did they study Arithmancy at all?"

"Not that I recall," Neville admitted and steadily stacked his plate with bacon as the morning owls swooped down. Harry watched the students opening their parcels and letters excitedly. Topham-Viney had a large parcel which Harry assumed was a congratulatory gift from her parents for Saturday's match – despite the fact she'd lost. A few feet away, Leo was opening his usual bundle of letters and treats from his doting parents and his mass of siblings. Scorpius too had a parcel from home – most unusual. He generally received the odd letter or two from home, which he never opened or read at the table.

"Looks like Malfoy's spoiling his kid. Like father, like child," Neville laughed, apparently also observing the students opening their mail. Harry and Neville watched as Scorpius pulled out a large collection of Honeydukes sweets, much to the interest of Leo and Teddy who instantly began pleading for a chocolate or two. Scorpius looked very smug, holding the parcel tightly to his chest and grinning widely and happily.

"Oh, not that spoilt," Harry admonished Neville. "That's the first parcel he's received from home."

Neville just laughed and shook his head. "I'm glad you have his class first today," he told Harry. "I bet you he'll be scoffing down those sweets and not listening to a word you say."

"Cheers," Harry said dryly.

On Friday, Scorpius approached Harry in the middle of their class. Harry had set them to a task which involved recognising common grammar mistakes and surprisingly they had quietly accepted the work and gotten on with it.

"Sir?"

Harry looked up in surprise.

"Yes, Malfoy?"

"Sir, I was wondering if you could help me write another letter."

"Another?" Harry asked, amazed.

"Yeah, sir. See, my dad was real happy with my last letter, he said my writing was real good and he said he was proud of me and said if I keep at it, he'll buy me a new broom," Scorpius said excitedly. Harry felt a sudden rush of – well, almost friendliness – towards Malfoy. He had expected Malfoy to either spoil his son or just ignore him completely but it appeared that he did

actually care for his son, and wanted him to work towards goals. To actually *earn* things.

"Well, alright," Harry said. "But you've got to finish this task first."

"I have, sir."

"I saw you, you just copied out Webb's answers. Now go do it again."

"Oh, sir," Scorpius said unhappily but Harry just laughed at his disappointed expression and Scorpius retreated.

At the end of the class Scorpius approached Harry with a bit of blank parchment.

"Alright, what should I write?"

"Whatever you want to, Malfoy. It's your letter," Harry said, taken aback. "Just update your father on news, tell him about your life. Like you did last time."

"Yeah, but last time I wasn't writing a reply. How do you write a reply? Here, read Dad's letter and tell me." Scorpius held out a badly folded letter; Harry politely refused.

"Scorpius, I can't read your mail."

"Why not?"

"It's private," Harry tried.

"No it's not, I want you to read it. Tell me what to write back," Scorpius said.

"Scorpius, it would be unethical."

"You said you'd help!" Scorpius yelled and Harry could see he was getting frustrated and angry.

"Alright, alright," Harry said quickly, taking the letter and scanning it. He wished he'd never thought of this stupid letter-writing idea!

*Hi Scorpius,*

*Thank you for your letter, it's good hearing what you're up to at Hogwarts. It reminds me of the good (and bad) times I spent at school. I didn't know you could write letters so well!*

*Congratulations on your match too, I knew you'd win. I'm really proud you made the team –I bet you'll go on to win the Quidditch cup too.*

*It's good that school is going well – remember that your education is important and focus on it. An education is everything. I'm glad you're getting along with your teachers at last and things are going more smoothly – keep at it and I promise you, you'll have a Firebolt 1000 for Christmas.*

The letter ended there without a sign-off, and Harry thought Malfoy sounded well-rehearsed at writing letters to his son. He had kept long words to a minimum, written in short sentences and had made it straightforward and encouraging.

"Well," Harry said, "maybe you should write back asking him about what it was like when he was at school, maybe."

"Yeah, alright, he's pretty cool like that," Scorpius said. "Doesn't ramble on like stupid old people."

"Er. Yes. Then maybe talk about your match, describe it," Harry said, and Scorpius jumped excitedly on that.

"Yeah! That's a wicked idea, sir, I like that."

"Good. Then maybe mention something positive about school. Another good mark you received, or something."

"Yeah, maybe," Scorpius said dismissively, before picking up his quill and writing excitedly whilst Harry began organising his folders and old essays. Twenty minutes later, Scorpius handed him the reply.

"What do you think, sir?"

*Hi Dad,*

*What did you get up to when you were at school? I bet you weren't as bad as I was I know I'm really bad sometimes sorry, about all that crap the Darmstrung teachers use to give you about me.*

*Anyway I drewed you a wicked pictcher of the match, I was going to describe it but its real hard and I'm no good with words.*

*Also I passed my defence test on Monday, my teacher says ive got lots of enthuseiasm I just need to hone my techneques. He talks a bit flash like that sometimes but hes alright, hes played quidditch too did you know, he was seeker and captin! Hes wicked cool.*

*From Scorpius.*

"Good, good effort," Harry said, examining the Quidditch illustration. It wasn't spectacular but it

was a decent picture and Harry supposed he should just be grateful Scorpius had bothered. "You need a little more work with your commas but it's good. Your spelling is really improving."

"I'm going to get that Firebolt," Scorpius said determinedly, replacing his father's letter in its envelope. "You'll see."

"I'm sure you will. Remember to copy the letter out again," Harry said, sliding Scorpius's reply across the desk. "I'm sure your father doesn't want a letter with red ink all over it."

"Yeah, thanks sir."

"You're welcome."

Harry wondered what Draco Malfoy would think if he knew Harry Potter was not only reading his letters but helping his son write replies.

"...I want to congratulate you all on your fantastic test results. Now we're approaching Christmas break and I appreciate the festive silliness, but please take the animated reindeer spell off Dobson or I'll ban you from the Weasley Wizarding Wheezes, alright Williams?"

"You can't ban me from a store!" protested Williams whilst a glowering Dobson tugged uselessly at the antlers growing from his elbows.

"Oh yes I can."

"No, you can't," Williams repeated, rolling his eyes.

"We'll see about that," Harry said, sighing and trying to think of a possible counter-curse, although knowing Ron and George, there was probably absolutely nothing to be done but wait out the humiliation. He could see Teddy grinning at him from behind his textbook. The little git! He'd clearly had something to do with it. Harry knew that at some point all the time Teddy spent with the Weasleys was going to have an influence. "Alright, now we've just about wrapped up our Dark creatures unit so we'll be moving off onto the Dark objects soon," he went on, glaring at Teddy.

There was a sharp knock at the door; Harry turned and saw McGonagall standing there.

"Yes, Professor?" he asked politely. "What can I do for you?"

"I need a word with Malfoy."

"Oh." Harry glanced around the classroom and spotted Scorpius up the back, having quill wars with Leo. He coughed loudly. "Malfoy? *Malfoy*! Professor McGonagall needs you for a moment. You may be excused."

"I didn't do it!" Scorpius said instantly, spotting McGonagall. "It was those stupid Slytherins -"

"You can explain elsewhere, Malfoy," McGonagall said crisply. "I'm sure Professor Potter doesn't need any more interruptions."

They departed and Leo looked goggle-eyed at the empty doorway, muttering to Teddy about something. Harry cleared his throat and went on. "Please, concentrate. Now, our final study of Dark creatures will finish with the study of the Mawklyn."

Somebody's hand shot up.

"What, Mancini?"

"Can I have a lavatory pass?"

"No, you may not," Harry growled.

"But I really need to go!" Leo protested, the class snickering.

"Mancini, I'm certain the second I hand over that pass, you're going to race off to McGonagall's office. I'm sure Malfoy can handle it himself. Now sit down and be quiet."

"Oh, sir, you're cruel, sir," Leo said, with tragic eyes.

"Only to little toerags like you," Harry shot back irritably before he could help himself. The class laughed and Leo looked around at them before laughing himself.

"Yeah, sir, sorry, sir," Leo grinned.

"No, I'm sorry," Harry said, feeling remorseful. He knew he shouldn't have snapped.

"Nah, you're alright sir. I know it's hard sometimes, teaching us," Leo said, as the class nodded their approval. "Gets a bit much, eh?"

Harry instantly forgave him all the mischief he had ever caused and had to stop himself giving fifty points to Gryffindor.

Things only got better. At the next class, Williams's hand shot up.

"Sir, you didn't really owl Weasley's, did you?"

"Yes."

"Because they refused my order, and said not to give you cheek!" Williams waved a letter around; the class roared with cheers and laughter.

"Good on you, sir!"

"You're wicked, sir!"

"Good job, Professor!"

The class milled around Williams, examining the letter and laughing uproariously; quite unembarrassed, Williams laughed along with them. The class looked at Harry with renewed respect.

"Anyone else trying to sneak in Weasley's merchandise will suffer the same fate," Harry warned them and they beamed up at him innocently.

"Wouldn't dream of it, sir."

"Yeah, sir, we do it to other professors all the time sir, but not you, sir."

"Yeah, last week someone let off fireworks in Professor Clearwater's class, sir. Dead funny."

Ah. So that was the little mid-class summons that Scorpius had received. He'd have to keep an eye on him.

"Alright. Enough chat," Harry said sternly. "Let's start on Dark objects. I have here two Dark objects and one normal object. Williams! Which one is the normal one?"

"Oh, sir, it's, uh, sir, it's..." Williams eyed the objects mistrustfully. "Well, sir, that music box, I don't like the look of that, sir. I bet it plays some creepy little tinkly tune. And I don't like the look of that necklace, sir, jewellery's always a bit dicey, isn't it? Probably got some ancient curse. So I'd say it's the manchette, sir."

"If you were to touch that manchette, Williams, it would strangle you on the spot."

Williams went an odd greenish colour.

"It's the jewellery," Harry announced. "The necklace is just your ordinary, run-of-the-mill jewellery. Muggle-made. Semi-precious stones. But believe it or not, you can actually tell Dark objects – with a trained eye, of course. Which is what I'm here for. I'm also going to teach you about recognising and using defensive objects. What's this, for example?"

"Oh, that's a Sneakoscope!"

"Very good, Lupin! Ten points to Gryffindor. Ten points to the next person who can tell me what

its use is."

To his surprise, Scorpius called out.

"To see if people are sneaking up on you, sir!"

"Excellent, ten points to Gryffindor."

"That's not fair, sir," a Ravenclaw piped up. "He probably just guessed from the name, that was an easy answer."

"I did not!" Scorpius yelled. "Take that back, you stupid tosser!"

"Alright, let's just calm down. I asked a question and Malfoy answered it. There shouldn't be an issue," Harry said mildly. "And Malfoy, I'm going to have to deduct five points from you now."

"Oh, sir, why, sir?" Scorpius asked unhappily.

"I've already told you our policy on name-calling."

"Yeah, serves you right Malfoy," sneered a Slytherin. Scorpius said nothing, then looked at Harry expectantly.

"Sir, I didn't call him a name. Can I get my points back for not calling him a name?"

"I'll give you one point," Harry laughed. The Slytherin's hand shot up.

"Sir, what about me? Just then, I didn't call him a name."

"Clark, if I gave you a point for every time you didn't call someone a name, Slytherin would be ahead by five hundred points."

"Oh, but sir -"

"Come on," Harry laughed. "Let's get on with it, shall we? The first thing about any chosen Dark object is that it's active. Wizards and witches rarely place curses within inactive objects. For example, paintings are rarely cursed because they are not handled often. Malfoy and Mancini, stop chatting please. The most commonly cursed objects are jewellery, books and furniture. Things people use constantly and things that they will come into direct contact with." Harry became aware of people discreetly shifting and packing up their bags quietly.

"Alright, I appreciate that you're all impatient for lunch, so I'll let you go. Remember you have your third assignment due this week, and I will accept absolutely no excuses. Especially from you, Mancini."

The class filed out, chatting and busy. Scorpius seemed to be taking an age; Harry sorted through his papers and glanced up briefly.

"Can I help you, Malfoy?"

"It's about my assignment, sir. I really want to make an Acceptable."

"Oh." Harry checked his watch. "Well, listen, if you do the best job you can and make a rough draft, I promise I'll look through it on Friday and show you what you need to do to lift the standard, alright?"

"Yeah, alright. Thanks, sir." Scorpius turned to the door then stopped. Harry looked up at him, frowning, and glanced at the doorway.

Draco Malfoy was standing there.

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Chapter: 7

"Malfoy?" Harry said incredulously.

"You know my dad?" Scorpius asked, staring at him.

"Yeah, he -" Harry began but Draco cut quickly over the top of him.

"Lucas Malfoy." Draco offered his hand quickly, his eyes unreadable. Harry frowned. "I'm sorry, you must be mistaking me for someone else."

"Um..." Harry wavered for a moment, then gave up. "Yes, my apologies. Professor Potter." He shook Draco's hand quickly, firmly. He expected Draco to try and crush his hand, but he did nothing, just smiled politely. Harry was at a loss. *Lucas* Malfoy? What was Draco playing at? "Can I help you at all, Mr Malfoy?"

"I'm meeting McGonagall in her office at half-three," Draco replied. "I arrived early and thought I heard my son's dulcet tones on my way through."

Harry tried not to stare. "I'm meeting McGonagall at four. To discuss Scorpius's progress."

"I told her I didn't fucking do it, sir, it's that Clearwater, sir, she's got it in for me," Scorpius said hotly, following them down the corridor. "That fucking firecracker shit – she doesn't know how to have a fucking laugh, sir -"

"Language, Malfoy," Harry said coolly.

"Oh, sorry sir, I forget sir. Hey, sir, I really liked your lesson, it was great, I reckon it could've been better though," Scorpius said mischievously.

"Oh? How so?" Harry said, smiling.

"You should've let Williams get that manchette, sir."

Harry laughed; Scorpius grinned. "Somehow I don't think I would have kept my job if I did that."

"Oh, sir, I'd let you."

"Well, thank you, Scorpius."

"You're welcome, sir."

Harry chanced a glance at Draco but he was looking straight ahead, looking unhappy. Harry wondered what Scorpius had done this time. Something big, to have his father called in.

They reached McGonagall's office and she called Draco in, smiling.

"Ah, now. Potter, you may escort Scorpius out."

"Why?" Scorpius demanded. "It's not fair. I'm not leaving."

"Malfoy," McGonagall snapped warningly and he raged all the way out the door, standing outside the office and kicking at the wall as Harry gently shut the door behind them, setting off down the corridor to mark his papers. He was surprised to find that when four o'clock rolled around and he made his way back to the office, Scorpius was still slumped outside McGonagall's door looking morose. Harry ignored him, knocking quietly.

"Enter," McGonagall called and Harry stepped into her office. He was surprised to find Draco still there. Harry took a seat, the furthest possible from the other man, and looked to McGonagall expectantly.

"Now," she said, adjusting her spectacles. "I apologise for cutting into your time, Potter, but -"

"Problems with Scorpius?" Harry asked. McGonagall sighed.

"As I was saying to Mr Malfoy, Scorpius has become rather difficult in class. He refuses to hand in assignments, frequently disrupts class, derides other students often and delights in vandalism. One of our professors was severely shaken by an apparent 'prank' last week, Potter. Despite discussions, he refuses to behave."

"What are you saying?" Harry asked.

"Well," McGonagall said, shuffling some parchment around. "Having just been over several alternative options with Mr Malfoy, none of which we both agree on," she paused, "perhaps we should consider placing him back on his ADHD medication. Frankly, he's becoming a nightmare. I can handle the silliness, the misbehaviour, but I won't have my professors being scared for their safety. And there's no point teaching a student who does not want to learn."

"He wants to learn," Harry spoke up earnestly. They both turned to stare at him. "Only five minutes ago he asked me to assist with an assignment. He told me he wants to receive good marks."

"Well," McGonagall said, "I have to say that's just one exception in many cases. I really think placing him back on his medication is the best move to make. As his parent, Mr Malfoy, you need to authorise his medications. And Potter, as Head of House you need to be aware of this and any issues which arise from it."

Draco sat for a moment, apparently considering things. Then he shrugged. "Put him back on the potions," he said tiredly, and Harry felt a sudden stab of pity for him. McGonagall leant back.

"Very well. Potions it is. Madame Pomfrey assessed him last week and contacted his Healer."

"Yes, the Healer and I have discussed it," Draco nodded.

"We'll need you to sign the medical documents."

"Of course," Draco said, accepting a quill from McGonagall and signing the roll of parchment she slid across the desk. Harry watched, staring at Draco's signature, written in a strong and graceful script but, surprisingly, without flourish.

"Thankyou, Mr Malfoy. I apologise for the inconvenience."

"It's not a problem," Draco said quietly, shaking her hand and standing up. Harry got up after him, nodding at McGonagall and following Draco out the door. Scorpius leapt up.

"What's going on? You were in there ages. Hey Dad, what's happening?"

"You're going back on your potions."

To Harry's surprise, Scorpius let out a howl of outrage.

"No fucking way!" he screamed, launching himself at his father, who brushed him off. "No! No! I'm not going back on them! No! You can't make me! I hate you!" he shouted, trying to grab at Draco. "I fucking hate you! I'm not going back on them! Fuck you!"

Draco simply ignored him, walking on until Scorpius fell back.

"I'm not coming home for Christmas! You hear me? I'll go – I'll go – live with Professor Potter!"

"I don't think so," Harry said hastily. "And you shouldn't talk to your father like that. He's just trying to do the best thing for you."

Scorpius glared at him. "Fuck you too then, sir! I hate both of you!"

"Detention. You will not speak to me like that."

"You can go shove your detention, sir -"

"Twenty points from Gryffindor," Harry said calmly, walking past him and leaving a screaming Scorpius in the corridor. He strode easily and found himself level with Draco. They walked in silence for a moment, then –

"Fuck me, what a little hellraiser," Harry said, exhaling loudly.

Draco looked at him. There was a long pause.

Then he started laughing.

"You're the first person to ever tell me that, Potter," Draco told him as they stood outside Hogwarts; they had managed to laugh all the way to the gates.

"Yeah, well. Someone's got to."

"You don't seem to hate him that much though," Draco said, his face unreadable.

"He's alright."

"You must have known he was my son."

"Yes," Harry said simply.

"I was watching the lesson," Draco said. "I found it fairly interesting."

"Yeah, well, Dark objects are your specialty, aren't they?" Harry said.

Draco looked at him for a long moment, standing there in the snow. The sky was already darkening, their breath coming out in white puffs.

"I don't think so," Draco said after a moment. "I never really knew that much about them, as it turned out."

With that he walked away into the shadowy hills, his hands deep in his pockets, leaving Harry alone by the gates.

"Harry!"

He had just entered the front doors of Hogwarts and was brushing snow from his shoulders, considering giving dinner a miss. He glanced up absently, then stared.

"Ginny?"

"Oh, Harry, it's wonderful to see you!" She looked beautiful, as always. Her long, copper-coloured hair shone and her freckles danced as she smiled, her brown eyes shining with happiness. "You'll never believe it, Harry, I'm taking over for Professor Westbrook!"

"That's...good, Ginny. That's really...congratulations."

Ginny laughed then swooped forwards and gave him a brief hug. For a moment he felt the softness of her robes, the warmth of her arms and the lovely perfume she always wore. Then she stepped back, smiling. "It's just wonderful, Harry, I never thought I'd land this job, not in a million years. And now I'm the youngest professor! Come to claim your title," she laughed, winking at him, but he could only dredge up a tight smile.

"Yeah, that's great, Ginny. Really good."

"Shall we go in?" Ginny asked eagerly. "They'll announce me at the Feast tonight. It's all so exciting!"

"Er...you know what, I'm not really that hungry." The encounter with Draco had startled Harry and he thought it was quite enough for one night. Ginny, however, had other ideas.

"Don't be silly, Harry, you simply must be there! I'd feel so much better with a few familiar faces, just come in and have a bite!"

"Um, I'm really tired -"

"Don't be ridiculous, it's only five. Come on!"

"Ginny -"

"Oh, it's just how I remembered it, it's absolutely gorgeous!" Ginny said, striding into the Great Hall.

"Just how you remembered it?" Harry repeated. It wasn't how he remembered it. He remembered bloodstains and screams and desperate faces. He remembered Neville screaming with a circle of flame over his eyes. He remembered Draco slumped against a wall, realising Crabbe had died in the horrific Fiendfyre. He remembered Hagrid carrying him, sobbing, to the castle grounds. He remembered Remus Lupin's cold, pale body lying in this very hall.

"...absolutely wonderful, oh, look at that beautiful ceiling! I'd nearly forgotten. It's been how many years? I've honestly lost count. Oh, where am I sitting? I can't believe I'll actually be up at the old staff table...it all feels so peculiar..."

"I have to go," Harry mumbled, pulling away from her and walking quickly through the doors, ignoring her calling after him.

Harry patrolled the castle at lunch, keeping students out of mischief. It was cold and snowing out; the winter had come early and forced students to stay inside and get bored quickly. And a bored student did not bode well. He sighed as he spotted the Slytherins and Gryffindors squabbling in a corridor.

"I know that's my quill, Webb, you nicked it from me yesterday!"

"Why don't you come and get it then, eh?"

"Give it back or we'll duel you."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah! Right here, right now!"

"Oh dear," somebody whispered near Harry. "What's going on?"

"Oh, they're just having a little row," Harry said. "Just ignore it. Someone'll make a few vague threats, then they'll all pretend they heard the bell sound and wander off."

"How atrocious," Ginny said. "It could escalate!"

"But it won't," Harry pointed out.

"Isn't that Malfoy's boy?"

"Oh, did Ron tell you...?" Harry asked.

"Don't worry, I know sensitivity is needed. I'll sort it out," Ginny said, striding over and speaking loudly. "Alright, what's going on?"

They all looked sullenly at each other and refused to answer her.

"I think I know," Ginny said, putting an arm around Scorpius. He looked horrified. "Picking on this little fellow, are you? Having a bit of a go at him because of his dad?"

They all looked confusedly at each other. Scorpius tried in vain to escape but he was firmly clamped to Ginny's side.

"Well, I think we shouldn't be so quick to judge. It's alright," Ginny said in a motherly tone to Scorpius. "I'll see to it that you aren't bothered again."

Scorpius shot off a reply that was, thankfully, muffled by Ginny's robes. She beamed. "Now, let's all get along, shall we? No more picking on poor little chaps like Malfoy here, right?"

"Yeah, right, miss," the boys grinned, nudging each other.

"Good. Now how about you all run along to the library and study together?" Ginny said brightly, releasing Scorpius and striding off. The boys howled with laughter, pointing at the humiliated Scorpius who was instantly outraged.

"Fuck off all of you, you stupid bastards! And thanks for nothing, Leo!" he said, rounding on his friend.

"What was I s'posed to do?" Leo tried, but Scorpius was having none of it and the next second a fight broke out. Harry quickly strode over.

"Alright, break it up or detention for everyone! Ten points from Gryffindor, ten from Slytherin. Quit with these stupid fights. It's just a bloody quill and you're not fooling anyone, Webb, I know that's Mancini's. Give it back," Harry snapped. Leo's father sent him novelty quills which Leo adored and Webb's claim to own the oversized, electric-blue quill was fooling nobody. "Go on, hand it back," Harry added irritably and Webb reluctantly handed it over. The boys had the grace to look ashamed, shuffling their feet around.

"Sorry sir."

"Sorry Professor."

"Good. Now you Slytherins, you can go north, and you Gryffindors go south. That's right. Different directions. Walk away from each other. And yes, I'll stand here until you both disappear from sight. Go on, split," Harry ordered and with last narrowed looks at each other they turned and walked away.

"What happened?" Ginny had arrived back, having finished dealing with a lovestruck couple in an abandoned classroom.

"Bit of a fight."

"See, it did escalate."

He sighed loudly.

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Chapter: 8

It was Scorpius's first day on his potions next week and Harry got to see the effect it had on him. He seemed a little quieter in class but otherwise unchanged.

"Alright, I've finished marking your assignments," Harry said, passing them out. Scorpius accepted his with a brief glance then cried out.

"Sir! I got an A!"

"*I* received an E," a Hufflepuff said a little pompously but Scorpius ignored him.

"Oh, sir, you're dead wicked, sir. I'm gonna tell McGonagall to give you a pay rise."

"That'd be nice," Harry laughed. "But I don't think it'll happen."

"Yeah, sir, dead true. You'll get an extra billion galleons a week."

Harry laughed, shaking his head. He noted Teddy glowing with satisfaction at his mark – an O. He knew Teddy would rather die than tell anyone though. He wouldn't want to risk being placed in the 'suck up' group with Dobson.

"Alright, let's get on with it. Anybody unhappy with their mark can discuss it with me afterwards. Now, continuing our introduction of Dark objects..."

The rest of the lesson passed without comment. Scorpius seemed to be particularly quiet, scribbling madly away. At the end of the lesson he approached Harry's desk and pushed a piece of parchment over the desk; what Harry had, very happily, assumed to be Scorpius's notes.

"It's a letter, Professor," he said. "To my Dad. I was hoping you could have a look."

"This is what you were writing all lesson?" Harry sighed.

"Yeah, sir."

Nevertheless, Harry examined it briefly.

*Hey Dad,*

*Thanks for your letter this morning, I'm sorry I got mad at you and I lied actually I do want to come home for cristmas I'm sorry I said all that shit.*

*Anyway quidditch is going really good, I got my next match next weekend its against ravenclaw which is annoying because they've got a real big chaser who looks like he could knock me of my broom but Leo says if he trys anything the Gryffindor boys will get together and kick his arse from here to Manchester.*

*Also I got an A this morning in defence. Potter's a dead nice teacher, I told him I'll get him a pay rise but he laughed and said he don't think he'll get one.*

*Anyway writt back soon coz I need to know bout cristmas break and all that shit.*

*From Scorpius.*

"This is wonderful, Scorpius," Harry said, smiling. "Barely a single spelling mistake, and you're getting very good with your apostrophes and capital letters."

"Thanks, sir."

"What about your mother?" Harry asked, suddenly realising guiltily that he'd never asked if Scorpius wanted to write a letter to his mother.

"Nah, sir, she's dead, sir."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"It's alright sir, she died ages ago. I can't remember her."

"That must have been horrible."

"Not really, she died when I was real little, I don't even remember her name."

"Oh."

"I asked Dad once but he got upset so I didn't ask again."

"Er. Right. Well, I'll, er, see you later, Scorpius."

"Yeah, cool sir, catch ya." And Scorpius was gone, leaving Harry sitting uncomfortably at his desk. Merlin, what an awkward, horrible conversation. Yet Scorpius had been so blasé about it, so uncaring.

He sighed and began collecting his papers, then frowned. Scorpius had left his textbook behind, a slip of parchment serving as a bookmark. From what Harry could see, it had beautiful and oddly familiar writing across it. Was it Scorpius's? Feeling slightly guilty, Harry took the parchment and scanned it quickly.

*I pray for the moon to forever wane*

*I plead for the stars to fade*

*I wish for the night to never return*

*I fear what the darkness has made.*

*I cry for the dawn to find me*

*I see it all fading, every last mark*

*Turn up the lights, make them burn bright*

*I don't want to go home in the dark.*

He frowned. It seemed to be a poem or a riddle. He stepped out into the corridor and spotted Scorpius at the end of the corridor, fooling around with Leo.

"Scorpius!"

"Alright, sir, I'm moving along," Scorpius called back, picking up his bag hastily. He often got in trouble for loitering between classes.

"No, I mean...come here, you left your textbook behind!"

"That's okay, I don't want it. Just kidding, sir," Scorpius said quickly and reluctantly mooched back towards the classroom.

"And you left this behind, too," Harry said, handing over the textbook and poem. "Did you write this yourself?"

"Ah, sir..." Scorpius said reluctantly before looking around. "You got to promise you won't tell."

"Alright."

"It's my Dad's, he wrote it for me. He used to sing it to me when I was real little," Scorpius said. "Like a lullaby, except not one coz I don't need no fucking lullabies, they're for babies and pansies."

"Yes, alright," Harry said hastily. "An interesting lulla – er, song."

"Nah, not that interesting. Makes sense, see. Makes perfect sense."

"Would you move it, we're late!" Leo hollered from his end of the corridor and Scorpius shot off.

Harry frowned.

*...I pray for the moon..*

Well, to the normal person it was just nonsense.

*...to forever wane...*

...to the normal person.

He stood for a moment, then raced to McGonagall's office.

"I know."

"You know?" Harry was incredulous. "You knew Scorpius was a werewolf when you enrolled him?"

"Potter," McGonagall said, "I thought you of all people would advocate the equal treatment of werewolves."

"Well – yes, I do – it's just – steps should be taken, precautions and -"

"And I've thought of it all, Potter," McGonagall said gently. "Rest assured I have discussed this with Scorpius and his father. A procedure is in place."

"Did his mother die from a werewolf?"

"Potter, that is confidential information. All you need to know is that the students' welfare is taken care of and Scorpius knows what to do."

"But he isn't really...the most reliable person."

"I can assure you, everything has been thought of."

"Are you using the Shrieking Shack?" Harry demanded.

"Potter, all you need to know is that the students are safe!" McGonagall said exasperatedly. "And you have a class in five minutes."

"I know, I just -"

"We have control over the situation, Potter. Please, prepare for class."

Defeated, Harry reached for the doorknob.

"And ensure this matter remains confidential," McGonagall said sharply.

"Of course!" Harry said, wounded, and slammed the door behind him.

"Harry!"

"Oh. Hi, Ginny."

"Are you alright?" Ginny looked at his pale face, struggling to keep up with him, dropping parchment and quills along the way.

"Yes, I just – I'm late for class," Harry snapped.

"Oh. Anyway, a bunch of teachers were thinking of heading to the Three Broomsticks on Saturday, I thought you might like to come along...?"

"Er..."

"It's for Professor's Mamble's fortieth birthday."

"Um...I don't really know her that well. Ginny, I've really got to go, I'll talk later, alright?"

"But – alright!" Ginny called after him reluctantly.

As he hurried into the classroom and began leading his seventh-years into a prac lesson, he wondered why he seemed so determined to avoid Ginny. After all, his social life currently consisted of floo'ing Hermione and Ron once a week and having the odd conversation with Neville between classes. It would be good for him to get out and catch up with Ginny. Certainly they'd had a long yet tumultuous relationship but they'd both moved on and he was comfortable being friends.

Wasn't he?

"I'm so glad you decided to come along." Ginny beamed and gave him another brief hug. "It's going to be so fun, I haven't been here since I was seventeen! Oh, doesn't the village just look beautiful with all the snow..."

Harry nodded his agreement, treading softly through the crisp snow and muddying it around the cobblestones. He didn't know what on earth possessed him to accept Ginny's invitation. He didn't even know this Professor. Perhaps they'd nodded to each other once or twice in the staffroom but that was it. He shifted uncomfortably as they entered The Three Broomsticks.

"Oh, Harry, look! It's Madame Rosmerta! Fancy her still being here after all this time. She still looks young as ever! How does she keep it up?"

She doesn't look young as ever, Harry thought privately. He could see the tiny wrinkles already forming around her smile and her eyes had an old look in them, a look that had not been there before the war. She would have been the earliest affected, being placed under Draco's Imperio. He sighed.

"Oh, still making eyes at her, are you Harry?" laughed Ginny. "Wait til I tell Ron she's still working here, I wonder if he still fancies her?"

"I think he's grown out of his schoolboy crushes," Harry said dryly but Ginny was already striding away, pulling out a chair and greeting the other professors with cheerful chatter. Harry liked that about Ginny, her naturalness, the way she laughed and smiled and made friends so easily. She was like a bright flame, vivid and forever youthful. Even had that same perfume she had used so many years ago at Hogwarts. It was like she was untouched, untainted by the past.

"...absolutely beautiful, isn't it Harry? We had a wonderful time walking down here. Oh, here's the birthday girl! I must shout you a drink."

"Oh, it's bad enough being forty," the unhappy birthday 'girl' sighed.

"Just wait til you reach fifty," Professor Grubbly-Plank said archly.

"Oh, don't! Don't even talk about it. Somebody get me a gin and tonic."

They laughed and ribbed her, Harry smiling awkwardly. He had nothing to say and nobody spoke to him; he lurked on the edges of conversations and wondered how much longer he'd have to hang around before he could politely excuse himself. Neville had the right idea, staying back at Hogwarts.

"...fantastic, absolutely fantastic!" Ginny was saying to Grubbly-Plank. "I remember our lessons, they were great."

"Oh, you've made me feel so old," Grubbly-Plank replied. "One of my students, now a

professor..."

"Oh, that wasn't my intention. Not at all. So, you've got Hagrid's old job, have you? How is he?"

"Off in France with that Maxime, from what I hear," Grubbly-Plank said crisply. "We had a bit of a send-off."

"Oh yes, I remember, there were a few notices in the paper." Ginny laughed.

"I'm just going out for some fresh air," Harry muttered. Ginny barely paused mid-chatter.

"Oh, alright. Don't catch a cold! Anyway, what you were saying, Wilhelmina?"

Harry manage to disentangle his chair from the surrounding ones and battle his way out the busy pub and into the still, calm night. He inhaled deeply, taking in the fresh air and glancing up at the white, cold stars overhead.

"Please don't tell me all the professors are in there getting drunk."

Harry jumped slightly, then looked around.

"What the bloody hell are you doing here?"

"Business," Draco replied. "Unlike you."

"Business?" Harry asked suspiciously, hit by the memory of Draco in Borgin and Burke's, perusing Dark things in shadowy corners. He narrowed his eyes.

"Yes. I work."

"You work," Harry said flatly.

"Yes. I have a bit of work in Aberdeen, thought I'd take a shortcut through here."

"Oh." Harry had absolutely nothing to say. Draco Malfoy, employed. He realised too that Draco was wearing Muggle clothes. Quite nice Muggle clothes, but Muggle clothes nevertheless. What on earth was the world coming to?

"I wish I hadn't."

"What?" Harry looked at him.

"I wish I hadn't come here."

"Yeah, it's horrible, isn't it?" Harry said automatically.

"God-awful. All this snow. Reminds me of the last winter I spent here," Draco murmured. Yes, thought Harry. Voldemort's puppet. You little weasel.

"Yeah. I don't like the snow either. It makes everything look...fake." Harry instantly wished the words back into his mouth but Draco just nodded.

"Puts a gloss over it."

"Buries the bloodstains," Harry agreed. Draco took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and charitably offered Harry one. "No thanks. And if you're going to smoke, don't do it downwind of me for Merlin's sake."

"Not one of those militant anti-smokers, are you?"

"Yes. Merlin knows why you're stupid enough to grow up surrounded by cancer warnings and gruesome pictures, then pick up a packet of smokes and start a habit."

"Alright, don't get your robes in a knot," Draco said warily. They stood in silence, Draco trying unsuccessfully to light his cigarette. "Got a light?"

Harry stared at him. "What? Are you a wizard or not?"

"I haven't got a wand," Draco said.

"Why not?"

"I lost it."

"You lost your wand?" Harry asked incredulously.

"Yes. Ten, eleven years ago."

"And you never got a new one?"

Draco just shrugged. Harry sighed and held the tip of his wand to Draco's cigarette; the tip shone a dull red, then transferred the glow to Draco's cigarette.

"Cheers."

They stood in silence, in darkness, in the snow. Through the glowing windows the pub, a cheer rose. Draco glanced briefly at the doorway.

"Fond memories."

Harry laughed, exhaling loudly. "Yeah. Fond memories. Madame Rosmerta's still there, if you want to say hello."

"I think she'd kill me."

"I can only hope."

Draco peered around the street, frowning.

"If you're looking for an ashbin, you won't find it," Harry said, turning to return to The Three Broomsticks.

"Hey, Potter," Draco said quickly; Harry paused.

"What?"

"Is Scorpius...is he happy in Gryffindor?"

"What? Oh, yeah. He's got a few friends. He's alright."

"He's alright," Draco repeated quietly. Then, louder, "Well, as long as he's happy."

"He's fine." Harry paused and Merlin knew what made him do it, but he glanced up at the sky for a moment, at the full, heavy moon still low in the sky. Draco frowned for a moment, following his glance.

Then Harry disappeared back into the happy cheer of the pub.

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Chapter: 9

"Oh, Harry! There you are!" Ginny laughed, reaching out and pulling a chair out for him. "I missed you." She observed his rosy complexion and shook her head. "I knew you'd get too cold out there. Give me your hands."

"Ginny -" protested Harry, but she picked up his left hand and rubbed it vigorously between her palms.

"See, they're absolutely freezing!" she laughed. "What on earth were you doing out there?"

"Just...looking around..."

"Yes, isn't it magical? The snow -"

*...puts a gloss over it*...Draco's serious, pointed face flashed through Harry's mind.

"- makes it look positively beautiful. Are you alright, Harry? You're being rather quiet."

"Hmm? Oh, I'm fine. Just a little...got a bit of a cold. You know, I think I'll head back now."

"Already?" Ginny said, pulling a face. "Well, let me walk you back, at least."

Despite Harry's gentlemanly refusal, she took him by the arm and led him outside, their feet crunching into the snow. Ginny's eyes glittered and her hair gleamed in the glow from the windows. Harry had to stop himself reaching out and touching it, feeling its softness.

"Just let me get my gloves on. Oh, isn't it cold! Christmas break is next week, isn't it? I bet you'll be glad for the break. Any plans?"

"Not yet," Harry said softly. They walked on in silence until Harry spoke.

"Ginny...doesn't it ever make you sad?"

"What?" Ginny asked, genuinely puzzled.

"Hogwarts. Hogsmeade. Don't you ever see the bloodstains?"

"Harry, what are you talking about? There's no bloodstains." Ginny took his hand, fumbling in her gloves. "There's no bloodstains." She said it as though telling a frightened child there were no monsters. As if they were just a nightmare, to be wished away by a comforting light and a firm voice.

"There's no bloodstains," Harry repeated quietly, staring at her. "No Battle. No bloodstains."

"Battle? Harry, the Battle was a long time ago." Ginny smiled, shaking her head; flakes of snow drifted gently through the copper strands. "And now there's a beautiful sky and beautiful stars and everything is beautiful." She was close now, looking up at him through her clear brown eyes.

And he let her kiss him.

*Everything is beautiful.*

It was, to Ginny. So untouched by everything around her. No bloodstains on her robes, no screams in her ears, no dirt on her hands, no curses on her lips. She was perfect.

Harry wasn't perfect and he knew that. He was far from perfect. Every time he opened his eyes, the bodies arced through the air like falling stars. Their hair flew like ribbons, their eyes wide as glittering coins, the pupils dark as night. Harry heard the bones and hearts break. There was a sadness in him that Ginny could never reach.

That's what he knew when he kissed her lips. That's what he saw when he looked into her eyes. Nothing but joy and loveliness.

And blissful, blissful ignorance.

He planned to spend the Christmas break catching up with assignments and doing his lesson plans. Ginny objected loudly.

"Harry, you must come celebrate Christmas with us! You've spent nearly *every* Christmas with us. It's a tradition," Ginny begged.

"I'm fine, Ginny. I'm happy here."

"Nobody wants to spend their Christmas in a great big empty castle," Ginny admonished. "You'll only get that mopey look on your face and stare into space for a week."

"Well, sometimes I like being alone and staring into space."

"Nobody likes to be alone for Christmas," Ginny objected.

"Well, I do."

"Harry!" Ginny laughed pleadingly. "Come on, I really want us to have another Weasley Christmas..."

"What do you mean, us?"

"Don't tell me that kiss meant nothing to you," Ginny said. "I know what it meant to me."

"Ginny, please don't."

"Don't what?" she asked, shrugging.

"There's a reason our relationship failed," Harry said, staring out at the snow flakes melting down the window.

"Yes, but I'm willing to give us another chance. Come on, Harry. You can't say you feel nothing for me."

"Just go, Ginny. Let's talk about this later."

"Alright," Ginny said, unexpectedly. "I'll let you think it over. But I want an answer after Christmas." She walked away and opened the door to leave. "If you feel lonely though, owl me straight away."

"I never feel lonely."

She gave him a warning look and strode out the door, nearly bowling over Scorpius.

"Malfoy! What are you doing out here?"

"I've come to see the Professor about my assignment," Scorpius said, giving her a belligerent look. "Why, what are *you* doing here?"

Ginny smiled lightly. "Just wishing Professor Potter a merry Christmas. What are your Christmas plans, Scorpius?"

"Going home."

"How wonderful," Ginny said, reaching out to squeeze his shoulder; Scorpius dodged quickly away and glared. "Have a happy and safe holiday."

"I hope not, that sounds dead boring," Scorpius shot back. Ginny just stared at him for a moment as though he had said something unintelligible, then left. Scorpius shrugged and walked into Harry's office. "I hope you're not getting it on with Professor Weasley, she's weird," he said.

"My personal life is of absolutely no relevance nor interest," Harry said. "Now what do you want?"

"Relevance, sir, what's that?"

"It means you don't need to know anything about it. And don't call Professor Weasley weird."

"She is, she looks like she's high on Cheering Charms all the time," Scorpius protested.

"Don't talk about her like that," Harry snapped.

"Bit touchy about your girlfriend, eh?"

"Malfoy! What do you want?"

"My assignment," Scorpius said, noting Harry's expression and apparently deciding not to push him over the brink. "I got a T."

"That's because you didn't display sufficient knowledge on the topic, you failed to use any references, you plagiarised everything, you handed it in a week late and you seemed to borrow suspiciously heavily from Dobson's notes."

"Yeah, but sir, all the assignments are due right now, it's real hard, you only gave us a weekend to do it -"

"Other students manage, and they have exactly the same workload," Harry said. "In fact, some have more."

"What's your problem, get into a fight with your girlfriend?" Scorpius said, grinning.

"No, I didn't. Look, Scorpius, if you don't do the work you won't get the marks. Merry Christmas." Harry indicated Scorpius was dismissed, then went back to marking his assignments. Scorpius didn't budge an inch. He remained standing in the middle of the office, the assignment limply held in one hand. Harry sighed loudly and read through a fifth-year assignment.

*There are several subtle differences between a wolf and the werewolf, the first being the size and shape of the snout...*

It had been full moon over the weekend. He suddenly felt rather guilty.

"I'm sorry, Scorpius, it's been rather busy lately and I've been a bit tired and short-tempered. Look, how about you re-submit the assignment and I'll see if it deserves another mark?"

"Yeah, alright," Scorpius said, as though he was the one doing Harry the favour. He walked slowly out then turned round. "Sir, it's coz there's a full moon, isn't there?"

"What?"

"It's coz of the full moon."

"Yes. It must be difficult," Harry sighed. "I'll put your bad assignment down to sleep deprivation."

"What's deprivation?"

Harry thought. "It's when you are denied something that most other people have."

"Oh. Well I'll see you round, sir. Merry Christmas and all that."

Harry could only shake his head and laugh. A typical season's greeting from Scorpius.

After Scorpius left, however, Harry's smile faltered as he went over the conversation.

On New Years Eve Harry went to Hermione's place for some drinks, although he volunteered to bring his own. Hermione was known for her lethal cocktails.

"How about just one, Harry?"

"No."

"Come on, you'll love my Sex In A Cauldron."

"I don't think so." Harry laughed. He'd had a couple of firewhiskeys and was feeling more relaxed then he had in months, lying on his back on Hermione's front porch and watching the snow spiral past. In the distance, fireworks exploded and he could hear people singing:

*And for auld lang syne, my joy,*

*For auld lang syne,*

*We will take a cup of kindness yet*

*For auld lang syne!*

"Oh, I missed the countdown!" Hermione said in disappointment but light spilled from her front room as people wandered out to the front garden, their champagne flutes coming together in crystal clinks, spilling the golden bubbly through the air, raising their voices in song until Hermione and Harry joined in, laughing:

*Should old acquaintance be forgot,*

*And never brought to mind...*

*Should old acquaintance be forgot,*

*And days of auld lang syne!*

"Happy new year!" they hollered to each other, some collapsing completely legless on the front garden. Harry turned to smile at Hermione but found Ginny next to him instead.

"I was promised an answer."

"Yes," Harry mumbled, the firewhiskey already hazing over his mind. But even as Ginny leant forwards to kiss him, her hair falling across his face, she was not on his mind.

*...should old acquaintance be forgot...*

"Alright, let's see how much you've managed to forget over the Christmas break," Harry said crisply to the sullen and wretched faces in front of him.

"Oh, sir, you're not going straight into work, are you?"

"Yeah, how about a really easy revision lesson, you know? Bring us back gently."

"Yeah, my break sucked, there was a fight about Grandmother's Christmas pudding and my mum threw it through the window and it knocked out old Uncle Norm who was outside sneaking a smoke and -"

"What, a Christmas pudding knocked someone out?" someone cut in disbelievingly.

"You have clearly never had one of my Grandmother's Christmas puddings," the Gryffindor replied darkly.

"Well, my break was really lovely," a Ravenclaw said smugly. "My family and I went to France."

"I bet you partied, didn't you sir?" Leo called out mischievously. "Had a big New Years bash, eh?"

Harry eyed him. "Hardly. Anyway, to get back to the lesson at hand -"

"I bet you got some, eh sir?" Leo grinned.

"Mancini, that's highly inappropriate," Harry said exasperatedly.

"But it's true. Teddy saw you, sir!"

"What are you talking about?" Harry said, his stomach plummeting at Scorpius's little grin and Teddy's oh-Merlin-I'm-in-for-it-now expression.

"Yeah, me and Scorpius and Teddy were at Hannah Harris's party and got bored and Teddy said he knew there where there was a better one, and we went there and saw -"

"My personal life should not be discussed in the classroom," Harry cut in coldly. Teddy slunk down further in his seat and glared at Leo.

"Does that mean we can discuss it anywhere else?" grinned Leo.

"Yes, but not in here," Harry snapped. "Is that clear?"

Leo knew he'd stepped over the line; he mumbled something and nodded.

"Excellent," Harry said. "I won't say anything more on the subject except that I have here," he held up a list of names, "all your names, backgrounds, academic and medical histories. And I have never chosen to publicly divulge such facts. Yet."

The class all swapped nervous expressions.

"Sorry, sir," Leo said meekly.

"That's alright," Harry said coolly. "Now, on with the lesson."

After the lesson Teddy approached his desk looking quite upset.

"Sorry, Harry. I didn't mean for that to happen."

"Nor did I," Harry said dryly.

There was a pause, where Teddy reluctantly drew invisible circles on Harry's desk, tracing the patterns over and over with his fingers. "Only," Teddy said slowly, "you're not getting back together with Ginny, are you?"

"Teddy, that's not...I don't...it's not really...Merlin, I don't know. "

"Only you didn't seem very happy when you're with her," Teddy said. "And I don't like it when you're unhappy."

"I know. It's complicated."

"Oh, right. 'Grown-up stuff'," Teddy sighed. "I am twelve. And a bit."

"I know," Harry said, smiling. "How fast they grow up..." He reached out to ruffle Teddy's hair but he ducked away, a reluctant smile on his face.

"Don't start that stuff!" Teddy checked his watch, then hurriedly crammed his books into his bag. "See you later. And cheers again for the Christmas presents!" he called over his shoulder, dashing away.

Harry was suddenly very thankful he had a Ted and not a Scorpius.

"Harry, wake up."

"Mmm?"

"Wake up, Harry!"

Harry rolled over and opened one eye, staring at a rather rumpled Ginny.

"Merlin. What time is it?"

"It's a quarter to nine, Harry."

"A quarter to nine!" Harry leapt out of bed and instantly fell over a mess of robes on the floor. "Well, thanks for waking me up, Ginny! I do have a class in fifteen minutes!"

"Stop yelling, just calm down. You looked so cute asleep, I thought I'd let you have a bit of a lie-in."

"Thanks," Harry said unhappily, picking up one of his rather creased robes and trying to remember any housekeeping spells. Any.

"*Kerala*," Ginny said and his robes obediently straightened out.

"Oh. Thanks Ginny."

"You're welcome. Never your strong point, those spells. And don't tell me its woman's work."

"I'm not a bloody caveman," Harry sighed, pulling on the robes and hastily buttoning them up. "I've got to run, I'm sorry."

"That's alright. I'll see you tonight?"

"Er...maybe..." Harry kissed her quickly and distractedly, racing out the doors and hurrying towards his office.

It was only as he was gathering some texts and assignments that he realised how easily he'd fallen back into their relationship. It had only been a couple of months since New Years, but already they were back to their old ways.

He sighed and despite the time, walked sedately towards his classroom.

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Chapter: 10

"...Now, remember we should already be thinking about exams, you've only got a couple of months left now...Malfoy, stay behind. I'd like a word with you. Keep walking, Mancini."

Leo gave him a filthy look and left; Scorpius approached Harry's desk suspiciously.

"I thought that water spell would be a bit of a laugh sir, honestly, Clearwater hasn't got a sense of humour, and it wasn't me that set Humbry's broom on fire during practice, sir, honestly, I take Quidditch dead seriously, and -"

"Calm down, Scorpius," Harry said, although he himself was rather alarmed to hear of these recent tricks. He had no idea. "I just wanted to ask about your work."

"My work, sir?"

"Yes. You've failed the last *three* assignments and you've failed the last two tests as well. You've been skipping Friday's English lessons and you've been even more disruptive in class. What's going on?"

"Oh, you know, sir, full moon, sir -"

"Don't give me that, Scorpius. You're not getting a pity vote here. I've met a few werewolves myself and one of them was the most hardworking and studious man I had ever known."

"Yeah, but -"

"No, Scorpius. Look, I know you want to pass, and right now I can tell you that you're only just scraping through. Are you still on your potions?"

"Nah, they took me off 'em. They mess up my Wolfsbane shit, sir, they cancel it out or some shit like that."

"Oh. I'm sorry to hear that."

"Nah, sir, it's alright. Sorry I'm failing." Scorpius strived to look contrite but Harry wasn't buying it.

"Don't apologise to me, Scorpius. Apologise to your father, perhaps."

"He got me my Firebolt, sir," Scorpius said. "He said my letters gotten real good."

"I know. Your last match was spectacular."

"Thanks sir. Got the final coming up, sir, this weekend. You gonna watch?"

"Maybe."

"You can bring Weasley as your date if you like," Scorpius said generously.

"*Professor* Weasley."

"Yeah, her."

"Thin ice, Scorpius."

"Sorry, sir. But you know she discriminates, sir." Scorpius looked excited; he'd recently learned the word 'discriminate' and to Harry's slight annoyance, was managing to drop it into every conversation.

"Scorpius -"

"It's true, sir, she keeps going on about my dad."

"How do you mean?" Harry asked warily.

"Oh, always 'don't pick on Scorpius coz of his dad, he can't help it' and shit like that, she's full of it sir, I can't help being a Muggleborn."

"A what?"

"I can't help it if my dad's a Muggle, I think maybe she's still hung up on that Battle shit, sir. Maybe she was Voldemort supporter or whatever and feels bad about it, trying to make up for it, but she's really getting on my nerves, sir -"

"Your father is a Muggle?"

"Yeah, sir."

"Dra – Lucas Malfoy?" Harry asked.

"Yeah."

"There was a Death-Eater Malfoy in the Battle, did you know that?"

"I dunno, I didn't really listen that closely in History," Scorpius said dismissively. "Anyway, so I wouldn't go out with Weasley, sir, that all I'm saying. I just don't like the way she talks to me."

"Alright, Scorpius," Harry said. "You may go."

Scorpius picked up his bag and slouched out the door to where Leo had been hovering anxiously. Harry watched as the two boys grinned and lightly punched each other, leaving him to mull over

the recent discoveries.

Draco Malfoy, pureblood Death-Eater. Lucas Malfoy, reformed Muggle father.

There was definitely something wrong with that family.

That bloody Quidditch final. Harry knew something would happen.

Scorpius had been flying steadily around. It was the usual moody spring weather: wet, windy and miserable. Harry wasn't really watching Scorpius. He was idly observing the Gryffindor Seeker, a sixth-year lad, Eli Morrow, with the ability to make amazingly sharp turns . He really was quite good and Harry considered recommending him to Madam Hooch for team captaincy next year. Harry had already seen the Snitch several times although neither Seeker had spotted it yet themselves. Just as Morrow suddenly dived towards the pitch, a cry was heard and somebody nearby gasped. Harry's head whipped upwards, following the pointing fingers and horrorstruck expressions. He saw two tumbling forms: A Slytherin and, of course, Scorpius. The two were half-hanging off their brooms, attacking each other. The crowd leapt to their feet, shouting.

"Stop! Stop it!" a little first-year sobbed, clinging to the bleachers as though he was the one falling. Harry half-expected the Slytherins to start shouting encouragement but like the Gryffindors, they were screaming disapprovingly.

"Malfoy! You idiot!"

"Stop it, Webb!"

"You'll get disqualified, stop it!"

"Someone stop them!"

Morrow had captured the Snitch in the confusion and Harry felt a pang of pity for him. The triumphant moment was ruined as the team struggled to fly up to the two fighting boys and pull them apart.

"Ooh, they're headed for the Whomping Willow!" someone cried out and to Harry's horror he saw she was correct. Indeed they were, drawing so close to it that Webb's broom was smashed from below him. He half-clung to Scorpius, the extra weight pulling Scorpius helplessly towards the Whomping Willow. Then, within a half-second, Webb fell before anyone could move and hit the ground with a sickening smack.

Nobody could tell whether Scorpius had shaken Webb off or whether Webb had simply slipped of his own accord. Harry tried telling people it didn't matter, all that mattered was Webb had survived the six feet fall and once his leg bones had been regrown, he would be perfectly fine.

However rumour still sped around the school and Scorpius was suitably punished: he would not be eligible for Quidditch next year. Scorpius had a rather large tantrum about this, cursing everything in McGonagall's office. Apparently further punishment was now due.

"...alright, so I think most of you are getting the hang of Stunning, please do not practice out of class or you'll have both myself and Professor McGonagall to answer to." Harry paused, then turned and became aware of Scorpius standing in the doorway. "Malfoy?" McGonagall had called him out of class earlier but Harry was quite surprised at how long he'd been gone. "Not much point sitting down again, I was just about to dismiss the class. Alright, so I'll see you all next Tuesday," Harry carried on. "Please remember you'll need your textbooks." He dismissed them, talking to the odd student as they filed past. Scorpius took some time collecting his things.

"Is everything alright, Malfoy?" Harry asked at last.

"Yeah, sir. I've been suspended."

"Suspended?"

"Yeah. McGonagall says some time out might be good for me."

"Oh," was all Harry could say.

"I'll be back in a week, sir. I'll practice that Stunning spell while I'm gone."

"Not on any unsuspecting victims, I hope," Harry said, trying to smile. Scorpius just grinned at him.

"No worries, sir. McGonagall asked you to walk me to the train station, sir, Dad's picking me up there."

Harry sighed. It was a half hour's walk to Hogsmeade; that meant it would take up his entire lunch hour. Nevertheless, he fetched his cloak and walked Scorpius though the school gates.

"Hey, sir, Christmas is a holiday, right?"

"Yes."

"And Halloween."

"Yes."

"And Easter. Like Good Friday and that."

"Yes," Harry said again, wondering where all this was leading.

"Okay, cool. Only McGonagall kept telling me this wasn't a holiday, and I know that. I never heard of no Suspension Day."

Harry laughed despite the circumstances. Scorpius, suspended. He wondered if it would actually work. Perhaps Scorpius really would just view it as a holiday, a free pass. Did he truly understand the seriousness of it?

"Hey sir, if the boys ask, you tell them it's a family emergency or some shit."

"Okay."

"And don't let Webb take over the quadrangle while I'm gone."

"I'll try."

"And don't listen to that shit, yeah sir? Coz I never pushed anybody off my broom. I wouldn't pull shit like that. I got my honour. I don't care what the teachers think."

"I don't think you pushed him off."

"Yeah sir but you're nice. Other people, they always blame shit on me. Scorpius must've done this, Scorpius must've done that." Scorpius squinted against the sun. "There yet, sir?"

"Just a little way to go."

"Cool."

They walked along a little further before Scorpius spoke up again.

"You reckon you'll marry that Weasley?"

"I don't know. Who knows. Everything changes," Harry said, letting his guard down a little.

"What's that mean, sir?"

"The future changes a lot. Especially when you're young. Who knows what tomorrow will hold?"

"Probably lots of yelling."

Harry laughed. Scorpius however seemed serious.

"The future doesn't change, sir. Nothing ever changes. My dad, he told me Hogwarts'll be different from Durmstrang. Teachers will be different, he says. Classes will be different, students will be different. But it's all the same, isn't it, sir?"

They had arrived at the train station. Harry could see Draco standing alone by the platform. Draco at one end, Scorpius at the other.

Draco began walking towards them. Harry turned to leave but Scorpius grabbed his sleeve.

"I just thought of another thing, sir. I get suspended, right? But when I come back, it'll all be the same. See? What's the point?"

"Maybe it's you who needs to change," Harry suggested.

"Well, I don't think I should change. I think they're the ones who should be different, but they're not gonna be coz no one ever changes," Scorpius retorted, quietening as Draco drew level with them.

"Scorpius."

"Hey, Dad. Listen, it wasn't my fault, Webb started it, honestly, and also Clearwater can't take a joke, that thing with the Rictusempra spell, just a bit of a lark, and I didn't mean to break Wilkinson's wand last week, it was an accident, and -"

"Just get in the car," Draco said flatly.

"I'll see you in a week, Scorpius," Harry said, quickly retreating.

"Right, sir, I promise to practice the Stunning spell," Scorpius said, scurrying after Draco who was already striding away.

"No you won't!" called Harry, overcome with a foreboding feeling at the thought of Scorpius practising Stunning spells.

But both Scorpius and Draco were already gone, a light blue Audi pulling away from the curb. Harry was surprised. He had been expecting some flashy and overdone car like a silver Mercedes or a red Porsche.

Scorpius was wrong, Harry thought. People do change.

"Hey sir, where's Scorpius?"

Harry feigned deafness as he deflected a Stunning spell and congratulated Dobson on his progress.

"Sir? Sir, he hasn't been here all week -"

"Excellent job, Clark, but it's more likely that in a hostile situation, your opposing partner won't

have their back to you."

"Sir? Did his dad take him out of school?"

"Pay attention to what you're doing, Mancini. And what you're doing is practising offensive spells, right? Not questioning me about classmates. Ah, excellent work Aaronson!"

"Ah, come on sir, he isn't replying to my letters -"

"Mancini," Harry said warningly. Leo sighed and shot off a spell without even looking.

It hit Dobson directly in the chest, both disarming him and Stunning him, sending him reeling several feet.

"Yeah!" hollered Leo, punching the air.

Harry sighed loudly and wearily.

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Chapter: 11

Exams were coming up and Harry was frantic. He understood now why the teachers were always so uptight about exams. It was a reflection on his teaching; he was being tested too, really. His seventh-years were cool and he loved them for it. Their final class before exams and they were the ones soothing him, not the other way around.

"Don't worry, Professor, I feel really confident," a Gryffindor said reassuringly.

"Really? I'm quite nervous about this Patronus, it's the first time it's ever been used in an exam, maybe Professor Potter pushed us a little too hard, no offence sir -"

"Shut up, Gwen," a Slytherin snapped, then turned back to Harry. "It's really awesome, sir, I think the Patronus will come in very handy. And I think you've done a great job teaching it to us all."

"Suck up," someone murmured but Harry was grateful.

"I have to say you've been an absolutely wonderful class," he said. "I've no doubt that whatever you choose to do, you'll succeed admirably."

Gwen burst into tears.

"My last week here."

"And the students'."

"Yes, but I won't be coming back after the summer. Professor Westbrook will be." Ginny took Harry's hand with a sad smile. "What about you, Harry? Will you be coming back next school term?"

"Yes."

"What about us?" Ginny smiled, brushing her hair from her eyes. Harry absently watched the rich red strands gleam in the sun. Ginny was quite pretty, he thought. Still so naive and full of innocence.

"Sometimes it's as if nothing ever happened," he murmured. "Like you never went to war."

"Oh, Harry. Don't change the subject," Ginny said. "Anyway, these summer holidays, we'll have those together at least. I was thinking we could spend it up here."

"What, Scotland?"

"Yes. We'll have Hogsmeade to ourselves, without any pesky students," Ginny smiled, bringing his hand to her lips. "What do you think?"

"I think...Ginny, why would I want to spend even more time up here?"

"Alright, alright, forget I suggested it." She laughed, shaking her head. "I can see you're in one of your moods. How about a nice walk around the lake? It's been ages since we've been out near the Forest..."

"Near the Forest?" Harry stared at her in disbelief. The Forest? Where Voldemort tortured Neville? Where Harry died? Where Hagrid held him, sobbing? Where children and parents were murdered alike?

"Yes. It's so pretty this time of year, and the lake's warm enough to cool our feet at least," Ginny laughed, standing up and trying to tug Harry upwards. However, he remained obstinately seated.

"What are you talking about? So *pretty*?" he spat. He remembered the grass bent and withered with curses, the grounds littered with corpses, the lake red with blood...

"Harry, what's gotten into you?" Ginny asked, her smile fading. "Is everything alright?"

"So pretty..." he muttered disgustedly.

"Yes, you can't deny it," Ginny said, looking bewildered. "You should see the daffodils, Harry, they're beautiful. Come on, let's not waste the day -"

"I...I don't...feel well, Ginny," Harry muttered. "I've got to go."

"Harry! Come on, it's your last free period for the day. Let's -"

"I've got to catch up on some assignments."

"What are you talking about? You haven't set any," Ginny protested, smiling and drawing him to her. However Harry's office door was suddenly flung open and she stepped away hurriedly.

"Hey, sir, I'm back, and McGonagall said to show you my homework." Scorpius held out a roll of parchment expectantly.

"Scorpius," Harry said exasperatedly, "I'm a little busy right now."

"Oh, Harry, it's okay," Ginny said warmly. "We've got time to spare, especially for little chaps like Malfoy here." She leaned across to Harry and lowered her voice. "Merlin knows his father probably doesn't offer any help, the poor boy just needs some attention -"

"My father gives me lots of attention," Scorpius said loudly. "Just last week, he spent a whole hour yelling at me."

"Yelling at you?" Ginny exclaimed. "I can see his parenting methods are quite -"

"Nah it's alright miss, I did royally piss him off. Shouldn't have got suspended."

"You were suspended?" Ginny cried out, before turning and whispering urgently to Harry. "He clearly needs help, and isn't getting any from his useless Death-Eater father...I bet he's really horrible..." Her expression darkened and she turned back to Scorpius, who glowered. "Scorpius, does your father ever hit you?"

"No."

"It's alright, you can tell me."

"He doesn't hit me." Scorpius eyed her as though she was crazy.

"Even when he's really, really mad?"

"He doesn't fucking hit me! What are you, fucking deaf?"

"Scorpius, don't talk to Professor Weasley like that," Harry tried to intervene.

"Well, she's talking shit, sir. I don't like people talking shit about my dad."

"No one's saying anything about your father. Now apologise to Professor Weasley," Harry ordered.

"No. She should be saying sorry to *me*."

"It's alright, Harry," Ginny said. "I can see Scorpius is obviously going through a lot of issues and that's okay. Enjoy your summer, Scorpius." She went to leave and Harry stared so hard at Scorpius that the boy finally squirmed and mumbled something.

"Yeah, thanks miss."

Ginny brightened and left beaming.

"Alright, give me a look at your homework," Harry said wearily.

Scorpius handed it over, chatting away. "See, sir, she's completely mad. Dunno what you see in her. She's definitely high on *something* -"

"Scorpius, this is just your first assignment with a few words changed," Harry cut in exasperatedly, scanning the parchment. "This is ridiculous. I'm going to have to give you a T."

"Ah, sir, McGonagall will kick my arse, sir -"

"So, what do you want me to do about it? If you didn't want to get in trouble, you should have done the work."

"Yeah, sir." Scorpius kicked unhappily at his chair and Harry sighed.

"Just – make sure you pass your exams, alright?"

Scorpius just grinned and Harry got a sinking feeling.

Graduation day.

It was a happy one, a lovely one. Something Harry never experienced. He'd never had a graduation day, having missed his final year. Although at the end of the year he was presented with an honorary certificate of education, which was nice, and received Dux of Defence Against the Dark Arts, despite failing to actually attend any seventh-year classes. Apparently defeating the Dark Lord was a good substitute.

"...Tepple, Bronwyn. Thorpe, Alicia."

The students proudly filed up, receiving their certificates and beaming round. There would be organised photographs afterwards and Harry was determined to get one of his seventh-years. How he would miss them! The wonderful, wonderful seventh-years. They worked hard, they wanted to learn, they wanted high marks, they were quiet, they were respectful, they actually spent time on their homework and handed it in on time. Never an excuse, never a sob story from his serious seventh-years. A dream class.

"Don't they all look so distinguished?"

Harry turned as Ginny squeezed in next to him.

"Where've you been?"

"Oh, you know. I just had to stop in Hogsmeade today, Gladrags had this fabulous set of designer robes, half-price. Really nice, pale blue. Do you think pale blue suits me?"

"Everything suits you," Harry muttered, not taking his eyes from the rows of Hogwarts graduates.

"Oh, don't be silly. Red looks terrible on me. Remember the scarlet dress?"

"No."

"Total disaster. I remember Auntie Muriel was very nasty to me about it, but then again she hates red. Scarlet woman, harlot, blah blah. Oh, what happens after this? Do we form some kind of guard of honour or something? Ouch, there's a nail or something sticking out of this chair, I swear -"

"They have some photographs afterwards. Then we all have the Final Feast and they leave tomorrow," Harry said shortly.

"Oh, they're only up to 'T' and I've been gone ages! It's so stuffy in here, they should have had it outside in the rose gardens or something. Come on, let's go have a wander round."

"I don't think so."

"Come on, it's such a beautiful day. And I'll make sure we're back in time for the Feast."

"Ginny..."

"Isn't it beautiful? Come on, you could do with a bit of fresh air. And nobody will think you're rude, honestly, Slughorn's been in and out like a yo-yo, and Penny just discreetly left to have a quick smoke."

"Penny?"

"You know. Penelope Clearwater. She's absolutely fantastic, you should hear her Runes knowledge, it's great. Come on, just say I felt faint because of the heat and you escorted me out like the lovely gentleman you are."

Harry sighed. Along the staff table, other professors were turning to glare at them and McGonagall coughed loudly. The heat *was* rather distracting, and his skin prickled uncomfortably in the warmth, his hair curling damply against his collar. He sighed again, then offered an arm to Ginny who theatrically and vigorously fanned herself as he discreetly left the Hall.

"Oh, *so* much better! Oh, the moon's already rising. Look, Harry, by the lake. Isn't it lovely?"

It was. The moon glowed palely in the lingering dusk, the lake rippling gently and reflecting the setting sun above them. In the hazy, purplish dusk the smell of heather filled the air and Harry breathed deeply.

"...absolutely perfect. Shall we?" Ginny took his arm and they walked down the gently sloping banks, Ginny choosing a reasonably insect-free spot and sprawling across the lusciously green grass, laughing as an evening breeze sprang up and danced with her robes. "Come on Harry, don't worry. You won't get your robes dirty."

Harry however remained upright, leaning against a slender willow. He watched its graceful branches trail in the lake water, watching the sun set on its surface. The water dazzled for a moment – brilliant orange shot with gold – and then the sky and water settled into a soft pink. A cheer rose in the distance; the graduates all had their certificates, and were squabbling about photographs.

"I feel like I'm seventeen again," Ginny sighed, her eyes closed, turning her face to the dying sun. "Like we're teenagers again, hopelessly in love. I can smell heather, isn't that divine? Oh, Harry, do you remember our walks around the lake?"

"I don't feel as though I'm seventeen," Harry said quietly. "I feel as if I'm twenty-nine."

"Well, I feel wonderful," Ginny laughed, holding her arms out to the sky as if she wanted to embrace the whole world. "I feel as though I should be the one graduating today! Nothing's changed, has it Harry? We're still young and the world awaits."

Harry stood up slowly, frowning.

"I should be in there with them," he said quietly. "I should be in there with my students, celebrating their success. I just missed their graduation, and I'll never see it again." He missed it! He wondered if Gwendolyn walked forwards with tears brimming, if the Slytherins ribbed her

about it. If Vivienne Topham-Viney shook with nerves or strode forwards, full of the confidence she should have earned through the year. If George Llewellyn sent his Patronus – a squirrel – darting through the graduation group as he always said he would.

"I missed it," he said, his voice cracking slightly.

If Ginny heard him though, she made no indication. She lay in the grass, a half-smile on her face, locked in some other world.

He turned his face away, looking towards the lonely moon.

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Chapter: 12

Harry was catching the Hogwarts Express back to London. He'd packed up his office, cleaned out his quarters and was ready to leave. When Gwendolyn saw him at the train station she squealed.

"Oh, Professor! Are you catching the train with us? You can share our carriage if you want."

"Er," he said, but was spared a reply.

"Hey, sir!" George Llewellyn waved cheerfully. "Where were you at graduation, sir? You missed my Patronus!"

"I'm sorry to hear that," Harry said, and he was. He should not have been with Ginny by the lake. He should have been standing and applauding his students.

"Bit of a fuss sir, but I think McGonagall was actually quite impressed."

"And so she should have been," Harry replied, managing a smile before he turned away to push through the crowd and fight his way onto the train. He managed to find a very quiet, small carriage at the very end of the train and paused. Had this been the carriage he had sat in seventeen years ago, when he had pondered over the shabbily-dressed man and his equally shabby luggage, printed with the words 'R J Lupin'? Did his thirteen-year-old self ever guess that one day, that man would be dead and he, Harry, would be the godfather of his newborn child? Remus Lupin taught Harry Potter and Harry Potter taught Teddy Lupin. A strange and tragic circle.

The door slid open and hurriedly slammed shut again. Harry opened one eye and listened to the conversation on the other side of the door.

"Not this one, there's a teacher in there."

"Let's look for another then."

"There aren't any others," a third and rather annoyed voice interjected. "Because you two had to be rather stupid and play keeps-away, didn't you? And then Dobson went crying off to Clearwater, we got in trouble, arrived late and received the last carriage." That was definitely Teddy speaking. He could not conceal how well-spoken he was, no matter how hard he tried.

Harry groaned and considered trying to slink off to another carriage. He was certain his godson would want a carriage all to himself and his friends. Before he could move, however, the door was flung open again.

"Ah, it's just Professor P, you wanker," Scorpius admonished Leo. "He's alright. Aren't you sir?"

"Mmm," Harry said noncommittally, staring out the window.

"May I ask what you're doing here?" Teddy asked, grinning. He knew full well what Harry was doing on the Express: taking Teddy home.

"Shut up, chav," Leo directed at Ted. This was a running joke between them, Harry noticed – as it was between all boys, really. Without a doubt, any thick person would be nicknamed Genius, a short person would be told to watch out for the chandeliers, and a toff would be called a chav.

Harry ignored Leo. He really didn't want to try telling them off as, after all, he had no real power over them now. He was certain they'd work that out quickly.

"I'm going to London, Teddy, same as everyone else," he said, still looking out the window.

"Leo's our London lad, sir," Scorpius told Harry, grinning. "He's living the real city life, aren't you Leo?"

"That place is fucking full of chavs, scuse my language sir," Leo said to Harry conversationally. "And hobos. But you know what really gets on my nerves, sir? Them damn charity workers!"

"A charity what?" Teddy asked, puzzled.

"You've clearly led a sheltered life. Don't worry. Hey, sir, you know what a charity worker is, right?"

"Yes," Harry said, still staring at the passing scenery.

"Yeah, well London's fucking full of 'em. If you can get a few feet down Oxford Street without being stopped by one, you get an award," Leo said, grinning. "My dad hates them, see. He's an

executive, see, right in the middle of London, and he says every lunch break they're out there hounding him. He gets real sick of it," Leo went on.

"You're living in London and your father's an executive? You're the toff then, not me," Teddy sniffed.

"I'm not a fucking toff!" Leo said heatedly and things might have gotten out of hand had Scorpius not intervened.

"Doesn't matter, lots of people in London," he said easily, shrugging.

"Yeah, you don't know much about London," Leo laughed. "Sir, we've got Teddy the Toff and Leo the London Lad, you know what Scorpius is?"

"No," Harry said, finally looking at him.

"He's our fucking country kid, no joke! He lives – hey, Scorpius, where do you live again?"

"Tulip Hill," Scorpius replied without malevolence, leaning back lazily and inspecting a half-melted Chocolate Frog he'd just discovered in his pocket.

"Yeah, and where the fuck's that?"

"Kent," Harry mumbled, dazed. The boys looked at him, surprised. Teddy looked ecstatic.

"Hey," Teddy began, "isn't that -"

"I hope you're not going to eat that." Harry quickly changed the subject, trying to recover from the nasty shock and watching as Scorpius looked at the Frog with a hopeful expression. He put it down and looked at Harry.

"Hey, sir, where do you live?"

"Nowhere," Harry said, trying to make his voice light. Leo howled with laughter, banging his fist upon the seat, his eyes tearing up with mirth.

"Hobo on a train, reminds me of home!"

Teddy and Scorpius burst out laughing; Harry just shook his head and smiled.

"All we need is a wino and a couple of pikeys," Leo said, managing to calm down. "Then we'd have fucking little London, sir!"

"I sold my home before going to Hogwarts to teach," Harry explained over their chuckles. Scorpius took a bite of the frog, grimaced, and threw it at Leo. "I'm moving in -"

"We've got a new place in Tulip Hill!" Teddy burst out excitedly.

The boys looked between them.

"Oh, that's right," Leo said. "I forgot he's your godfather."

Harry was amazed that Teddy had told his friends.

"You...you knew?"

"Yeah, you'd make a pretty cool godfather, I reckon," Leo said knowledgeably. Scorpius, however, was apparently thinking along the same lines as Teddy.

"No way! You're fucking joking! You live in Tulip Hill too? Oh, that's fucking wicked, Teddy, we can hang out every day..."

Harry suppressed a scream.

He waited patiently on the Kings Cross platform, watching the joyful reunions of parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and family. Scorpius had rushed off towards his father whom was waiting with folded arms.

"Don't tell me its summer holidays already," Draco sighed. "I've got two months of you and your mad little experiments."

"You could always send me to France. Leo's going to France," Scorpius said jealously. Leo, nearby, stuck his tongue out at him happily.

"I thought you hated France." Draco frowned.

"Yeah, I do. Full of croissants and shit."

"An excellent summary," Draco said dryly.

"Yeah, well, maybe if you take me there I can tell for myself, yeah?" Scorpius hinted.

"You'd better start saving up, then." Draco laughed and Scorpius pulled a face. "Ready to go?"

"Yeah, hang on, I've just gotta say bye to Leo and Teddy. *Leo*. Leo! LEO! You fucking tosser, come here and say goodbye properly, you shitbag -"

"Fuck you, fucking country boy," Leo retorted, stepping up to Scorpius and punching him lightly on the shoulder.

"Enjoy your hobos on the tube, London lad," Scorpius grinned before pelting away as Leo gave chase, hurling Chocolate Frogs at his back.

"That's his *friend*?" Draco asked in disbelief. "Do they always talk to each other like that?"

"Yes," Harry replied absent-mindedly, looking around. "Teddy, mind the – oh. Oh well."

In the distance, Teddy slid hopelessly around on a squished Chocolate Frog, howling with laughter as Leo and Scorpius desperately tried to grab at him.

"I hope there won't be too many summer visits," Draco said, frowning.

"Oh, Teddy's not so bad. You've got to watch Leo, though. He's Scorpius's partner in crime. But Teddy has the extensive knowledge of Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes."

"Thanks for the heads-up."

"You're welcome," Harry said courteously.

They remained standing for a while in slightly uncomfortable silence. Draco was patient, Harry noticed. Never yelling out to Scorpius or dragging him off to the car.

"It's full moon tonight," Harry noted, his thoughts on the night ahead.

Draco looked at him, smiling a little sadly.

"I know," he said. "I never forget."

He held out his wrist, and Harry saw a watch on it. Instead of numbers, there were miniscule moons all in different stages of waxing and waning. Currently, the hand was a quiver away from where the number twelve should be – a full moon.

"I don't need it anymore," Draco said, dropping his wrist. "I just know."

There was a pause, silence, then –

"Harry!"

Ginny sped over, dressed Muggle-style – a cotton summer dress, her hair spilling over her shoulders, her face shining. She always looked so fresh, Harry thought. Even today, with a blue sky and an uncomfortably warm breeze.

"Oh, Harry, I'm sorry I'm so late! The traffic was absolutely awful, I had to resort to some...tricks." Ginny winked, leaning forwards and kissing him, fumbling with her purse at the

same time. "Oh, here they are – the keys! D'you want to drive?"

Harry just shrugged wordlessly, staring at the keys in his hand. Ginny grinned, looping her arm through his and guiding him away from the platform.

"I thought I'd bring in my brand new car. George bought it for me as an early birthday present. He's really spoiling me! Guess what it is?" Ginny said excitedly. "It's a..." she pushed him outside the station, "brand new Jaguar! Or something like that. Dad's insanely jealous."

"Oh."

"Isn't it beautiful?" Ginny laughed. "Isn't it the most loveliest thing you've ever seen? Now you know why I simply had to drive it here today, instead of your little white car!"

"Mazda," Harry murmured.

"What?"

"A Mazda. It's the make."

"Oh. I don't really know about brands and all that. George told me what this one was, oh, it just sounds so exotic! Isn't it absolutely wonderful? And you know, red is one of my favourite colours. For a car, anyway. Anyway, what are you waiting for? Get in! You'll absolutely love it. Come on!" Ginny gave a giggle and opened the driver's door for him. "It's amazing – oh, Merlin," Ginny suddenly said in a low voice. "It's Malfoy." She spat out the name, glaring as she walked to the passenger side. Harry said nothing.

"What a laugh. Here I am in my brand new Jaguar, and he's driving some cheap thing. Isn't that incredibly funny? All the times he called me poor," Ginny laughed, buckling in her seatbelt. "Well, I wonder who's laughing now?" She glanced across at him, smiling. "Harry, say something! You've barely said a word since you've seen me!"

Harry glanced in his rearview mirror at a sullen Teddy, slumped far down in the back seat. Their eyes met and they understood: it was embarrassing. Draco, pureblood (and wealthy) aristocrat, with his discreetly tasteful Audi, Ginny Weasley with her bright red Jaguar.

"Well? Say something?" Ginny demanded. He finally looked at her.

"You're on empty."

"What?"

"Petrol."

"Petrol? What's that?" Ginny stared at him, confused.

He sighed.

"Scorpius, get in the back seat."

"Why?"

"Because you're small and don't need the leg room," Draco said, adjusting his mirrors.

"But -" Scorpius stopped mid-sentence as he realised he'd be sitting with Teddy and he happily clambered into the back seat. "Bags not the middle!"

"I'm not taking the middle," Ted sniffed.

There was a scuffle which broke up when Ginny sat herself between them.

"Oh, Ginny, you can sit in the front," Harry tried but Ginny shook her head, gesturing at Draco's back.

"No, thanks. I'd rather not," she said in a cheerful tone, though she was pulling a face. "I don't want to tread on any toes here."

Harry told himself not to snap. Draco had been perfectly polite and helpful. Neither smirk nor sneer had crossed his face and his voice hadn't been smug or condescending. The only emotion he'd shown so far was exasperation at Scorpius, who was being rather fidgety. And now, as they finally pulled out from the curb, Scorpius was up to no good. As usual.

"Hey, nice car, toff," he sniggered to Teddy.

"It's not my car! And it's not Harry's, either. It's *Ginny's*."

Ginny looked hurt and Harry sighed, feeling bad for her.

"Come on, don't pick a fight," Harry said warningly, craning his neck around to glare at them.

"I thought you said Ginny was bringing up your Mazda," Teddy said accusingly.

"Well, apparently there was a change of plan." Harry couldn't get mad at Teddy either – he understood Teddy's embarrassment, especially in front of his school friend.

"Nobody told me," Teddy sulked.

"You don't need to be told of everything that goes on around here, I'm not a bloody noticeboard," Harry said with exasperation. Scorpius stared at him.

"What?" Harry snapped.

"You sound exactly like Dad."

"Oh."

Harry turned back round, thoroughly embarrassed. He sounded like Draco. Great. He glanced across at Draco; he was looking straight ahead at the highway. Though Harry could've sworn he had a faint smile on his face.

"I'm bored," Teddy piped up from the backseat.

"Play a game," Harry directed, flipping through his newspaper. *Tragedy Strikes! Cornelius Fudge Suffers Fatal Heart Attack.* Harry couldn't muster any sympathy for the old coot.

"I know a good game," Teddy sniggered and Harry instantly whipped round, managing to grab Teddy's arm despite the constraint of the seatbelt.

"Absolutely not, no writing rude words on the window or I'll kick you out and you'll have to walk!"

"All the way to Tulip Hill?" Scorpius scoffed.

"Yes," Harry said, glaring. Scorpius looked outraged.

"That's real mean, sir," Scorpius began, but Teddy was grinning.

"He wouldn't. He's a softie."

"I am not," Harry growled, but the boys were laughing over the top of him. Eventually they sobered up, quietly talking. Harry listened absent-mindedly.

"...yeah, a bloody dragon...he's so full of it..."

"And a bottle of firewhiskey, don't forget that bit."

"Mmm."

There was silence for a while, then –

"Shame about old Cornelius Fudge, eh?"

"Yeah." A pause. "He was a right shitbag though, weren't he?"

Harry and Draco simultaneously burst out laughing.

"What?" Scorpius said, grinning at them, quite pleased with himself. Scorpius liked making people smile and laugh, Harry noted. The problem was not everyone had his sense of humour and not everybody appreciated it.

At length, Teddy produced a pack of Exploding Snap and the boys played for a while as Draco drove. Harry gazed out at the darkening sky, then glanced across at Draco, surprised to see Draco's pale face and tense expression. Harry frowned then glanced in the rearview mirror and noted Scorpius staring out the window, ignoring Teddy and fidgeting very much.

Oh.

There was a full moon tonight.

"I feel a little sick," Harry said; Ginny instantly looked at him with concern.

"Are you alright? Do you need some water?" she asked quickly.

"No, just some fresh air." He glanced across at Draco and their eyes met briefly.

Draco gently applied the brakes and pulled over as Ginny quickly unbuckled her seatbelt and managed to climb over the boys.

"Hang on, Harry, I'll come out -"

Draco got out of the car and walked round to the passenger side where Harry stood, pulling out a packet of cigarettes and offering him one.

"Are you smoking?" Ginny asked, glaring.

"Yes."

"Around children?"

"My apologies." Draco walked away, stepping over a low ditch so he was now standing on the edge of a field. Harry followed him and Ginny retreated, slamming the car door and muttering.

"How much longer til Tulip Hill?" Harry murmured, as Draco inhaled deeply and stared at his feet, apparently deep in thought.

"About a half hour. We won't make it."

They stood in silence for a few moments – such precious seconds – and Harry watched absent-mindedly as Draco flicked ash from the end of his cigarette. His hands were very steady

and Harry realised that he was probably panicking like anything inside.

"Side-Along Apparition."

"What?" Draco asked.

"Side-Along Apparition," Harry repeated. "You can Apparate with him –"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

Draco looked up at him, his eyes unreadable. "I'm supposed to be a Muggle, remember?"

"Oh. Er. Right." Harry glanced at the car. Scorpius was peering out at them whilst Ginny was patiently and unsuccessfully trying to engage Teddy in conversation. "Look...I'll Apparate with Scorpius, maybe?" He wasn't sure how welcome his suggestion was, but Draco nodded quickly.

"Alright. The address is 42 Roseneath Road," Draco murmured. "I haven't any Anti-Apparition wards up so you shouldn't have a problem."

"Right."

"Scorpius knows what to do. I always use the garage – on full moon nights I just park the car on the street. Here's the key." Draco took a ring of keys from his pocket and removed a small silver one, handing it over to Harry along with two others.

"Alright. I'll just go tell Ginny something, then I'll be back."

Draco frowned. "You're just going to make up a believable lie on the spot?"

"Yes." Harry left him and went to the car, opening Ginny's door. "Ginny, Scorpius isn't feeling to well." On cue, Scorpius wheezed most unconvincingly. "He needs his asthma puffer, I'm going to Apparate ahead with him."

"Why can't Malfoy do it?" Ginny asked, looking unhappy.

"Because, idiot -" Scorpius began but Harry cut across quickly.

"He doesn't trust either of us to drive his car. I'm sorry, Ginny." Harry pulled a face.

"Oh. Typical. Well, I'll meet you at Malfoy's I suppose." She sat back, sighing.

"Thanks, Ginny. Come on, Scorpius."

Scorpius clambered out quickly and they both looked around furtively, checking for Muggles. Draco came over and nodded at them.

"Scorpius, you'll need to explain to Harry what needs doing. I'll be home in half an hour at the least."

"Okay," Scorpius said and Harry clamped him to his side before Disapparating with a loud crack.

Draco stared at the spot where they had been for a moment before walking back to the car.

"Just us then," Ginny said brightly and Draco managed a tight smile.

"Yes. Just us."

Teddy looked miserable.

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Chapter: 13

Harry arrived, Scorpius stumbling next to him, outside quite a nice house. Like Draco's Audi, it was nice, small, tasteful. There was nothing big or flashy or overdone about it.

"Come on sir, we gotta move real quick," Scorpius said urgently, tugging on Harry's sleeve and gazing up at the evening sky. "It's almost here. Here, get the garage door up." Scorpius raced over to a small garage and began tugging at the roll-up door; Harry quickly strode over and assisted him, the door instantly giving way.

"It's perfect, see, coz I learnt how to turn handles," Scorpius explained. "But I can't do these fucking roll-up doors. I can't get close enough to figure them out either, coz Dad made the handles and locks silver. Can't go near the fuckers." He ducked under the door as it was going up and Harry glanced in. It was, unlike every other garage he had encountered, completely bare apart from some blankets in the corner. Scorpius noted his glance. "Yeah, Dad used to store stuff in here, paint and wood and all that usual shit, 'cept I kinda tore it all apart. Dad says I'm like a bloody wrecking ball when I'm under the change," Scorpius said proudly. "When I get tired and the morning comes I go to sleep on the blankets. That's if I haven't eaten them. Dad says we should start buying shares in blanket companies."

Harry laughed despite the circumstances. Scorpius grinned up at him. Was it just the light or did Scorpius's teeth seem a little longer, a little sharper? Harry's smile faded and he suppressed a shiver, glancing up at the setting sun.

"Just roll down the door, lock it up, that's all there is to it really," Scorpius said. Harry again had to suppress the urge to walk backwards to the door. He did not want to turn his back on Scorpius.

"It's okay, sir," Scorpius said. "I don't mind if you're creeped out. That's the point of werewolves, isn't it? To be scary."

"I'm not afraid."

"I can smell it, sir. You're real creeped out right now. It's cool. Even my dad used to get scared, but he's gotten used to it now. He's cool as ice. Don't worry about it. Goodnight, sir."

Harry walked to the door and rolled it shut, watching Scorpius's pale face disappear as the door descended. He turned the key gently in the lock, the silver glinting in the last dying ray of sun.

Somewhere a dog howled, a long and lonely howl.

Harry had wondered what the other two keys were for but now he realised. Draco was inviting him to enter his home.

He fumbled with the unfamiliar keys but eventually managed to open the door, squinting into the darkness and searching for a light switch. He found one and switched it on, blinking as he gazed around.

The door opened up into a warm and welcoming lounge area. The couches were well worn and battered but looked incredibly comfortable. There was a home theatre system set up, quite expensive but nothing extravagant. The floor was cluttered, Harry saw. CDs and DVDs were littered around, throw-rugs draped over the back of the couches. It looked like everyone kicked off their shoes wherever and let them lie there. And it looked like Draco liked to read books on the couch, then just add them to a growing pile and use it as a side table rather than return them to the bookcase.

The lounge room was sunken; there were two steps that led up into an open kitchen and dining area, all of which was quite relaxed and nice. A small nook led into a bathroom and laundry, whilst in the far corner of the dining room was a staircase which Harry assumed led to bedrooms.

All in all, it was a small but nice and welcoming house, very well lived-in. What hit Harry the most were the large windows and skylights. The house had clearly been designed or renovated to let in as much light and air as possible. Harry had been expecting a dark, dank house like the Black house, filled with fiddly, fancy heirlooms and dark antique furniture. But everything here was light and modern. In fact, there was nothing Malfoy. No portraits of his parents, no family photos besides the odd picture of Scorpius. Harry picked up a framed photograph and examined it. It was a photo of a young Scorpius riding a tricycle through a dirt puddle, laughing in glee as the dirty water came up around him. Harry turned the picture over and edged it out of the frame: *Scorpius, 2004*.

He placed the picture back down and played with the idea of making a cup of coffee. He very badly wanted one but that would require rifling through Draco's kitchen. Eventually his cravings won and he found a selection of mismatched mugs. He went for one printed with stars and began a long search for coffee.

Fifteen minutes later he was prepared to give up.

"Who knows," he said aloud. "Who doesn't have coffee in their kitchen?"

Something brushed his leg and he suppressed a scream, leaping backwards.

A black and white cat stared sorrowfully up at him, meowing loudly.

"Oh," Harry said, relieved. "A cat. Merlin." He bent low and examined the cat's tags, ignoring its loud purring. *Bandit.* And on the reverse side: *42 Roseneath Rd, Tulip Hill.* "So, Bandit," Harry said as the cat happily nudged its head along his knee. "I suppose you're hungry." It meowed again loudly, still purring, and Harry opened the fridge, systematically searching the shelves until he found half a can of cat food. Now, how much? The rest, he decided. And where would Bandit's bowl be? He took a few steps forward with the can in hand and Bandit ran excitedly into the laundry. Aha. He followed and found a small red bowl, filling it up and opening the back door that led off the laundry. The air greeted him, balmy and lovely, and he stepped into the night, staring at the clear stars, at the cold, blue moon.

A lonely howl came from the garage, and sympathy surged into Harry's heart. Here he was, standing here in the night, enjoying it and living in it whilst in the dark, Scorpius waited for the long dawn.

He sighed and placed the can in the recycling bin, stepping back into the welcoming light of Draco's home.

He hated waiting around for Draco, Ginny and Teddy. It was already half-nine, and Draco had said he should be home about twenty minutes ago. Harry walked restlessly round the kitchen, washed a couple of dishes in the sink and finally wandered back into the lounge. He picked up a book: *Oliver Twist.*

"I take it Scorpius is alright?"

Harry jumped and the book dropped, falling onto a half-empty mug of tea. It fell over, spilling all over the book and carpet and Harry stumbled backwards, instantly treading on a CD and hearing a loud crack as it broke in two.

"Oh – fuck – sorry," he stuttered, heat rushing to his face.

"It's alright, it's my fault. If I cleaned up properly, it wouldn't have happened," Draco said ruefully. "Trust me, I'm forever breaking CDs and tripping over things."

"I'm sorry," Harry repeated, still flushed with embarrassment.

"It's fine," Draco said, shrugging. "Teddy was getting tired so Weasley asked me to drop them off first. I'll just feed the cat," Draco said, "then I'll see you out -"

"Oh, I fed him."

"You fed the cat?" Draco stared at him.

"Er, yes," Harry said, the embarrassment coming back.

Draco raised an eyebrow, pausing for a moment. "Well," he said at last, "the least I can do is offer you tea or coffee."

Harry smiled tentatively.

Harry sat at the island counter, watching Draco wander around the kitchen and talk.

"Thank you for helping out with Scorpius," Draco said, measuring out coffee granules. "Is the Guatemalan roast okay?"

"That's fine," Harry replied. "I don't mind." He shifted, feeling out of place. "It must be hard, him being a werewolf."

"Oh, that bit is easy," Draco said, placing a filter into his coffeemaker. "It's the human Scorpius I have problems with. Did you know he was expelled from Durmstrang?"

"Yes."

"What a nightmare. He's promised to try harder at Hogwarts, but every day I'm getting annoyed letters and warnings – even Howlers – from professors."

"Howlers?" Harry asked, surprised.

"Oh, yes." Draco leant back on the kitchen counter as the coffeemaker bubbled quietly behind him. "Penelope Clearwater, always yelling at me about something he's done. At least once a week."

"She can't do that," Harry said, shocked. "She can't send you Howlers! That's very unprofessional of her!"

"It's alright," Draco said, smiling. "I don't mind. You know though, I'm still waiting for your letter?"

"My letter?"

"Yes. I have one letter from every professor except you."

"I've sent you letters," Harry said. Draco raised an eyebrow. "Scorpius and I wrote them together. He was very excited about his Firebolt, I should thank you for that. He took a lot more interest in writing after that."

Draco said nothing, but Harry was certain he hadn't known that Harry had helped Scorpius write the letters home. Suddenly he just wanted to be frank, not to be nice and tiptoe around it all.

"Why are you being nice to me?" he asked bluntly. "I mean, we hate each other. We used to fight in school all the time. You broke my nose. I slashed your chest to bits. We hate each other! All those nasty little fights, all the insults and baiting and taunting and curses. All the times we humiliated each other and got each other into trouble and – you tried to Crucio me! You bloody wanted me dead! You were always such a bastard to me. So why the hell are you suddenly all nice? You hated me, you wanted me and my friends dead."

Draco poured two mugs, listening patiently. When Harry finished, he finally spoke. "Milk?"

"No. No fucking milk."

"Alright."

"Fucking hell, were you even listening?" Harry snapped.

"Yes." Draco added milk to his coffee and took a sip. "Do you remember, Potter, when you came to the Manor?"

Harry nodded, his eyes narrowed.

"And my father ordered me to identify you. Of course, you had a slight question mark over you. Badly swollen face, hard to recognise, you might say. But I know your face very well. I'd been seeing it nearly every day for the past six years. I knew at first glance. And Granger – of course that was her. And Weasley, too. Unmistakeable. But I still wouldn't identify any of you. Because you see, in the end I didn't hate you. I didn't want you dead. I didn't want any of you dead. In the end, I chose a world without Voldemort and a world with Harry Potter."

*It's our choices that define us.* Dumbledore's soft voice echoed through Harry's mind.

"A wise decision," Draco said. "Perhaps the best I've ever made. I doubt it makes up for all my

other rash choices, but you'll have to forgive me those. I was young and stupid."

"Weren't we all?" Harry said.

"Not you. You were always brave, not stupid," Draco snorted. "According to everyone but me."

"Oh, I don't know. According to Hermione I was occasionally stupid, according to the media I was a nutcase, according to Dumbledore I was a saviour..."

"I'd go with the nutcase theory," Draco said, sipping his coffee, and Harry laughed.

"Thanks a lot. Last time I feed your cat."

They sat in silence for a while, sipping at their coffees. Harry looked around, noting nothing was magic nor of Malfoy heritage.

"Does Scorpius know your history?" Harry asked.

"I'm a Muggle, completely unrelated to any wizards or witches," Draco said matter-of-factly, and it suddenly dawned on Harry that it was a massive undertaking.

"What about your wand?"

"I snapped it in two and threw it away."

"Your old textbooks? Uniforms? Firebolt? Prefect badges, potions sets, quills?"

"I had them all destroyed. Everything from Hogwarts."

"What about your eagle owl?"

"I gave him away."

Harry was hesitant about the next question, but ploughed on regardless. "Family photographs? Portraits? Heirlooms? What about everything you had at home?"

"All destroyed," Draco said. "Down to the last Chocolate Frog wrapper."

"Your parents?"

"They live in Wiltshire still, but I haven't told them where I live. I visit them now and again. They don't know about Scorpius. They can't. Can you imagine Scorpius living with that stigma? Son of a Death-Eater. He would be shunned, tormented, hated. This is a legacy I refuse to pass on."

A sacrifice, Harry realised. Draco had sacrificed his life as a wizard. He had moved away from his family, his beloved mother, he had destroyed every remnant of his life previous to Scorpius. He had wanted Scorpius to live the life he had been unable to.

He had been unselfish.

"A father at seventeen," Harry murmured unthinkingly. How young, too young!

"You or me?" Draco asked.

"What, me?"

"Yes. Teddy, is he your son?"

"He's the son of Remus Lupin and Nymphadora Tonks," Harry said quietly. "They were killed in the Battle. I was blessed as godfather to Teddy just weeks beforehand."

"And you took him in?"

"No. He remained with his grandmother for a few years – his grandfather was also killed in the Battle. I didn't think I was mature enough to care for him. When he was about five, he began visiting me and now he splits his time evenly between his grandmother and myself."

"I didn't have a choice," Draco said. "I was given Scorpius on the eve of the Battle. There was nobody to give him to."

He looked up at Harry. "I've never told anyone before, and now I'm confiding in *you*. I can't say I saw this coming."

"Don't worry," Harry said. "I'm a nutcase. It's probably contagious."

Draco laughed and went on, absently drawing patterns in some spilt coffee. "It was Pansy, of course."

"Ah. Young love."

"Of course. She didn't tell me, until right before the Battle. Remember how she wanted everyone to just hand you over to Voldemort? She didn't want to fight. She was terrified. Anyway," Draco said, "suffice to say she didn't tell me and I didn't know until we had this argument right before the Battle. I said I was going to stay and fight, and she told me I was stupid and I didn't even know which side to fight on. Which was fair, because it was true. Then she told me I couldn't die because I was going to be a father. She'd kept it secret, used a glamour charm to hide the signs."

"Merlin."

"I know. I panicked, of course. Started yelling at her. I was very frightened. I didn't want a child, not on top of everything else. In any case, I was Summoned by Voldemort and had to leave and the Battle commenced soon after." Draco absently smoothed over the careful circle he had created. "And you know how the rest plays out. Mostly me running backwards and forwards, not sure who to fight or why. By the time it all ended, I had lost most of my friends and acquaintances. Crabbe, fuck. What a way to go. Sometimes I still hear the screams."

They sat for a moment, their coffees long cold. Draco went on. "Anyway. Everyone hated me. The Voldemort supporters hated me, the Light side hated me. I remember sitting in the Great Hall by myself, feeling completely alone. Then Theodore Nott, remember him? He came up to me. A complete mess. He'd been half-mauled by some curse. But he'd managed to somehow crawl out of the wreckage and find me, babbling about something. He mumbled something about Pansy being attacked by werewolves then he pushed a bundle of rags into my hands and died.

"It was, of course, Scorpius. Newly-born. I mean, really new. His umbilical cord hadn't been cut properly, he was mewling away, and I just – I mean, Pansy had just been mauled to death, Theo had tried to help her and died, Crabbe had just been consumed by Fiendfyre, Goyle was already on the run, my godfather was dead, my parents were murderers and I was sitting in the middle of a war holding an infant. What could I do?"

"What *did* you do?" Harry asked, intrigued.

"I Apparated to Gringotts. Demanded my money. The place was madness anyway but I managed to get it. Then I exchanged it for Muggle dollars and had this house built whilst I lived temporarily in an apartment. And by the time Scorpius was six months old, this place was finished. I destroyed all evidence that I was a wizard, got a new name – first name, at least – and lived in the Muggle world."

"You raised Scorpius by yourself, as a Muggle?"

"Yes. I was determined to do something right in my life. Make the right choice for once. I wanted Scorpius to have everything I never had. I wanted him to never know what a Death-Eater was. To never hear the word Voldemort. To never know dark Magic."

"What about him being a werewolf?" Harry asked softly. "You would have had to explain it to him."

"He's been a werewolf for as long as he can remember. It's part of his life. He can't remember why or how or what or who. He's never needed an explanation."

Harry sat back, took a sip of cold coffee and winced. Draco laughed, breaking the sadness and reaching out to take Harry's cup and pour it down the sink.

"Sorry. Do you want another? Or tea."

"What sort of tea do you have?"

Draco smiled. "You're asking the right person." He opened a polished wooden box to reveal small compartments all carefully filled with different teas.

"Er...you pick one out," Harry said. "I'm in unfamiliar territory."

"Chamomile. Always a winner," Draco said decisively, picking a sachet out and putting the kettle on.

"So you destroyed all evidence?" Harry asked, still unable to get over the fact that every single magic thing had been removed.

"Not all," Draco said hesitantly. Harry raised his eyebrows.

Draco disappeared upstairs and returned a few moments later with what appeared to be a ragged piece of black cloth. He handed it over to Harry, who smoothed it out slowly, the material familiar in his hands. He turned it over and frowned.

A Slytherin crest adorned one side of it, the silver and green threads shining brightly in the kitchen light.

"It's what Scorpius was wrapped in," Draco said quietly. "A bit of Pansy's school robes."

Harry dropped the material as if was a hot coal, leaping backwards. Draco flinched and his elbow sent one of the mugs of tea flying, smashing all over the floorboards.

Harry tried to calm his breathing. Merlin. A ragged piece of robe. The crest would have been right over Pansy's heart. Harry didn't want to know how this piece of robe came to be.

Draco's face was pale, expressions flicking across it like a flame upon a candle, his hands gripping the kitchen counter tightly.

"Sorry," Harry mumbled quickly. "Look, I've got to go." Without another word he hurried to the front door and fumbled with it for a moment before opening and slamming it behind him.

He stood for a long time, leaning against the door and trying to calm his breathing, waiting for his heart to slow. The kitchen light remained on for a long time.

Harry glanced at the soft glow then Disapparated.

Another howl, lonely and pitiful, filled the otherwise silent night.

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Chapter: 14

"Harry? Oh, thank goodness! I was so worried about you!" Ginny was standing by the front door, looking welcoming. Harry hugged her for a moment, enjoying the soft feel of her robes and the smell of her hair before stepping back.

"I'm sorry. I just had to help Malfoy out with a few things," Harry mumbled.

"It's midnight, you were gone hours," Ginny said, frowning. "Do you want a grand tour of the house? I think I've managed to set everything up for you, you'll love the kitchen -"

"I'm really tired, I think I'll just head to bed," Harry said.

"Oh. Alright." Ginny stepped in front of him, leading him to the bathroom. She leaned against the doorframe and watched as he brushed his teeth. "I'm really looking forward to summer. Are you sure you wouldn't enjoy Scotland?"

"I find little to enjoy about it," Harry said, rinsing his mouth.

"Don't be silly, it's lovely in summer. Though if you want a real summer, we could always head to France. Remember when Hermione went for her trip? It always sounded really gorgeous, I'd love to see that forest, wouldn't you?"

He stared at her in disbelief. "Ginny, I already have seen those forests. In seventh year."

"Did you really?"

"Yes. Before the Battle. I'm sure Ron told you?"

"Oh, I must have forgotten," Ginny laughed. "Honestly, sometimes I swear I'm losing my mind. Could you pass me my hairbrush?"

He silently passed it to her and walked past her, going into his bedroom and barely pausing to admire his new abode.

"Harry?" Ginny called. "Are you alright?"

He didn't answer as he undressed, sliding between cool sheets and closing his eyes.

Sleep, at last.

He just wanted to forget today.

"I'm going round to Scorpius's."

"Alright." Harry turned a page and took a bite of toast.

"Well, I'm not walking."

"It's only two or three miles," Harry said, drinking some pumpkin juice and writing in some crossword answers.

"Please, Harry? Or I'll try Apparating again," Teddy threatened.

"How about tomorrow?" Harry asked, taking another bite of toast. "You only got out of school a week ago."

"It's been two weeks, actually," Teddy sniffed.

"Go play with Max and Ben again, then," Harry said, referring to Teddy's Muggle friends.

"No, they're boring."

"Alright, alright! After I've done my crossword."

"After you've done your crossword," Teddy agreed happily, pouring himself a glass of pumpkin juice. "Can I help?"

"Sure. Five down. 'Express'."

"That's the clue?"

"Yes," Harry said.

"Well, does it mean 'express' like fast or 'express' like express yourself, or 'express' like precise, or what?"

"I don't know." Harry laughed. Teddy grinned. Harry was always a little irritable in the mornings and Teddy liked making him smile, regarding it as his own personal challenge.

"Pretty stupid crossword writer," Teddy said critically. "They should fire them."

"I think the crosswords are done by a computer," Harry shrugged. Teddy looked devastated.

"Computer? I always thought of a crossword writer spending lots of time making one and then I spend ages on the answers, trying to think like them and put myself in their frame of mind,"

Teddy said sadly.

"Santa Claus doesn't exist either," Harry said and Teddy pulled a face, punching his shoulder lightly.

"I think the answer to 'express' is 'rapid'," he said and Harry marked it in reluctantly. "There you go! All finished!"

"Alright, I'll grab my keys. Get your shoes."

Teddy happily ran off and Harry lazily folded the newspaper, gazing into the distance.

"Come on, you've barely moved!" Teddy shouted happily, lugging a bag through the kitchen. Harry raised an eyebrow.

"What is that?"

"My overnight bag."

"You're staying the night?"

"Yes." Teddy grinned.

"Thanks for the update," Harry sighed.

"You don't have to know everything that goes on around here, I'm not a bloody noticeboard," Teddy recited, grinning as Harry rolled up the newspaper, shouting as Teddy ran away laughing.

"Get back here!" he yelled, but when Teddy was out of sight he just shook his head and laughed to himself. Draco was welcome to Teddy; it would give Harry a break, thank Merlin.

Harry pulled up outside number forty-two.

"Alright, there you go."

"You're not coming in?" Teddy asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I'm avoiding Dra – Lucas," Harry said, trying to shove Teddy out the door – but Teddy climbed determinedly back in.

"Why? What've you done to annoy him?"

"Never you mind."

"Harry! I can't believe you pissed off Scorpius's dad! Thanks a lot, now he'll hate me!" Teddy hissed.

"Language! See, I knew Scorpius was a bad influence..."

"I'm not going in unless you're coming in with me!" Teddy argued. "You're always going on about being nice and polite to people, and you go and make Mr Malfoy mad! He probably won't even let me and Scorpius do anything now!"

"What do you mean by that?" Harry said suspiciously, making a lunge for Teddy's bag. Teddy tried to snatch it away but was too slow and Harry triumphantly unzipped the bag.

"Oh. And what's this?" Harry demanded.

"Okay, I can explain -"

"Please do, I'm very interested in hearing your excuse for having a bag full of fireworks."

"Just give them back, it wasn't going to be anything dangerous, Scorpius just had this wicked idea about rockets and Fizzing Whizzbees -"

Harry snorted and Teddy reached up and snatched the bag from Harry's hands.

"It's fine, I'm going -"

"Oh no you don't!" Harry snapped.

"Why, are you going to stop me? Because you can't step out of the car or Mr Malfoy will get you -"

Harry leapt out of the car and Teddy squeaked, running towards Draco's front door with Harry angrily in pursuit. After a long chase around the front garden, Harry managed to bail up Teddy behind the apple tree.

"Drop the bag."

Teddy knew when he was cornered and he sighed, handing over the bag.

"Thankyou," Harry said, grabbing him round the collar and marching him towards the front door. "And I'll confiscate this bag, thankyou."

"Hey, I paid for those fireworks!"

"Well, this teaches you a lesson then, doesn't it?"

"Alright, alright," Teddy sighed. Before Harry could leave, however, the front door opened to reveal a grinning Scorpius.

"In trouble, eh Teddy? I was watching from the kitchen. Dead funny."

"Excellent," Harry muttered.

"You wanna come in for tea, biscuits, all that?" Scorpius asked Harry.

"Oh, I'm a little busy -"

"Come on sir, you gotta be nice with my dad coz he hardly lets me have anyone over," Scorpius said. "You gotta try his raspberry tea, he fucking imports it and everyone loves it. 'Cept me. Hey sir, you could do me a favour, yeah? Find out where the fucking coffee is hidden, sir -"

"Alright," Harry muttered reluctantly, following Scorpius as he raced into the kitchen. Teddy muttered to Harry.

"Please be nice, I plan on spending a lot more time over here."

"What's the matter, don't like home?" Harry laughed but Teddy gave him a serious look.

"It's just that Ginny's round an awful lot..."

"I thought you liked Ginny."

"To a certain extent," Teddy said ambiguously.

"She's really nice," Harry said. "You said so yourself."

"Too nice. I don't know," Teddy replied. "She looks...better in the old photographs you've got of her, at Hogwarts. She looks really different."

"Twelve years does that to you," Harry said dryly.

"Not like that. I mean she looks really serious in those photographs, like she's thoughtful or determined to do something. Now she doesn't look like anything, she just smiles all the time."

"Did you bring the fireworks?" Scorpius cut in, helping himself generously to the biscuit tin.

"Yeah...almost," Teddy mumbled. "Harry won't let me."

"Oh, sir, be cool!"

"I'd rather be alive," Harry said. "I don't trust either of you."

"Scorpius, what's this about fireworks?"

"Oh...nothing, Dad."

Draco had arrived from upstairs, looking quite composed.

"And don't eat all the biscuits."

"Okay, Dad." Scorpius made a great show of carefully pushing the biscuit tin away.

"Can I get you anything, Harry?" Draco asked, glancing once at him.

"I'd love to try this imported raspberry tea," Harry said.

"And coffee," Scorpius whispered to Harry.

"Harry can't drink coffee before lunch and I can't eat chocolate after dinner. It's a rule," Teddy explained.

Harry sat by the island counter again, watching Draco make the tea.

"Come on, I'll show you my room," Scorpius said to Teddy.

"I hope you've cleaned it," Draco said warningly, handing Harry's cup of tea to him.

"Yeah, yeah," Scorpius said, sighing loudly.

"I mean it. Or I'll send Teddy home."

"I cleaned it, it's the fucking cat that gets in there, he's fucking annoying -"

"Language, Scorpius," Draco said.

"Sorry, Dad. But it's clean, I swear. Come on." With that, he and Teddy departed, running up the stairs so noisily they sounded like baby elephants.

"Anything I should know about Teddy?" Draco asked, rinsing some dishes. "Any problems or medication or anything?"

"No, nothing. I've been very lucky, he's never had any health problems. He's going through a

phase with his metamorphmagus skills, enjoying changing himself, so don't be alarmed if he suddenly turns up with purple hair or a beaky nose or something."

"Interesting."

"Yes. Apparently it's not hereditary, although his mother was one."

"Mmm. Well, I expect you'd want to be on your way. I'm sure you can show yourself out."

"Yes. Thanks for the tea."

Draco made no reply, simply picking up Harry's empty cup and rinsing it out. Harry walked to the door, frowning. Draco was definitely being stand-offish. Not rude or annoyed or sullen, but he was definitely being politely distant and impersonal, as though Harry was a complete stranger.

He opened the door and stepped out, walking straight onto Bandit who yowled indignantly.

Behind him, he heard the sound of something shattering on floorboards.

He shut the door and left.

"How about this? This is nice."

"Harry, it's hideous. Put it down."

Harry sighed and replaced the spoon. It danced happily underneath a floating pie dish.

"Alright, how about that then?" Harry pointed.

"What is it?"

"I'm not sure."

"Look, I'll do the shopping, you just stand there and look pretty," Ginny said.

"We've been here three hours," Harry said moodily.

"So?" Ginny asked, picking up a potato peeler that began whizzing around dangerously.

"So, I've only got one dose of Polyjuice Potion left," Harry muttered.

"There's no reporters around. Just relax."

"There will be, trust me. It's been over a decade and they still haven't lost interest."

"Of course they haven't, you're the Boy Who Lived Again!" Ginny laughed.

"Keep it down!"

"Alright, alright. Do you think Hermione would like a toaster?"

"It's a housewarming party," Harry said. "Everyone will be getting her toasters." He grabbed something off a shelf. "I'm getting her these."

"What is it? Self-cleaning saucepan set," Ginny read. "Oh, that's perfect for her!" She looked around anxiously. "I'll never be able to top that."

Harry grinned. He had a knack like that. He wandered past a shelf, grabbed something off it, and it turned out to be the perfect gift. Whereas everyone else spent three hours wandering around hopelessly. Harry picked up a sachet absentmindedly. *Ghoul-B-Gone*.

"Is there anything Muggle in here?" he asked Ginny. She gave him an odd look.

"No. I suppose they probably sell the usual basic items, like bowls or forks or what have you. Oh, look at this cute little cutlery set, Harry! Look at all the tiny pumpkins engraved in the handles. Hermione would absolutely love these." Ginny examined the price tag then put it back hurriedly.

"You could always sell your Jaguar," Harry said unkindly but Ginny looked horrified.

"My Jaguar? Oh, it's so beautiful. I could never do that!"

Harry picked up a teacup, examining it. *Fine bone china – Unbreakable Spell: Guaranteed Not To Break, Crack or Even Chip!* He happily grabbed a couple, bouncing one on the floor experimentally.

"More gifts? You're generous," Ginny said absently, reaching for some knives but withdrawing her hand hastily when one twitched.

"They're for Malfoy. I've accidentally broken two cups now."

Ginny laughed. "Good for you!"

"And I'm replacing them."

"Harry, you're too nice. I'm sure he can well afford to buy a few more cups."

Harry was growing tired of their shopping excursion and decided to end their suffering. He reached out and took something from a shelf.

"Here you go, Ginny. Amortentia Potion-Infused Candle. Hermione would adore that."

"Oh, Harry!" Ginny clutched the candle. "You're wonderful! This is perfect!"

He smiled.

"Hey, Harry," Teddy said, pouring some juice. "I'm going round to Scorpius's again today. Maybe tomorrow."

"It can't be tomorrow, tomorrow's a full moon," Harry said absently, taking a bite of toast. He was suddenly struck with horror; Teddy probably didn't know about Scorpius. Teddy looked up and caught his expression.

"It's okay," Teddy said. "I know Scorpius is a werewolf." There was a pause. "I forget sometimes. It's sort of weird, that I can forget something that easily, isn't it? Because Scorpius will never forget, ever." He looked up at Harry. "My dad was a werewolf, wasn't he?"

"Yes," Harry said. "He was a very gentle, peaceful man."

"I don't take after him, do I?" Teddy asked, a little sadly.

"Of course you do," Harry said, smiling. "You have his thoughtfulness and his quiet determination. But you have your mother's lightness of heart, her humour. And, of course, her excellent Metamorphmagus skills."

"Watch this," Teddy said, and a look of intense concentration crossed his face. His eyes slowly lightened and his hair became finer and fairer, his body slimming slightly until Harry had a Scorpius sitting in front of him.

"I've been practising for the past month," Teddy said happily, smiling and looking up at Harry with grey eyes. "Don't tell Scorpius, will you? I'm going to surprise him."

"This feels very odd," Harry laughed. "But that's amazing, Teddy. Absolutely amazing."

"Yes, but I can't hold it for long. I have to concentrate on everything and then I start forgetting to keep my eyes grey or my skin more pale," Teddy explained, his eyes gradually darkening and his hair becoming thicker, until he was back to normal. "Still...it'll be good for a lark. I've got a couple of other tricks up my sleeve."

"What have you got planned?" Harry asked suspiciously.

"We-ell...I've been practising another, but you mustn't get angry with me. I'm only doing it to play a bit of a joke on Scorpius, I promise. I'm not going to use it do anything stupid, like buy

firewhiskey or anything," Teddy said anxiously, and Harry nodded his approval.

"I trust you, Teddy. I know you won't do anything stupid," Harry said. Whilst Teddy might occasionally dabble in silly fireworks pranks, he'd never do anything completely out of line. He had Remus's logic and sensibilities when it came to that.

"Alright. Promise you won't get mad?"

"I promise," Harry said.

Once again, Teddy's eyes lightened and his hair grew fairer. He began growing, slowly but surely, until he was slightly taller than Harry. His fingers grew longer and slender, his cheekbones became slightly sharper and his skin lightened.

"You promised you wouldn't get mad." Draco Malfoy's anxious face looked at him.

"I – I'm not mad, just...a little...unnerved," Harry confessed. "It's odd seeing people you know aren't them, if that makes sense..."

"Oh, I know," Teddy said. "Trust me, when I did it in the mirror I scared myself. It's very odd, isn't it?" He took a bite of toast.

Harry nodded and took a sip of juice; by the time he glanced up again Teddy was back to his normal self and was happily pouring himself more juice, apparently quite pleased with himself.

But the image of Draco Malfoy sitting in his kitchen and eating toast would stay in his memory forever.

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Chapter: 15

They were waiting some time on the front porch before Draco answered the door, looking quite annoyed.

"What time is it?"

"Five, and Teddy said he was expected," Harry said, ready to glare at Teddy.

"What? Oh. I forgot."

Scorpius nudged past his father and grinned at Teddy.

"Just ignore Dad. I drew up the plans, let's go."

"Hey -" Harry caught Teddy by the collar. "Teddy, I don't want any misbehaviour."

"Okay."

"I mean, no *mischief*," Harry said pointedly, referring to his metamorphmagus skills.

"Oh, that. Okay, I promise," Teddy said before following Scorpius up the stairs.

"Should I be worried?" Draco frowned.

"No. I hope," Harry said, wandering into the kitchen.

"You hope? That doesn't inspire much faith."

"I'm sorry, I thought Teddy was expected," Harry said, Draco's mood seemingly unimproved.

"Just ignore me. Don't take it personally," Draco sighed.

"I'll try," Harry said, putting the kettle on as Draco rummaged through a drawer of teatowels. "Listen, I just wanted to say I'm sorry."

Draco opened the fourth drawer and began rifling through rolls of cling wrap and baking paper.

"Although to be fair, you shouldn't have sprung it on me like that. It's horrific enough listening to you talk about Pansy at the Battle, but to actually hold it in your hands, this evidence that someone you went to school with was killed...how many deaths am I still yet to hear of? Do you have any idea how many funerals I've attended?"

Draco looked up at him at last. "Oh," he said. "I thought you were just disgusted."

"Sorry?"

"Holding the clothing of someone torn apart by werewolves. I thought you just felt sickened by it."

"No," Harry said bluntly. "I didn't. I just felt...horror. For her. You can go ahead and call me a hypocrite and say I hated her and yes, I didn't like her very much. But nobody deserves that."

"I don't know how Scorpius survived. I am eternally grateful to Theodore Nott," Draco murmured, absently stirring his tea. "He wasn't even friends with me, did you know that? He and Pansy had study sessions in the library sometimes, but that was it. And God knows what he was doing at the Battle. Got left behind, or went back for something or just got caught up in it. But he

must have been there and spotted Pansy and tried to offer as much help as possible. And when she was killed, he must have rescued Scorpius and crawled, dying, to deliver him to me. He owed me nothing and yet he died for Scorpius. How easily he could have walked away from Pansy, from the Battle and gone on to live. But he didn't. He died, and my son lived."

"Split-second decisions," Harry said aloud. "In battle, they change everything. Teddy became an orphan because a curse was a few inches to the left or right. Things like that." He paused and suddenly smiled. "It's nice, talking about the Battle."

"It's depressing," Draco sighed.

"Yes, but it's nice to know other people went through the same horror, the same sufferings. That you weren't alone."

"Can't you talk about it with the Weaslette?" Draco asked curiously.

"Ginny? Merlin, no. I just – can't."

"But she was there, wasn't she? She'd understand."

"No, she wouldn't."

"Well, you should try," Draco argued. "You won't know otherwise. Maybe she really wants to discuss it too."

"No she doesn't. All she ever talks about is how nice Hogwarts is, isn't the lake pretty, oh the forest is so beautiful, wasn't it great being seventeen – oh, I forgot. These are for you." Harry handed over the teacups and Draco examined them, surprised.

"Oh, thank you. These are perfect."

"And fun, too," Harry said, bouncing one on the floor as though it was a basketball. Draco laughed, startled; Harry noted his amazed expression. "Been a while since you saw magic?"

Draco shrugged, quickly looking away. "Yes. I was hoping to see some on my visit to Hogwarts, but I didn't."

"That must've been a trip down memory lane, visiting Hogwarts."

"It was," Draco said, a sad smile lacing across his lips. "I often think of myself as a naive eleven-year-old, strutting the halls, filled with self-importance and confidence..."

"Confidence? I'd say arrogance," Harry suggested and Draco laughed good-naturedly.

"Yes, I suppose. Arrogance."

"But you've changed," Harry noted.

"Scorpius made me grow up rather quickly. I supposed he made me change quickly too. I'd say Teddy's made you change, too."

"Really?"

"Yes. More patient and relaxed. Much more calm," Draco said.

"Oh," Harry said, feeling pleased.

"Don't let that go to your head, Potter."

"I won't." Harry paused and in the brief silence, one of the baby elephants came downstairs again: Teddy, grinning away. As he arrived there was a sudden thump from upstairs.

"What was that?" Harry asked Teddy suspiciously but the boy just shrugged and looked confused. Draco looked up the stairs, his brow furrowed.

"Scorpius?"

Silence.

"I'd better go check on him." Draco frowned and made his way upstairs.

"What do you want?" Harry asked Teddy, slightly distracted by the odd thump and the discerning silence.

"I want to show Scorpius my new Strike 4000," Teddy said, referring to his new broom. He'd saved up all year to buy it.

"I'm not driving you all the way back again," Harry said severely. "I'm not going to and fro all the time. You choose one place and stay there."

"Good, Scorpius can stay over at my place!" Teddy said triumphantly.

"Er – that is, Scorpius's place." Harry tried to back-pedal quickly. Teddy was hiding a smile, Harry was sure.

"Scorpius's never even seen my place," Teddy said as Scorpius arrived downstairs, looking happy.

"Yeah, that's an insult, sir," Scorpius said, grinning in his usual mad way.

"Oh, alright," Harry snapped. "But you have to get your father's permission."

"Yeah, alright. Where is he?" Scorpius asked, looking around.

"He went upstairs looking for you," Teddy laughed. "What did you do?"

"Nothing. Go get him, would you?" Scorpius said lazily.

"Why don't you?" Teddy retorted and Scorpius went to shove him.

"Alright, alright," Teddy sighed, going upstairs. Scorpius turned his attention onto Harry.

"Hey sir, did you find out where the coffee was?"

"No," Harry smiled.

"Oh, sir, you know! You're just not telling me!"

"Honestly, I don't," Harry laughed, and Scorpius grumbled to himself as Draco arrived downstairs looking puzzled.

"There you are. Me and Teddy were wondering if we could stay at his place for the night," Scorpius said quickly and hopefully. Draco didn't seem too fazed by this unexpected query, giving a nod as Scorpius grinned happily.

"What's going on?"

Draco and Scorpius looked behind them; a second Draco Malfoy approached them from the bottom of the stairs.

"What the -" he began as Scorpius collapsed into laughter whilst Draco suddenly started to flicker – brown hair, red hair, black hair, pale skin, dark skin, adult-sized, child-sized – Harry suddenly realised what was going on. He grabbed the flickering Draco by the wrist, catching glimpses of Teddy's terrified expression.

"Teddy, calm down. I'm a little mad at you right now, but that's okay. Just calm down, alright? I promise I won't go off at you, alright?"

The flickering faded and eventually there was Teddy, his normal self.

"He talked me into it!" Teddy shouted accusingly, pointing a finger at Scorpius, who was still doubled up with laughter.

"Teddy, I thought you said you wouldn't use it for anything bad. You promised me," Harry said quietly.

"I know, I'm sorry Harry," Teddy said miserably, glaring at Scorpius. "Only Scorpius said his dad wouldn't let him stay the night and he talked me into this -"

"It's alright," Harry said. "I'm still going to lock up your Strike for a week, though."

"I guessed as much," Teddy said. "I'm sorry."

"You should also apologise to Mr Malfoy too," Harry said. Teddy walked up to Draco, staring at the floor and mumbling an apology. Draco still seemed a little in shock.

"You pretended to be me?" he asked Teddy. Teddy nodded.

"Ah, don't get pissy at him Dad, it's my fault, I'll take all the blame," Scorpius said, getting to his feet and grinning like a Cheshire cat. "It was my idea, I talked him into it."

"Why?" Draco asked.

"Coz you never let me go to other people's houses," Scorpius said easily. "I figured I might actually get a chance this time. We spent ages hatching this plan, eh Teddy? Ah well."

"Teddy, you're going home right now," Harry said sternly and Teddy walked back over to him without complaint, putting his jacket on dejectedly.

"He can go," Draco said quietly, sinking into a chair and holding a hand over his eyes.

"What?" Scorpius asked, staring at him.

"I said you could go!" Draco said more loudly.

"You two get in the car," Harry said to Scorpius and Teddy. For once Scorpius said nothing, walking quickly out the door with Teddy. Harry waited til he heard the slam of car doors, then approached Draco, sliding into the chair next to him.

"Are you alright?"

"No. My son just convinced someone to impersonate me so he could go stay the night at a friend's place. Am I that bad a father?"

"I don't know, I'd say you're doing a decent job," Harry said generously.

"I'm not that strict, am I?" Draco asked. "I'm not one of those parents always panicking over a grazed knee or following him round all the time."

"You just don't trust anyone else to supervise him," Harry shrugged. "Which is fair enough."

"It's stupid, I know. It's ridiculous, it's illogical. I only let him stay the night once at somebody's place, when he was about five. That one night he fell down the stairs, burnt his mouth on hot chocolate, had an allergic reaction to some plant, and worst of all they had a dog. Dogs don't like werewolves, no matter what shape they're in. They dropped Scorpius off at three in the morning, saying he'd gone hysterical and perhaps it was in everyone's best interest that he didn't stay again. You should have seen him, all bruised and bandaged up, with a rash all over him and sucking on an ice-cube for his burnt mouth. The father was mumbling something about how he swore that he saw Scorpius bite the dog. Something about rabies, and how he thought he saw Scorpius change into a kind of dog-form, then back again. The mother was rolling her eyes and telling him he was crazy. What a nightmare."

"So? One bad experience," Harry shrugged.

"So he nearly changed into a werewolf, even though it wasn't full moon. What if that happened again? What if he did just lose it and start attacking people? I couldn't do that to him or his host. It'd be like letting a tiger wander round a hunter's home. You're not sure who's going to get hurt."

Harry hesitated for a moment. "Do you want to come over?"

"What?" Draco looked at him in confusion.

"Do you want to come over, have a look round the place, supervise them for a bit? Perhaps that would ease your mind a little. You could stay for a few hours if you want," Harry shrugged.

Draco thought this over, tapping his fingers against the china teacup.

"No, it's alright," he said at last.

"Is it?"

Draco looked up at him. "No. You're right. I'll come along. Otherwise I'll spend the rest of the day pacing around worrying."

"You've got a nice place," Draco said. Harry's kitchen was smaller than Draco's but it too was light and airy, full of sun. Draco was looking quite relaxed and at ease and Harry smiled.

"Coffee?"

"Yes please!" Teddy hollered, running through the kitchen on his way to the lounge. He was followed quickly by Scorpius, racing after him.

"The last thing you need is coffee!" Harry called after him.

"Same with you – you said you'd cut down!" Teddy retorted, shooting back through again – this time on his Strike.

"Oi! No brooms in the house! Take it outside!" Harry called, floating a cup of tea over to Draco as he stirred his own cup of tea. Draco tentatively took the cup from the air, as though expecting it to zoom away from him.

"Biscuit? Looks like Teddy's been in here and taken all the fancy ones," Harry said, inspecting the sad contents of the biscuit tin.

"I'm alright," Draco said, looking around him and taking in his surroundings. A loud crash was heard from the other end of the house.

"I told him to take that bloody broom out!" Harry said, annoyed. "I'll be right back, hang on.."

He disappeared down the hall and confronted an embarrassed Teddy, a hand clamped over his face.

"Sorry Harry," he said in muffled tones, "I know you said to take it outside and I was about to leave except I turned to say something to Scorpius and -"

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah," Teddy said ruefully, taking away his hand to reveal a bloody nose. "Went straight into the wall, though."

"*Episkey*. Go clean yourself up."

"Yeah, sorry," Teddy said again; Scorpius picked up the fallen Strike and followed Teddy into the bathroom, chatting away.

"Wow, that's awesome. I wish I could do magic whenever I wanted to..."

"You can. In five years," Teddy added.

"Five years! I'll never survive that long..."

Harry grinned and shook his head, heading back up the hallway and pausing in the doorway to the kitchen. Draco had his back to him and was holding a framed photograph of Harry's parents, examining them closely. Harry came up silently behind him, looking over his shoulder. His mother laughed and held up a baby Harry, his father smiling and smoothing a calloused hand over baby Harry's fine black hair.

"My parents."

Draco jumped and the picture dropped, the glass smashing all over the floor.

"Oh God, sorry -"

"It's okay. *Reparo*," Harry said, the glass instantly coming together and joining seamlessly. Chips of wood flew back into the frame, making it perfect again. Harry picked it up and handed it to Draco.

"I'm sorry," Draco said again, running a hand over the smooth glass as though checking for cracks or fractures.

"It's perfect," Harry said. "You haven't hurt it a bit. Or me."

Draco managed a smile. "Your parents look happy."

"I was told they were very happy people."

"I can't imagine not having parents."

"I can't imagine having parents," Harry replied. "I think about it all the time. What they'd be like. What my bedroom would have been like. All my birthday parties that never happened. The presents I never got, the bedtime stories that were never read. The toys that were never bought, the lullabies that were never sung."

Draco hesitated. "Sometimes I think that way about magic, when I stopped doing it. All the spells I never cast, the potions left unbrewed, the books unread. The robes I burned, the wand I snapped, the owl I freed, the memories I destroyed. Even my name, Draco, unused for so long. Sometimes it feels as though all of it just keeps building up, all the magic, waiting to be freed. But it never will. Not whilst I have Scorpius, and I'll have him until the day I die."

There was a tiny silence as a floorboard creaked. They both turned around.

Scorpius stood in the doorway, staring.

He turned and bolted even as they both reached out to him.

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Chapter: 16

Harry watched Draco fall apart, standing in his kitchen. He said and did nothing but Harry could tell he was slowly losing his composure. Teddy arrived in the kitchen, looking timid.

"Is Scorpius alright?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, I guess. He seems a little sulky," Teddy said, frowning. "Why? What happened?"

"Teddy, I'll tell you later."

"But -"

"Teddy, please."

"Okay. Do you want to try and talk to Scorpius?" Teddy asked despondently. He glanced over at Draco, who was stirring a cup of coffee aimlessly.

"There's nothing I can say. And I really don't want to leave Malfoy here, even for a moment," Harry said, giving Draco a wary look. He wouldn't put it past Draco to do something stupid. People always seemed to, when their lives fell apart. On the other hand...Scorpius, having a bit of a sulk? A mild reaction. Harry was suspicious.

"Okay," Teddy whispered, departing. Harry admired his sensitivity. Teddy would grow up alright. He always would. As for Scorpius, who knew? Draco had been seventeen years old, in the middle of a war, with everything he knew falling apart and everyone he knew dying, and he'd been handed a newborn child. He'd done the best job he'd known how to do. And here Scorpius was with a nice house, a good education, friends, family. Draco had done an amazing job. He'd sacrificed his entire world for Scorpius. He sacrificed his family, his friends, his memories. *The books I burnt, the wand I snapped in two...*

"Draco?"

"I've fucked it all up," Draco said at last, pausing in his endless stirring.

"I don't know. The problem with family is they generally always hang around, no matter what you do."

"What about your family? Who took you in after your parents died?" Draco asked, his voice suspiciously light.

"My aunt and uncle."

"Do you have any photos of them?"

Harry hesitated. "I last saw them twelve years ago. My cousin and I send each other Christmas cards, that's about it."

"So you hate them, you've disowned your family?"

"I never received any love from them," Harry said. "I was never given anything. Listen, Draco, how much does Scorpius have? He has a home, he has somebody who puts his needs before theirs. He's rarely denied anything. And he has a lot of love and care. A lot. You must have loved him very much to give up all your magic and heritage for him. You were just trying to protect him."

"And now he hates me. He knows I'm a Death-Eater." Draco spat the words out.

"So? Your name was cleared, you were pardoned," Harry said. "Your mother saved my life, and so did you."

There was no reply. Harry sat there for a long time, watching Draco. Eventually Teddy poked his head through the door and gestured; Harry sighed and went down the hallway with him.

"What?"

"I got an owl. Hermione wants to come over to talk about Neville's birthday plans."

Harry sighed. "It's a little late."

"It's only nine," Teddy shrugged. "She said it's cloak and dagger business."

Despite the situation, Harry laughed.

"Alright. I don't really want to send Malfoy home in the state he's in," Harry said. "I really don't want to leave him alone. Tell Hermione to come on over. I'll go see how Scorpius is." Harry paused again. "Tell – tell Draco if he wants to stay, he's welcome to. Bedroom's down the hall. I'll take the couch."

"Okay," Teddy said, nodding seriously.

Harry set off down the hallway and opened Teddy's bedroom door. True to Teddy's word, Scorpius was sulking on Teddy's bed, playing with some of Teddy's Self-Shuffling cards. He had his back determinedly to the door.

"Fuck off."

"It's me, Harry."

"Who?"

"Professor Potter."

"Oh. Right. Well, you can fuck off too."

"I don't think so," Harry said. "Now quit sulking and I'll talk."

"About what?"

"Your dad."

There was a silence, then Scorpius made a great show of having to turn around. He looked furious.

"I met him when I was eleven."

Scorpius said nothing.

"I met him in a robe shop. Madame Malkins."

"I know that place," Scorpius said, surprised. "That's where I got my robes."

"He seemed like a very arrogant git. I didn't like him very much."

"Good," Scorpius said. "I hope you cursed him."

"I didn't. He asked to be my friend later, and I declined. I didn't like the way he spoke to me." Harry paused, but Scorpius didn't interrupt. "And I have to say as the school years went on, he got very nasty towards me. Always calling me names, getting me in trouble, spreading rumours about me, finding out personal things and telling other people."

He paused. Scorpius was still saying nothing.

"Do you know, Scorpius, that I was captured by Snatchers? My two friends and I. We were dragged to the Malfoy Manor, home to Draco and his parents. The Snatchers and other Death-Eaters decided to summon Voldemort to kill us."

Scorpius stared up at him. "Snatchers?" he breathed. "I read all about them. What did you do?"

"We couldn't do anything. They'd kill us if we did. The problem was though, they weren't sure if it was us. The only person in the room who really knew what we looked like was Draco. So they ordered him to identify us."

"What happened?"

"Your father, Draco, refused that order. He refused to identify any of us. And one of my friends created a diversion and we escaped. And a few weeks later, we defeated Voldemort."

"Yeah, I read all about that in the textbooks, that's the good exciting bit," Scorpius said. "His

mum, the flower name -"

"Narcissa."

"Yeah, her. She pretended you were dead."

"Yes. And when the war was over, the Minister of Magic himself pardoned all the Malfoys, because Draco and Narcissa both saved my life and the lives of my friends. Your father didn't want to kill anyone. I don't think he really wanted to be a Death-Eater at all. He wasn't meant to be one. And you know, your father once told me that he wanted you to have a better life than he ever did. He wanted you to live a nice, normal life and not be judged because of your father's actions. He didn't want people to laugh at you or make fun of you or hate you because of bad choices he made."

Scorpius finally looked up at Harry. "You know what, sir," he said, "I knew all about him being a Death-Eater."

Harry stared.

"Yeah, it's true. I'm not exactly stupid, no matter what Dobson says. At Durmstrang, when I was accepted. I found out all about the Death-Eaters. Draco Malfoy, the youngest one. They didn't have a picture of him but I found a picture of his dad, in the latest *Hogwarts: A History*. Looks a lot like my dad. I put it all together – what d'you call it? Detecting. Detective work." Scorpius fiddled with Teddy's covers. "I dunno why he did it. He should've just told me."

"Maybe," Harry said. "But he just wanted to protect you."

"Yeah, well." Scorpius kicked at Teddy's bed and frowned. "People are always telling me that. Dad, teachers, everyone. They all want to protect me."

"Well," Harry said, "Usually that's because they care about you. You say you can't wait five years to do magic? Your father hasn't done magic for the past twelve years because he wanted you to have a clean start."

"Well he shouldn't have!" Scorpius said angrily. "I had lots of time to think about it, sir, it's made me real angry. I didn't ask him to give it all up! I want him to have a nice life and do magic! I didn't ask for him to throw it all away!"

"But he did it anyway, for you."

"Well, he shouldn't have!" Scorpius snapped again. "It's not fair! I never wanted him to give up his old life for me! I didn't want to get in the way! I didn't want to fuck up his life!"

"Well, maybe you should tell him that," Harry said, taken aback. No wonder Scorpius was angry. He thought he was just a burden, that he had forced his father to choose a different life. A lesser

life.

"No. I'm still pissed at him."

"Okay. Well, I'll just leave you to get some sleep." Harry went to pick up his wand then thought better of it, instead dragging the mattress out from underneath Teddy's bed and making it up. When he finished he looked around for Scorpius's overnight bag and handed it over to him. "Put on your pyjamas, brush your teeth. I'll go find Teddy." He left, closing the door behind him and confident he had mollified Scorpius somewhat. When he entered the kitchen Teddy was playing a game of solitaire on the table. He glanced up.

"Oh, good, I'm bored. I didn't want to interrupt, Scorpius sounded angry." Teddy gathered up the cards, noting Harry's questioning look at Draco's empty chair. "Oh, he went to bed ages ago. Said thanks for the offer."

"And you should've gone to bed too," Harry said, and sent Teddy on his way before looking around the empty kitchen and sighing.

"Finally," he muttered. "Sleep at last."

Just as he was about to throw a blanket over the couch, a cheerful voice came from the fireplace.

"Harry!"

He turned and looked. Hermione stared at him.

"Oh," she said lamely. "You look...a little tired. Should I go?"

Harry paused for a moment, then smiled a brilliant and breathtaking smile. "No," he said. "Stay. I've got so much to tell you."

She raised an eyebrow.

Harry poured a glass of pumpkin juice and glanced at his watch. Teddy would normally be up and about by now but they'd probably spent all night talking and staying up. Harry had gotten up to get a glass of water during the night and heard low voices coming from Teddy's room. He was certain he'd heard the phrase 'as long as we run like hell it should be fine' twice and intended to interrogate Teddy when he woke.

"Harry, hi!"

"Oh, Ginny. I didn't hear you come in."

"Thought I'd pop in," Ginny smiled, picking up Harry's glass and taking a sip.

"You want some toast?"

"Yes, please."

Harry put in a couple of slices for her, leaning against the counter and watching the way sunlight caught on her hair. He had a sudden wave of fondness for her. She was refreshing after last night. Something pure and simple after the complicated lives of Draco. Ginny never got overemotional, never cried or created problems. She was simple, she was straightforward. She was wearing her white sundress, his favourite. White for pure. White for truth.

"Did I leave my hairbrush behind?" Ginny asked, pinning a lock of hair behind her ear. "And a book, I think."

"You always leave something behind." Harry smiled, shaking his head as she disappeared down the hall. "Oh – hang on – Ginny!"

It was too late. A scream broke the morning peace.

Teddy stuck his head out of his bedroom, which was opposite Harry's.

"Ginny?" he asked sleepily. Harry heard Scorpius call out from the bathroom.

"What's going on out there?"

"I don't know," Teddy replied, rubbing at his eyes. "Harry, what's going on?"

Harry ignored him, heading straight into his bedroom where, miraculously, Draco was still sleeping soundly. Ginny was standing in the middle of the room, her eyes wide and her hand held to her heart. Standing there in her white sundress, barefoot, she seemed picture perfect, a dramatic pose taken straight from a magazine. For some reason this annoyed Harry although he knew he was being ridiculous.

"Ginny," he whispered but Ginny didn't move, her hand still over her heart as though she was dying.

"You're cheating on me with Draco Malfoy?" she squeaked. Harry heard sniggers from the hallway.

"No, Ginny, listen -"

"With Draco Malfoy?" she asked again.

"Ginny -"

"Why? Harry, why?"

"Ginny, look –"

"You're cheating on me with Draco Malfoy?" Ginny asked again, and Harry finally snapped.

"Yes, that's right. We're fucking non-stop behind your back, every second of the day. For the past ten years, actually. In fact, we're married and have a family in Essex somewhere, so technically I'm cheating on Draco Malfoy with *you*."

Ginny looked at him and burst into tears, storming out.

Harry sighed and looked over at his bed where Draco was staring at him, awake at last.

"I think I may have actually upset her with that last bit," Harry said.

Despite it all, Draco started laughing.

Draco made himself a coffee and apologised profusely for last night; Harry forgave him.

"I'm sorry about taking advantage of your offer too. I was just so tired. I assure you I don't usually go around intruding on people's hospitality," Draco said politely but Harry brushed him off.

"Not a problem, you had a bit of hard day yesterday," Harry said, picking up the phone and dialling Ginny's number. Draco went to leave but Harry gestured for him to stay. "I'll go," he said, wandering out into the hall and hoping Ginny would answer.

"Hello?"

"It's me."

"Oh, Harry, I'm too upset to talk. Which one is the end call button?"

"I'm not telling. Listen, Ginny, Draco dropped off Scorpius last night and Scorpius overheard Draco telling me something and it created a bit of drama. At the end of it all Draco was too tired to go anywhere and he slept on my bed, whilst I took the couch."

He paused and waited. Ginny's voice came through.

"I – I know. I talked to Hermione. I'm sorry."

"No, I'm sorry."

"I should have waited for an explanation," Ginny said. "I feel like such a fool."

"Well, I shouldn't have snapped. I'm sorry too. And the end button is the big red one."

"I know." Ginny laughed a little shakily.

"Look, let me make it up to you. Let me take you out tomorrow, we can walk up to Stockton Ridge and have a picnic."

"Oh, that sounds lovely," Ginny said hesitantly.

"Come on, I'll bring your favourite pinot noir."

"Oh...alright."

"I'll pick you up at one o'clock," Harry said.

"Okay. I'll see you tomorrow. We'll talk then," Ginny promised before hanging up. Harry returned to the kitchen. Draco raised his eyebrows.

"All sorted?"

"Yes, we've forgiven each other. Just a stupid little misconception."

"Do you have a lot of these little misconceptions?"

"No," Harry said. "That's the most emotional I've ever seen her."

Draco said nothing, stirring his coffee. Harry looked up at him.

"You know something," he said slowly.

"If she's not telling you, I won't."

Harry sighed, looking at him.

"Why does everyone have to lie?"

"There's a difference between lying," Draco said, "and withholding the truth."

"Says you," Harry said bitterly. "How's Scorpius?"

"He came in this morning and told me how much he hates me. Then he wanted to know what the Battle was like. He said he wanted to know why I saved the life of Harry Potter."

Harry smiled, looking downwards at his coffee, tapping his fingers lightly against the handle. Draco Malfoy, Death-Eater and Voldemort supporter, saving the life of Harry Potter, leader of the Light.

"Did you have a couple of words with him?" Draco asked.

"I told him his dad saved lives."

"Only one."

"Many. Many, many lives. Imagine if I had died right there, my mission unaccomplished and Voldemort victor and lord of the wizarding world."

Draco shivered, perhaps unconsciously.

"You made the right choice, Draco," Harry said softly. "And you know that, and your son knows that." He stood up, moving to rinse out his cup.

"You know something too," Draco said, turning round to look searchingly at Harry.

Harry smiled.

"We can all have one secret."

"I'd say you have more than one."

"You know I was there that night Dumbledore died," Harry said slowly. During the Death-Eater trials, every truth had come out. "I stood there and watched your wand shake and your voice falter. And I knew you weren't a killer. There wasn't any hate in my heart that night, only pity."

"And do you pity me now?"

"I'm certain if I said yes, you would kill me."

"That is correct."

Harry laughed, abruptly stopping as Teddy stormed in looking most upset.

"Teddy?" Harry asked, concerned. "What's wrong?"

Teddy stared long and hard at Harry then burst out: "Scorpius says you have a second, secret family in Essex!"

Draco sniggered into his coffee.

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Chapter: 17

"Harry, where are you going?"

Ginny was relaxing on Harry's couch, flipping through the Daily Prophet and idly searching through a bowl of Bertie Botts Every Flavoured Beans; it had been just a few days since their argument but things were already smoothed over.

"I've got to drop Teddy off at Scorpius's."

"Oh. Is this apple?"

"Grass, I think. Teddy's eaten all the good ones. I'll be back in a couple of hours."

"A couple of hours?" Ginny laughed, stretching out her legs lazily. "Why? It's only a few minutes away."

Harry paused. "I'll probably chat to Malfoy for a bit."

"What? Why? You two hate each other!"

"Yeah, and we also still squabble over the Quidditch pitch and sneak sugar quills in class," Harry said; unfortunately this remark was lost on Ginny.

"Well, as long as he doesn't stay over again," she sighed. "I hope you've washed the sheets."

Harry wisely said nothing, heading out the door and shepherding Teddy into the car.

He returned, unfortunately, to find Hermione and Ginny chatting. Hermione and Ron often popped in and out over the summer and whilst he thoroughly enjoyed their visits, he was always suspicious to find Ginny and Hermione talking. Two girls could cause a lot of damage. He greeted them warily as he stepped into the kitchen and put the kettle on.

"Oh, hullo Harry," Hermione said, smiling. "Where have you been?"

"Malfoy's," Ginny giggled. "He's always over there."

"Over at Malfoy's?" Hermione queried disbelievingly. Although Harry had enlightened Hermione as to the friendship between Teddy and Scorpius and the civilties between him and

Draco, he had conveniently omitted the fact he was constantly around at Draco's place.

"Yes, he says they have a lot to talk about." Ginny grinned. "Isn't that hilarious? Him and Malfoy! I imagine they have nothing in common! What a laugh."

"Nothing in common?" Hermione asked, her eyes following Harry as he made tea. "What do you talk about, Harry?"

"The Battle, the joys of taking care of kids, how to get ketchup out of the carpet, the usual," Harry said, watching Ginny as she frowned and shook her head.

"The Battle! Oh, Harry, you don't want to talk about *that*. It must have been simply awful! You should tell Malfoy you don't want to talk about it."

"But I *do* want to talk about it," Harry murmured. Ginny waved a hand dismissively.

"What a laugh...Malfoy bailing you up and trying to talk about the Battle..."

"He doesn't bail me up," Harry said a little angrily, placing a cup of tea in front of Hermione, who accepted it with surprise and took a sip.

"Harry, this is wonderful. What is it?"

"Raspberry tea," Harry said, slightly placated.

"Since when have you made raspberry tea?" Hermione smiled at him.

"Malfoy gave me some," Harry said reluctantly. "It's his favourite, and I must admit it's rather nice -"

"Talking about tea with Malfoy!" Ginny, her laughter returning. "Oh, stop it, Harry, this is too hilarious!"

"It's true!" Harry argued, but Ginny waved him away, apparently overcome with laughter.

Hermione looked at Harry.

"It's lovely, Harry," she said quietly, taking another sip. "Tell Malfoy I really like it."

"I will," he replied.

Ginny wiped tears from her eyes and Hermione gave Harry a strange look, a look that said *Are you sure you're happy in this relationship?* Harry sent a look back that said quite clearly *You were the one that wanted us together.*

"But she's...different," Hermione said softly, gazing at Harry with confused eyes. "She's changed."

He shrugged: what can I do?

"Drink your tea, Ginny, it's getting cold," he said aloud.

"Oh, no," Ginny said. "I'll never drink anything from Malfoy. It's probably poisoned!" She pushed her cup away, smiling as if she understood a joke nobody else did.

Hermione gave Harry a look.

The end of summer was looming and Teddy was eager to spend the last of it well. He and Scorpius had spent nearly the entire week together, plotting and scheming. The boys had wanted to have some Quidditch practice over in Whitlam Fields and Harry and Draco had accompanied them, Harry casting anti-detection spells around the area, waiting until dusk for minimum vision in case of passing Muggles.

"Don't fly too high," Harry called out. "It's a pretty flat area, if any Muggles spot you we'll all be in trouble."

The boys laughed and flew overhead, dipping and looping around each other. Harry sprawled on the lush grass of a small knoll, leaning back on it to gaze upwards at the stars appearing in the hazy dusk.

"Only one more week until term commences," Draco said, lying back lazily.

"Don't remind me, I have to leave on Sunday."

They lay in comfortable silence, watching as the stars appeared. There was bright Venus, shining white and lovely. There was Orion's Belt, a string of jewels. There was the Milky Way, a handful of sand tossed into the sky. The two shadows of the boys danced across the sky, looping past the moon.

"I've got something for you," Harry said softly. Draco glanced across at him, their eyes meeting through the long blades of grass.

Harry passed over a piece of cloth. He'd cut up one of his old robes years ago to use as rags and wrap up unused glasses and whatnot, but now the bit of old clothing held something infinitely more precious.

"My wand," whispered Draco, holding it above him. It was still polished, reflecting all the stars above them.

"It took thirteen years," Harry said. "But it got back to its rightful owner, in the end."

Draco rolled it around hesitantly in his hand, then pointed it at Harry.

"*Allegra*."

"What was that?" Harry asked.

"A calming spell. Did it – did it work?" Draco whispered.

Harry didn't know why but he smiled gently and lied. "Yes."

Draco took a deep breath and they both gazed up silently at the eternal night sky.

"*I pray for the moon to forever wane*

*I plead for the stars to fade*

*I wish for the night to never return*

*I fear what the darkness has made.*"

Draco looked up in surprise.

"Did you write that?" Harry asked, handing the paper over to him. He'd remembered it since the day he'd discovered it on top of Scorpius's schoolbooks and had written it down. It struck a chord with him. He had found it and been reminded of it whilst cleaning out his trunk. The quidditch practice a few days ago was the last of the summer activities; today the boys had been forced to undergo mundane activities such as labelling their new textbooks and organising stationary. Harry had finally set to the task of making his own preparations for school.

Draco hesitated halfway through washing out some cups. Harry absently watched the soapy suds slide slowly through his fingers, running in long rivers down his wrists.

"No," Draco said. "It's from a song I play."

"Really? Got the CD?"

"No," Draco said again, slowly. "I mean, I play it. As in, on an instrument."

"Piano?"

"No."

"Violin?"

"No." Draco looked thoroughly embarrassed; Scorpius came in and grabbed a handful of biscuits, looking pleased with himself.

"Well, let's hear it," Harry said.

"Oh, no, I honestly...I don't really play that well, really..."

"He does concerts, performances, all that," Scorpius said to Harry, inspecting an Arrowroot. "Hey Dad, how old are these?"

"Shouldn't be stale yet," Draco said quickly. "Shouldn't you be outside in the fresh air or destroying some prized possession of mine?"

"Performances?" Harry said, amazed.

"Yeah, and he does stuff for CDs sometimes, like when an artist needs accompaniment or whatever," Scorpius said, stuffing three Arrowroots into his mouth and leaving, much to the relief of Draco. Harry crossed his arms.

"Do I get to hear a free sample song?"

"No, I'm really not that good..."

"Scorpius gave up your game. Don't be modest," Harry said, but Draco shook his head.

"No. It's...I don't like to play in front of people."

"Oh right, but you do performances or play on CDs," Harry retorted.

"That's different. That's professional."

"And I'm...?"

"You're different. You're...personal." Draco refused to look at him and Harry decided to let it drop for now.

"Okay. Well, I should get going," Harry said. "I've got to start packing." He paused. "Do you miss Scorpius, when he's away at Hogwarts? Or is it a welcome break?"

Draco gave him a knowing smile. "Sometimes I really miss him. Sometimes I really don't."

"I'll see you on the first," Harry said, laughing. "I'll be dropping Teddy off, then I'll floo up later."

"See you on the first," Draco replied; his hand slipped and the cup he was holding fell. Harry brought up his wand automatically and pointed it. The cup balanced delicately a few inches from the floor.

"Seeker's reflexes," Draco said softly.

"Yeah, still got it," Harry said.

"Wordless magic, too."

"Yeah. Powerful wizard, blah blah. I just use it to scare Teddy sometimes," Harry said. "It's a good accompaniment to scary bedtime stories."

Draco laughed. "Success hasn't spoiled you."

"Oh, I was spoiled long before." Harry smiled then shouted over his shoulder. "Teddy! Get down here, it's already six!"

"Can't I stay the night?"

"No, you can't. You're still to pack anything and you've got school the day after tomorrow!"

"Third year! I'll get to boss the little firsts and seconds around," Scorpius laughed, trampling down the stairs. "Come on, let's go."

He paused, aware of them both staring at him.

"Oh, oops," he said, and changed quickly back into Teddy. "Sorry. It's really easy now, Harry, I hardly have to concentrate at all!"

"That's fantastic, Teddy," Harry said encouragingly and Teddy grinned, making his hair electric blue.

"I can do bubblegum pink hair too. Gran told me it was Mum's favourite."

Harry laughed, remembering how Tonks would entertain them at dinnertimes with her repertoire of noses and faces.

"I'd say so too. Come on, let's go."

Teddy put his jacket on and hollered upstairs to Scorpius.

"See you on the express, Scorpius!"

"If you get there before me, make sure you get the best compartment!" Scorpius called back.

"Kick any stupid firsties out if necessary!"

"Scorpius!" Draco said, his voice sounding outraged, but Harry caught a tiny smile lingering on his lips. Whilst Teddy busied himself putting on his shoes and making sure he had everything, Harry murmured to Draco.

"So, everything alright with you and Scorpius?"

"Yes. I think he's slowly forgiving me." Draco smiled faintly. "Thankyou."

"You're welcome."

There was a sudden thunderclap and they both looked out the window at the grey, stormy sky, the rain suddenly pouring down.

"That's it then," Harry said. "The end of summer."

And he didn't know why but suddenly he wanted the rain to go away, he wanted an eternal August. He wanted summer to stay forever.

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Chapter: 18

Teddy ducked through the rain, laughing as his trunk bounced along the pavement. Harry sped along only to bump straight into Draco Malfoy; Draco stumbled backwards and Harry reached out and caught him, laughing.

"Sorry, I wasn't watching!"

"This rain is terrible!" Draco shouted back over the noise of the rain, but contrary to his statement he was laughing, apparently quite enjoying the storm. His coat was soaked in Harry's hands and he told Draco this.

"You're absolutely soaked, where's your umbrella?"

"Same place as yours!" Draco laughed and Harry let go of his coat, smiling as they dashed together to the train station.

Platform 9 ¾ was comfortably warm and they stood together, laughing and breathing on their hands, trying to warm up again.

"Where's your little devil?"

"With your little demon," Draco replied, smiling. His eyes were bright and clear like the stars he and Harry had stared at so many summer nights ago and his lips locked in a soft smile.

"You look really good, really happy," Harry told him.

"Yes, you know how you just wake up in those good moods?"

"No. That is a fascinatingly rare ability," Harry replied and Draco laughed again. Harry couldn't help but smile as though happiness was contagious. Suddenly he felt lighter than he had in weeks. He felt bright, truthful, happy and confident.

"I think I've caught your good mood," he told Draco, who held up his hands, laughing.

"Sorry. Good news though. There's a vaccine – it's called Scorpius."

They broke into laughter again and Teddy ran up, reaching up to give Harry a quick hug.

"Hey Harry, I'm going now. I'll see you in class! Tell me what we're studying this year, I'll give my friends a heads-up."

"I don't think so," Harry admonished. "You can learn as you go along, same as them."

Teddy just laughed and raced back to the train with Scorpius, the two of them ducking and weaving through the crowd.

"I'd better go," Harry said. "I promised McGonagall I'd arrive ahead to help with the first years."

"I'll see you round, Potter." Draco grinned and held out his hand.

Harry glanced down at it, then returned Draco's smile and shook hands with him, placing both his palms over Draco's cold hand.

"See you, Malfoy," he replied and then he was gone.

Draco stared down at his palm for a moment, feeling it tingle from Harry's unexpectedly warm hands.

His smile faded just a little. He prepared for the long drive home.

Harry led the first years into the Great Hall this time, smiling a little at their pale faces. Some were excited, some were apprehensive, some looked as though they were about to throw up any second.

"You'll be fine," he assured them, making sure they were all in alphabetical order before the Sorting Hat began. He sat back in his usual seat at the staff table, next to Neville.

"I see you've returned for more soul-destroying suffering," Neville grinned.

"Yes," Harry said, hiding a smile as Scorpius waved excitedly to Harry; Teddy nudged Scorpius and Harry could just imagine him muttering 'be cool!'.

"Teddy's looking well," Neville observed.

"Yes. He'd done really well. I'm proud of him."

"And so you should be. He's one of the most attentive and hardworking students I've had the pleasure of teaching."

Harry smiled. "Yes, he'll do well. I'm not sure about Scorpius though."

"Oh, he'll be fine. They all find their way, in the end," Neville replied.

Harry found those words strangely comforting.

Hermione visited him on Halloween whilst the students had their short break. Strictly speaking she was there on business, delivering some Healer potions to Madame Pomfrey, but she couldn't resist the opportunity to catch up.

"Settling back into it again?" she asked, looking around his office and smiling as she inspected the newspaper clippings.

"Yes. Assignments, assignments, assignments. There's far too many."

"Stop setting them, then!" Hermione laughed.

"Yes, but I've got to keep them on their toes." Harry began inspecting a newly-arrived Foe-Glass whilst Hermione marvelled at the high pile of essays, glancing over Harry's desk. She frowned and picked up an envelope, a letter folded inside and apparently unsent.

*D. Malfoy*

*Forty-Two Roseneath Rd,*

*Tulip Hill.*

She put it back down and picked up a stack of paper next to it, flipping through.

*Dear Harry,*

*They all find their way in the end, you say...*

*Dear Harry,*

*I'm glad to hear Scorpius hasn't been up to too much trouble...*

*Dear Harry,*

*I missed Clearwater's Howler this week, I hope she's not ill, send my regards...*

*Dear Harry,*

*Enclosed is some raspberry tea, as requested...*

There were so many of them, reams of paper, all in the same elegant script. Hermione marvelled.

"Are these from Draco Malfoy?" she asked in amazement.

"Oh – yes. We've sort of started a correspondence," Harry said, glancing up from where he was kneeling on the floor and adjusting the Foe Glass.

"Harry, there's so many! You must send letters at least once a day!"

"No," Harry laughed. "Usually once a week. Twice if Scorpius is up to no good."

Hermione turned the letters over, seeing Draco's signoff; it varied.

*Thanks again for the advice,*

*Draco.*

*Awaiting your reply,*

*Draco.*

*Hoping this finds you well,*

*Draco.*

"You two sound like good friends," she murmured. Harry stared up at her, apparently quite surprised.

"You're right," he said slowly. "I suppose we are friends. I never noticed, but..."

"What do you write about?" she asked. "If you don't mind me asking?"

"No, not at all. We write about everything, really. The Battle, our old days at Hogwarts, our pasts and presents and futures. The best way to raise kids. How to disguise vegetables in meals. What we were like growing up. I update him on recent Wizard inventions, he sends me different tea samples."

Hermione was smiling at him. "I'm glad you put your past behind you."

"So am I. I suppose I could get hung up on it all, but when it comes down to it he was just a terrified teenager in over his head."

Harry hesitated, then looked up at Hermione, apparently deciding whether to confide in her or not. In the end he seemed to deem her trustworthy, for he spoke.

"He's very different to Ginny," Harry said slowly. "The past hurts but he doesn't mind talking about it. And he's...mature." He looked up at her. "Does this sound bad?"

"No, go on," Hermione said gently.

"It's just sometimes I feel like I'm speaking to a seventeen-year-old, with Ginny. Like she's regressed somehow. And she – well, she doesn't seem to care whether I talk about the Battle or not. She just laughs and waves her hands around as though the whole thing is just some silly misunderstanding. I don't...I don't understand. It's as though something changed in her mind, or...I don't know. Maybe she's just grown up, or..." He caught Hermione's expression. "You know something."

She sighed. "Do you remember how I dropped in early during the summer, when Scorpius was over? And Draco arrived to pick him up and we sort of chatted politely. But I sort of mentioned something about Ginny and we both thought – well, we agreed that it wasn't our place to tell you."

"Hermione -"

"Ginny should tell you. I'm really disappointed she hasn't," Hermione said, standing up. "I'm sorry, Harry, but I think I was wrong about her. She's not the person I thought she was."

She got up and left. Harry sat back and sighed before getting out his letter to Draco and re-reading it, considering adding a postscript demanding information. However he knew that in the end, Draco would just repeat that it wasn't his place. Draco was like that, Harry mused. When Ginny said yes, she meant yes or no or maybe. When Draco said yes he meant yes, and when he said no, you knew you shouldn't waste your breath asking again.

He sighed and left for the owlery.

He held the letter in his hands, musing over the fact that whilst he found writing letters to Draco a thoroughly enjoyable and rambling experience, the prospect of replying to Ginny's letters left him with feelings of self-doubt and listlessness.

This latest one was perhaps the most worrying of all; as Harry scanned it he caught the phrases 'family', 'time to settle down' and 'commitment'.

He glanced at it for a moment longer, re-reading it, weighing up his options, the potential responses.

In the end he picked up his quill and wrote hesitatingly, his hand inking in empty words that his mind did not believe.

He went home for Christmas. Teddy was overjoyed.

"I thought you had all those assignments!"

"They can wait. I want to celebrate Christmas with my godson."

"Well, it's going to be a damn miserable Christmas if there isn't anything book-shaped under the tree," Teddy said cynically. He'd be angling for a copy of the latest *Hogwarts: A History* all year.

"Maybe there is, maybe there isn't," Harry teased but Teddy just grinned. He knew Harry would get it for him. "Anyway, Ginny'll be coming over too, so -"

"Oh, Ginny's coming round? On Christmas day?" Teddy asked, sounding disappointed.

"Yes, and you'll be very nice to her."

"I always am," Teddy sighed.

Harry gave him a look. "What exactly don't you like about Ginny?"

"I don't trust her," Teddy said truthfully.

Harry ignored an unsettling feeling in his stomach, unlocking his front door and bustling Teddy inside.

"Cherry Mistmas!"

"How much have you had to drink, Ginny?" Harry demanded, taking her champagne flute away from her.

"Oh, just a couple," Ginny giggled. "Thankyou so much for this necklace Harry, it's gorgeous." She played with the fine gold chain, the diamonds glinting in the firelight.

"Anything for you," Harry said, kissing her; Teddy made gagging noises in the corner.

"If you're going to get all mushy, I'm going round to Scorpius's. I promised I'd drop in."

"Alright. Are you going to cycle there or d'you want a lift?"

"Yes, I'll ride. Just let me fit my snow chains," Teddy said.

"Alright," Harry sighed, getting up, but Ginny stopped him.

"You should relax, Harry, it's Christmas Day!" she admonished him. "I'll take Teddy along with a Side-Apparation."

"Alright," Harry said, settling back down. Teddy looked disappointed.

"You don't want to come along, Harry?"

"No. And remember we're going to your grandmother's at four, so you'd better be back by then."

"Yeah, yeah."

"And give this to Draco."

"What is it?" Teddy asked, then gave a cry of happiness as he recognised the silver envelope. "Wicked, are you having another big New Years bash?"

"Yes. Scorpius is welcome to come along too, we'll just put all the kids down your end," Harry said, referring to Teddy's bedroom.

"Wicked," Teddy breathed; he didn't even pull a face as Ginny took his hand and they Disapparated with a light pop.

It happened on Boxing Day. Why, why, why? Why did she have to tell him? She had been talking all year about marriage and commitment and Harry took the hint. He'd spent ages picking out the ring, thinking about when to present it. He didn't tell Hermione or Ron. He had the feeling they'd both advise him not to do it. Even Ron seemed to know something he didn't, his face becoming troubled when Harry spoke of a future with Ginny.

He'd meant to do it on Christmas but they hadn't had a moment alone. Now it was the day after

Christmas and Ginny and him were sitting by the fire, wrapped in throw-rugs, drinking the last of the champers and laughing over old Hogwarts photos Harry had found. It was perfect apart from Teddy roaming around looking bored.

"Oh, look! Mary Wentworth, she was in my class...oh, I remember she had these gorgeous long plaits that all the boys would dunk in the inkwells..."

"Hang on, Ginny, I'll be back in a moment," Harry said and took Teddy aside.

"Do you want to go to Scorpius's?"

"What? Sure." Teddy looked suspiciously at him and Harry sighed, knowing he couldn't keep it from Ted.

"I'm going to propose to Ginny," Harry whispered. "I just want it to be really romantic..."

"Oh." Teddy looked neither happy nor sad. "Okay."

"I'll Side-Apparate you there, alright?"

Harry Apparated to Draco's home and waited until he saw Teddy being welcomed inside by Scorpius before Disapparating again, shaking the snow from his cloak and joining Ginny by the fire.

"Oh, there you are! Harry, I found an old picture of Penelope! Just look at her in her Head Girl uniform...remember how Percy used to flirt with her? Oh, I still feel awkward about Percy. The way he deserted us...Mum cried for weeks."

"But he came back," Harry said. "He fought in the Battle."

"Oh yes, that's right," Ginny said breezily.

"Listen, Ginny," Harry said, his mouth drying up. "I...I'm really happy with you. And...I always want to be with you. I know we've had our ups and downs, but...I really do want us to work."

"Of course." Ginny shut the album and looked at him, her expression growing curious.

"I'm ready to really commit to us," Harry went on, "and I'm hoping you are too." With that, he took out the small velvet box and opened it, revealing the expensive ring. Ginny gasped.

"Oh, Merlin – oh, Harry...I...I'm really..."

He looked at her, his heart banging in his chest. He was expecting her to say yes straightaway, after dropping so many hints about it. Why the hesitation?

"This is what you want, isn't it?" he asked in concern.

"Yes, of course, but...I...I need to tell you something. I want us to have a clean start, without any...I mean..."

"What is it?" he asked, all happy feelings gone. Dread settled in his stomach.

"Harry, you have to understand that after you broke up with me – around your twenty-sixth birthday..."

"Yes?" Harry swallowed.

"I..." Ginny bit her lip.

"What? Ginny, what is it?"

She stared into the flickering flames, her face troubled.

"I...I had my memories modified."

"Your memories...modified?"

"Yes. I don't remember anything about the Battle, or anything around that time, or any part of our relationship prior to your twenty-sixth," Ginny said, talking fast and looking at Harry nervously. "It was a very upsetting time for me, Harry, who wants to remember a war? I think you'll agree it's for the best -"

He stood up, breathing heavily, trying to take it in.

"Harry, don't – Harry!" Ginny cried.

But he was gone.

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Chapter: 19

He Apparated directly into Draco's front garden where Scorpius and Teddy were industriously building a snowman with a carrot mohawk. He walked straight up to Teddy and grabbed him by the hand.

"Hey! Harry, let go! Harry!" Teddy tried to tug his gloved hand away from Harry's vicelike grip.

"What's going on? Ouch, let go -"

"You're going to your grandmother's."

"What, now?"

"Yes," Harry said in the same icy tone.

"Why? I don't want to, Scorpius said I could stay the night – let go!" Teddy struggled fruitlessly in Harry's grasp, yelling at him; Scorpius was standing in the background, looking afraid.

"What's going on? Hey, sir, let go of Ted -"

"Harry? Are you alright?" Draco's soft voice brought Harry back to earth. He let go of Teddy, who rubbed his hand and looked up at Harry.

"She said no, didn't she?" Teddy asked in a small voice.

Harry shook his head mutely, not trusting himself to speak.

"She said yes? She said maybe? She said she hates you?" Teddy tried.

"Why don't you two finish your snowman?" Draco tried, touching Harry's shoulder. Harry flinched at the touch.

"No. I'm not going til I know Harry's okay. What'd she do to you?" Teddy asked. "Did she throw a curse at you? Did she attack you? Did she lie to you?"

"Worse," Harry said, his voice breaking slightly. "She told me the truth."

Teddy fell back unhappily as Draco led Harry inside, watching as the two disappeared into Draco's house.

"He'll be alright," Scorpius said. "Dad'll take care of him."

Teddy looked back at him, his face pale and anxious.

"I hope so," he said.

The two boys stood silently in the snow.

They sat opposite each other. A poinsettia was in the middle of the table, surrounded by other Christmas debris: a pair of scissors, a roll of tape, a half-eaten bag of éclairs. There was a long silence which Draco wisely chose not to break. Harry finally spoke up.

"You."

"What?" Draco was startled; he hadn't been expecting that.

"You." Harry looked up at him, his eyes filled with fury. "You *knew*! Hermione must've been the Healer who oversaw it, and you must've wheedled it out of her! You probably went around bloody telling everyone except *me*!"

"Harry -"

"Just like fucking school! Going around telling all these little secrets to my friends...I bet that felt good! Ginny was right, you're still a worthless tosser -"

Harry picked up the scissors and hurled them at Draco, who ducked.

"Okay, resorting to physical violence. Not a good sign," Draco muttered, but Harry whipped out his wand and shot off a Stunning spell. Draco ducked again and a vase behind him exploded. Harry didn't pause before using a Crucio spell. Once more, Draco dodged it, the chair he'd been occupying moments before exploding into splinters.

"Okay, Potter, that one was a bit mean," he said but Harry, stony-faced, shot off yet another.

"*Sectum Sempra*!"

Draco darted to the left but was just a little too slow, several deep cuts appearing across the back of his hand. Harry rose his wand again but the words never left his lips as Draco tackled him, both of them ending up on the kitchen floor.

"What were you going to use next, Potter, Avada Kedavra? Great, I'm sure Teddy would enjoy writing letters to his godfather in Azkaban. And Scorpius would really appreciate being an orphan. No, really, he would. Fathers just get in the way, they're such a liability these days..."

Harry, panting, just glared up at him. "Get off. You weigh a ton."

"Not until you put your wand down, you stupid idiot."

"Sect -" Harry managed, his wand pressed tightly against Draco's chest. Draco pressed a hand on Harry's throat, effectively cutting him off.

"Come on, this is just embarrassing. Two grown men brawling? Well, mostly you. I'm kind of just sitting on you whilst you throw a tantrum and have a moment of childhood regression."

Harry appeared to consider this for a long while, his wand still wedged against Draco's chest. Then his hand slackened and his wand dropped abruptly, rolling away across the floorboards.

Draco instantly leapt up and grabbed it.

"Okay, this is mine. You're not getting it back until you calm down. Tea?"

"No," Harry snarled.

"Such a temper," Draco said mildly. "It's a good thing we've always gotten along so well."

Harry stared at him for a moment, then started laughing.

"You really need to talk to her."

"Yeah."

It was five hours later and Harry was morosely stirring his fourth cup of tea.

"She broke my heart."

"It happens," Draco shrugged.

"Why? Why would she do it?"

"That's a question only she can answer."

"Thanks, o wise one," Harry said sarcastically.

"You're welcome."

"What about you?" Harry asked. "You've never changed your memories. Why not?"

Draco shrugged again. "I don't know. I suppose I think experiences and memories of those experiences build a person. I wouldn't be the same person if I forgot those experiences."

"Exactly," Harry said slowly. "She's not the same person. She's so different. I can't talk to her."

Draco tactfully said nothing.

"That's it then," Harry said. "I'm not...I'm...that's it. Enough. I think we both need to move on."

"Are you sure?" Draco asked, his eyes searching Harry's.

"Yes. I am," Harry said, certainty suddenly filling his veins. "I'm tired. I've had enough."

"That's a pretty big decision." Draco hesitated. "Less than ten hours ago, you were proposing to

her."

Harry shrugged. "Things fall apart."

"I'll drink to that," Draco said.

His phone kept going off and, at long last, he answered.

"Hello?"

"Harry, it's me." Ginny's uncertain voice came through. Harry sighed and let the silence go on.

"Harry, we need to talk. Listen -"

"Ginny, not now. Not today. Give me some space."

"No, Harry, I think you should come home. Where are you?"

"I'm alright," Harry said. "I'm fine, that's all you need to know."

"Harry, I really want to talk."

"And I really don't."

"Harry, are you sure you're alright?" Ginny asked.

"Yes. I'm the calmest I've ever been in my entire life," Harry replied. He was. There was a calm before the storm and there was a calm afterwards, when the rain gently eased and the world was grey and silent. That was how he felt, slow and silent.

"Harry, you shouldn't be bottling up your emotions -"

"I'm not."

"I'll be waiting for you," Ginny said. "Come on, just go home..."

"I won't be home tonight," Harry said, making a split decision. "I'll talk with you tomorrow."

He hung up and turned round, bumping straight into Draco. His face was emotionless.

"I'll get Scorpius to set another place at the table," Draco said.

"Are there any carrots in this?"

"Just eat it."

"Because I really don't like carrots."

A pause.

"What's this? This looks like a carrot -"

Harry could see Draco struggling not to yell at his son in front of their guests and he stepped in.

"Scorpius, if you don't like it you can go cook something else for dinner or starve," Harry said. "Your choice. Now quit complaining."

"Oh, sir, you can't tell me off," Scorpius said, Draco smiling.

"Yes I can. I'm your professor. Telling you off comes naturally to me. What's the correct incantation to dispel a Bogart?"

"Oh, me!" Teddy's hand shot up, instantly going into school-mode.

"Riddikulus," Scorpius said quickly. "Ask another one, I bet I'll get it!"

"Alright. How does a Kappa kill its prey?"

"It lures them into marshlands," Teddy said quickly, much to Scorpius's disappointment.

"Okay, another," Harry said. "What colour is a Kappa?"

"Oh, I know -" Scorpius gestured excitedly and he ended up with a sleeveful of pasta sauce.

"*Scourgify*," Harry said casually, and with a gentle wave of his wand the stains disappeared.

"Brown!" Teddy said triumphantly.

"Oh, sir, that was wicked. Wasn't that wicked, Ted?"

"What, a cleaning spell? Not really," Teddy said dismissively. "I'm right, aren't I Harry? Brown?"

"Greeny-grey, actually," Harry laughed, to Teddy's disappointment.

"Oh well. That was really delicious, Mr Malfoy, may I please be excused?" Teddy asked; Draco consented and Teddy took his plate to the sink, rinsing it off.

"It'd be nice if you had manners like that," Draco commented to Scorpius.

"Yeah, it's a crying shame," Scorpius said, inspecting a suspect vegetable.

Harry tried valiantly to hide his smile.

Draco hesitated as Harry sat in the lounge, listening to the boys bickering over which movie to watch.

"You need something to take your mind off her," he said quietly. Harry nodded, gazing into the distance. Draco hesitated again. "Would you mind listening to me practice a piece? I've got to go to a recording tomorrow and I wouldn't mind having a critical listener."

Harry looked up at him, surprised.

"Yes," he said. "That would be wonderful."

Draco led the way upstairs. The first door on the landing clearly led to Scorpius's room; it had 'KEEP OUT' and 'WARNING: NUCLEAR SITE' stickers all over it. A second door further along presumably led to Draco's room. But there was only a single door on the other side of the hallway, and it was this one Draco unlocked and gestured for Harry to enter.

The room was large and in one corner was unused furniture, draped in white sheets. The large windows had no curtains, showcasing a beautiful view over Tulip Hill. In one corner was a mess of music sheets, a well-worn chair, a couple of broken music stands and one beautiful wooden stand, loaded with sheets of music. In pride of the place was a cello case. Draco closed the door behind Harry and allowed him to gaze around in silence.

"You're a cellist?"

"Yes. My father had a fit. He wanted me to learn fencing but after many tantrums he relented and paid for cello lessons instead," Draco said, smiling faintly.

Harry wandered over to the music stand and saw a stubby pencil balanced on the stand and a sheet of music paper, music notes filling half of it.

"You compose?"

"Not often, and not well," Draco shrugged. "I'll have to warm her up."

"Her?"

"My cello."

"Oh."

Harry watched as Draco settled himself onto the chair and prepared the cello, balancing it delicately on its endpoint and tightening the bow, running it across the strings and going through scales. Harry could feel the deep and beautiful thrum of the cello through the floorboards. Draco went through scales a few times then paused and began sifting through music, eventually finding the piece he wanted and settling it on the stand.

And he played.

Harry was entranced. He found himself mesmerised by Draco's hands; between the pegbox and the neck, his fingers moved gracefully across the strings. Sometimes they danced lightly and quickly, so fast that Harry thought he should surely slip up (though he never did). Sometimes his fingers stayed still for a long time as he drew out a long and melancholy note. His other hand, resting on the bow, was always adjusting itself; Harry watched the strong tendons in his wrist change and flex as he applied different pressures and changed the movement of the bow.

He never took his eyes off the music, not until he had completed the last and longest note. Then he looked up, briefly, at Harry.

"That was really beautiful," Harry said. "I loved watching your hands move."

"Room for improvement?" Draco asked briskly, preparing to put the cello away.

"Absolutely none."

"I messed up the bit in the middle, I had to improvise until I found my place again," Draco said critically.

"It was perfect."

"And at the end, I didn't use the correct position for A, I ended up having to do a lot of fancy work to get my fingers back into position in time for C," Draco said.

"It was perfect," Harry insisted. "Absolutely perfect."

And at last Draco allowed himself a small smile.

"I suppose," he said, "it was half-decent."

Harry shook his head and laughed.

Draco made up the couch downstairs whilst Harry hung around and ate his way through some leftover Christmas treats. It looked as though Draco and Scorpius had made sugar biscuits and iced them. Harry could tell only too clearly who had iced which biscuits. There were green

Christmas trees with tiny iced baubles and thin lines of brightly-coloured icing, angels with yellow wings and creases iced across their sweeping dresses – only too clearly the work of Draco's focussed eyes and careful hands. On the other hand, there were stars and bells energetically splashed with random blobs of colour. One bell looked as though someone had just mixed all the colours together, producing an odd grey shade, and dunked the bell in it.

"He got bored towards the end."

Harry smiled and looked up at Draco. "Bit of a short attention span."

Draco snorted. "That's putting it mildly."

Harry moved towards the couch and Draco raised an eyebrow.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"To...bed?" Harry asked, confused.

"I'm taking the couch. You're going upstairs."

Draco ignored all of Harry's indignant protests.

"Absolutely not. You're a guest, I'm not about to put you on the couch."

"I'm not a guest, I just imposed," Harry tried but Draco was having none of it and Harry found himself led upstairs, whereupon Draco pushed open his bedroom door and waited for Harry to walk in.

"If you need anything, help yourself," Draco said and with that he clicked the door closed and walked away.

Harry listened to his footsteps fading and looked around him. He was expecting a green room, Slytherin green, but it wasn't. It was painted in neutral tones with soft lighting and that's what Harry decided he liked the best, the soft glow. As with the rest of the house, there was a singular and large window, the curtains yet to be drawn. He walked to the window, staring out. At first he saw his reflection staring back at him but when he focussed he saw the lights of houses below in the valley, gradually petering out into the darkness of the hills behind them. And where the darkness of the hills ended, the brightness of the sky took over, the stars cold and white high above him.

He stayed there for a long time, looking out at the beautiful world. Then he turned and closed the soft curtains, taking in Draco's room. He had a very simple, unadorned double bed. No fancy woodwork, no scrolls or engravings or curlicues. It was made of a mellow-coloured wood and had a matching bedside table, upon which lay a book (a leaf acting as a bookmark and indicating Draco was halfway through it), half a glass of water, a small alarm clock and a lamp. There was

a low dresser but no wardrobe and a small and quite beautiful end table which Draco was apparently using as a small writing table. There was a chair in front of it and upon it lay a pad of writing paper and a pen, and next to that a laptop computer, its screen still up but apparently turned off. Harry glanced at the notepad and caught the words *Dear Harry*. It looked as though Draco was halfway through the letter. So it was here Draco sat, facing the beautiful view over the valley, penning his letters to Harry.

However it was the dresser that seemed to be Draco's place to put everything. Everybody had a one. In Harry's room, it was his bedside table. He used to joke that with Teddy it was his bedroom floor, but Teddy had gotten a lot better at keeping his room tidy lately.

The top of the dresser was littered with various things. Supplies of envelopes and stamps, letters and bills, a comb, a couple of sweet-smelling candles, lighters, a lump of rosin, a bottle of sunscreen, half a bag of Maltesers and a packet of cigarettes.

Human after all. The youngest Death-Eater, the boy who Harry had hated so much. And here it all was, a sign that Draco was like Harry. He forgot things like Harry. He could be messy like Harry. When he came through his bedroom door he dumped everything on the nearest bit of furniture, like Harry. He had bills to pay, he had to use sunscreen on sunny days, he liked rosewood-scented candles. Human after all.

Harry walked away from the dresser. Draco's room held few other things besides the furniture. There was a small alcove built into the wall above Draco's bed which he had lined with books, all which looked very battered and well-thumbed. They were stacked higgledy-piggledy, balancing precariously on each other, and Harry examined the titles. *Bleak House, Frankenstein, The Great Gatsby, Heart of Darkness, The Lighthouse.* Draco was certainly well-read, he couldn't deny it. However the book he was currently reading was *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and Harry had to smile.

Apart from the alcove of clearly treasured books there was nothing else to examine. Draco had a clothes basket in one corner, a shirt half-hanging from it, a couple of socks escaping. More signs that he was human. Harry smiled to himself and stripped down to his boxers, folding his clothes neatly and placing them over the chair by the end table. He placed his mobile phone, wallet, keys, wand and, lastly, spectacles, upon Draco's bedside table and slipped between the covers, his head sinking into the soft pillows. And within five minutes he had drifted contentedly into a deep sleep, the best he'd had for a long time.

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Chapter: 20

He woke up, blinking. Sunlight streamed through the curtains, soft and yellow. He blindly felt

around for his spectacles.

When he could see again, he glanced at the clock on the bedside table and did a double take.

Midday? Already? It couldn't be. He never slept that long. Someone knocked at the door and he called out tentatively.

"Yes?"

"May I come in?"

"Yeah," Harry said as the door opened. "Sorry, I never sleep this long usually. I guess I was just really tired last night."

"Don't worry about it," Draco said casually. "I'm sorry to wake you, I just need my wallet and keys."

"You didn't wake me," Harry assured him.

"Do you want a shower? I know I can never wake up properly without a shower," Draco confessed and Harry smiled.

"Yeah, that'd be good. Where are the towels?"

"In the cupboard under the bathroom sink," Draco said. "Help yourself to soap and shampoo. I don't have conditioner, it does terrible things to my hair."

Harry laughed. "Thanks. I'll try to make it quick."

"Don't worry about it, everyone else has had their shower. Take as long as you want," Draco said, examining his wallet critically as Harry got out of bed, sleepily wandering past him and out into the corridor.

Back in his bedroom, Draco flipped through his wallet, removing receipts. He isolated a few important ones, tossing them onto his dresser, then placed his wallet in his pocket and turned to leave.

He glanced back at his room one last time and frowned. Harry's clothes were folded over his chair; his wallet, wand and keys on Draco's bedside table, his phone wedged under Draco's pillow.

Draco went to the window and gazed out of it, his breath misting across the glass. Fingerprints showed, imprinted on the glass. Harry had stood here last night and gazed at the stars.

Draco did not wipe the fingerprints away. He wanted proof. Proof Harry had been here, standing

and looking at the stars as Draco did night after night. Proof Harry was thoughtful, that he too was drawn to the night sky, that he loved its beauty.

Proof Harry was human, after all.

Ginny was smiling and wearing her white summer dress, even though it was the middle of winter. Although Harry's house was comfortably warm, he felt the need to throw a blanket round her shoulders.

"Hey," Ginny said shyly, standing barefoot in his lounge room.

"You must be mad, wearing that in the middle of winter," Harry said abruptly, gesturing at her dress.

"What, this? Oh, yes, but it's my absolute favourite." Ginny smiled, lifting up her arms and giving a little twirl.

Harry said nothing, spinning one of his keychains around. Ginny looked up at him, smiling hopefully, brightly, but when he refused to meet her eyes her smile faded a little.

"Look, Harry, I can understand why you're so angry with me. But honestly, I must have been a mess after the Battle. Why else would I take all my memories away?"

You weren't a mess, Harry thought. You were grim and determined and strong and steady. But now...

He watched her twirling in the middle of the floor, her white dress billowing around her.

Now she was as thin and insubstantial as a puff of breath. A white dandelion caught on a breeze, tumbling along.

"I love it, I feel seventeen again," Ginny said. "I feel happy, and I know I could bring you happiness. What do you say?" She looked up at him, her voice giddy. A seventeen year old in love all over again. He looked at her, seeing her bright, brown eyes brimming with youth, her copper-coloured hair flying free as though she was a child, her red lips curved into a perfect smile.

"Well?" Ginny said impatiently and he looked at her, his face softening. Ginny smiled for a moment, bunching her white dress in her fists, confidence brightening her heart. But Harry made no movement, no motion.

"Harry?" she asked, suddenly afraid. Afraid she had held false hope, afraid she was mistaken, afraid of everything, like a little girl crying out about shadows and monsters. He looked back at her, his face in darkness.

"White doesn't suit you," he said quietly, and left.

"I think Harry's broken up with Ginny," Teddy said, pouring a bowl of cereal. Draco glanced at him.

"Good," Scorpius said with satisfaction, sneaking another teaspoon of sugar over his cornflakes. "No offence but I don't like her, she's fucking weird."

"I don't like her either," Teddy said quickly. "But she's alright. She was always trying hard to be friends with me."

"That's what I mean, she tries too hard," Scorpius said, sifting the sugar quickly beneath the cornflakes. "Did you hear them fighting?"

"No," Teddy said. "Ginny said a lot of things, but Harry didn't say anything. Except at the very end, and he said white didn't suit her."

"That's a weird thing to say," Scorpius scoffed, sneaking another teaspoon.

Teddy shrugged. "I suppose."

Draco said nothing, removing the sugarbowl well out of Scorpius's reach.

*White doesn't suit you.*

He heard the words clearly as though he'd witnessed the entire scene. He could hear Harry's quiet, firm voice. Harry wouldn't yell. Harry knew when to shout and when to whisper, and Draco liked that.

"I'm sorry about you and Ginny."

"Are you? I'm not," Harry said, eating one of the last candy canes from Draco's tree.

"Well, I'm sorry you had to experience the turmoil and hurt of a broken relationship."

"Experiences build the person," Harry said, echoing Draco's words. "It's made me think differently. And that's good."

"Think differently?" Draco asked.

"You know, it's bad luck if you leave your Christmas tree up over New Year's." Harry changed the subject.

"I'm not a superstitious person."

Harry laughed. "I am. I look for four-leaf clovers. I always look for the first star of the night."

"That's not superstition," Draco said. "That's like looking for the first blossom of spring or the kindest smile in an unfamiliar place."

"The first star is always Venus," Harry said. "The first blossom of spring always comes from the hazel tree. Who does the kindest smile in the room belong to?"

Draco said nothing. Harry negotiated the tricky hook-shaped part of the candy cane.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm in a whimsical mood." He paused. "We're nearly up to New Year's Eve."

"And you'll be going back to Hogwarts," Draco said softly.

"Yes. I'll be going back to Hogwarts," Harry repeated.

They stood in silence for a while.

Draco wished for all the clover to wilt, for the hazel trees to be buried under snow, for Venus to die away into darkness; but yet they lived whilst a smile ceased.

Harry leant his forehead against the cool glass of the car window, watching the darkening sky.

"Missing Ginny?" Teddy asked.

"Yes."

"Did she tell you a lie?"

"Yes."

"That wasn't very nice of her," Teddy observed. Harry sighed, finally glancing across at Teddy.

"She was just trying to make her life better."

Teddy unbuckled his seatbelt and produced a tiny trunk in his hand, waiting for Harry to perform an enlargement charm on it. He carefully opened the door and placed it on the pavement in preparation.

"Did she?"

"Did she what?" Harry asked, performing the spell.

"Did she make her life better?"

Harry thought. "I don't know, Teddy. I really don't know."

Teddy nodded and walked away, disappearing into the Kings Cross crowd.

Harry prepared for the long drive home.

Alone again, he thought.

Overhead, the heavens opened and the rain poured down.

Scorpius was being a nightmare.

"Fucking stupid fucking thing -"

"Malfoy," Harry said warningly, but Scorpius glared.

"Well I can't fucking do it, sir, the stupid fucking -"

"Just be patient and practise, you won't get it straight away," Harry said, knowing he had said these words hundreds of times to Scorpius and, as always, it was advice Scorpius refused to follow.

"I can't, it's bloody impossible," Scorpius said angrily and threw his textbook across the room; it hit Dobson on the head and he snarled.

Harry sighed.

There was a loud and brief knock at Harry's door before Scorpius burst in two seconds later, without waiting for a reply. At least he's learned to knock, Harry thought tiredly.

"Yes, Scorpius?"

"I got a letter from Dad," Scorpius said excitedly. "First in ages. You gotta read it, sir, and explain it to me. Coz I asked him a question, but the answer's damn long."

Harry frowned. Draco's answers were never long.

"Alright," he said reluctantly, and pulled the letter towards him. To his surprise, there was no

date, address or title as Draco usually and meticulously included. It seemed to open straight into a fairytale:

*Once upon a time there was a strange little world which had no light and all the occupants lived in darkness. In this dark world there were three brother wolves: Bene, Vikt and Cygnus. One day when the brothers were out hunting they found a young princess weeping by a fir tree, for she was lost and did not know the way home.*

*The brothers felt sorry for her and offered to lead her home. "For we can see easily into the darkness," they said, "and we promise not to harm you."*

*The princess was very frightened but the wolves kept their promise and delivered her safely to her father, the King, who was very grateful. "I must repay you," he said to the wolves.*

*"Tell me," he asked Vikt, the oldest, "what do you desire the most?"*

*"I desire gold and topaz," Vikt said. "Their colour is bright and brings warmth to my heart."*

*So the King created the sun. "The sun will bring warmth and is far brighter than any gold I can offer," he said. "But every twelve hours, the sun must rest a while before rising again."*

*Next, the King asked Bene what his heart's desire was.*

*"I desire silver and diamonds," Bene replied, "for they are beautiful and their coolness soothes my mind."*

*So the King created the stars. "The stars are more beautiful than any diamond I can offer," he said, "but during the day they will fade because the sun will diminish their loveliness."*

*The King then looked at Cygnus and said, "What do you desire, littlest wolf? What pretty trinkets does your heart yearn for?"*

*But Cygnus shook his head. "All I wish for is a companion, for my brothers rarely talk to me and I grow lonely."*

*"Very well," said the King. "I grant you the company of my daughter, the princess."*

*"But she is human," Cygnus said. "She will not desire a wolf companion."*

*"Ah," said the King. "And you are right. So you shall be a human." He clapped his hands once and Cygnus instantly became a handsome youth. "Beware, every twenty-nine days," the King warned, "you will revert to wolf-form. But I will give you a companion during this time, so you may not feel too lonely." And he created the moon to keep Cygnus company in wolf-form.*

*And so the brother wolves lived. Cygnus had the princess and the moon, Vikt had the sun and*

*Bene the stars. And it was generally agreed that Cygnus had the two most beautiful things of all.*

Harry placed the letter down again gently. "What was the question?" he asked.

"Not really a question," Scorpius admitted. "I just sort of wrote to him, all annoyed coz we just had a full moon and I told him I hate being a werewolf and everyone thinks we're horrible creatures." He hesitated. "Dad used to tell me that story when I was a kid, but it's been ages since he told it."

"I suppose he thought it relevant," Harry said. "He's trying to tell you that you've got a gift."

"I ain't got no princess," Scorpius said suspiciously.

"No, what he means is, you've got – you've got Teddy and Leo, and you've got the moon," Harry said.

"Yeah, alright, I can see the Teddy and Leo bit," Scorpius said. "But why the moon? What's so good about it?"

"It keeps you company when you're a werewolf," Harry said. "So Draco is trying to tell you that you shouldn't think of yourself as alone, because the moon is always there in the sky, giving you light. You shouldn't think of it as something that makes you a werewolf, but something that suffers through the isolation with you, that waxes and wanes with your human form."

"Oh," was all Scorpius said before collecting his textbooks.

"Didn't you want to write a reply?" Harry asked.

"Nah. I gotta think about it for a bit."

Scorpius never thought about anything. Harry raised an eyebrow but said nothing as Scorpius quietly left. He picked up his quill and resumed his writing:

*...by the way, your son just interrupted my writing (rudely, as usual, but I'll forgive him on account of his most interesting news...). He just showed me a particularly interesting tale penned by none other than yourself. Then he asked me what it meant. Please don't send any more such stories, as I have no idea how to explain your riddles...*

And although Harry didn't ask, he felt as though Draco had written that story for two people.

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Chapter: 21

Harry held Draco's letter, troubled, re-reading it again.

*...and I'm getting so many Howlers from Penelope Clearwater, I've got scorch marks all over my kitchen table. Even Prfsr. McGonagall is sending me concerned 'is everything alright at home' letters. I honestly don't know why he's acting up again. Only last week he got caught fighting (on three separate occasions), was thrown off the Quidditch team (apparently the message "non-contact sport" just wasn't sinking in) and Professor McGonagall informed me he's failing two (two!) classes, a new record even for him! Not to mention he apparently put a nest of Flobberworms in Clearwater's desk, set a student's quill alight, and has been banned from the quadrangle on account of stupid fights over territory issues. I feel like he's losing control again...another Durmstrang situation coming up. Please, Harry, just talk to him and ask him not to screw up his future...*

"Is this true?" Harry asked Scorpius, who stared blankly. "I know about your little Quidditch incident last week, but all this fighting? Over territory? This is just getting ridiculous. And what's this about failing two classes?"

"McGonagall ratting on me again?" Scorpius asked, trying to glimpse the letter. Harry folded it away.

"No, but a reliable source. Look, I'm getting really concerned about all this. Are you ill or distracted or is there a serious problem or are you just being lazy?"

"Ah, sir, I get bored!" Scorpius protested. "I'm just trying to make class funny. And homework, sir, dead boring, I'd rather be playing Quidditch -"

"Except you're not on the team anymore," Harry said dryly and Scorpius was silent. "Look, what can I do to help you? Anything?"

"No," Scorpius said. "I just get bored, that's all. Homework takes too long, professors drone on, all that -"

"I'll ask about getting you remedial lessons," Harry sighed. "What classes are you failing?"

"Already got remedial lessons, sir, I just can't be arsed going to them."

"Scorpius, this is serious. You really need to consider your education. What do you want to be when you're older?"

"I dunno, a hobo?"

"Scorpius!" Harry said with exasperation. "You must have some goal!"

"I dunno. Something with animals, maybe. The big dangerous ones."

"Alright," Harry said, relieved, opening the third drawer of his desk and feeling slightly guilty as he got out Scorpius's student record. Every Head of House had student records that were there to ensure student progress was monitored but Harry didn't have the time, and thus had not noticed Scorpius's falling grades. He examined Scorpius's academic record critically.

*Potions: A*

*Charms: P*

*Tranfiguration: P*

*History of Magic: T*

*Defence Against the Dark Arts: A*

*Herbology: O*

*Care of Magical Creatures: A*

"Well," Harry said cautiously, "at least you're passing Care of Magical Creatures, so you're getting there. But you seem to be doing remarkably well at Herbology. Interested in anything there?"

"I like plants," Scorpius said. "They don't pick fights."

"Er...okay...In any case, if you really want a career in Magical Creatures you're going to have to lift your game. Otherwise in ten years time you're going to be really kicking yourself for not getting high enough grades and you'll be stuck in a job you hate."

"Yeah, alright," Scorpius said.

"Just...promise you'll try harder, alright?"

"Yeah."

Harry dismissed Scorpius and sighed. He had the feeling he'd failed Draco somehow.

The twenty-third of March. A Wednesday. Spring was in the air and it was an unexpectedly beautiful day. The students were lazily looking forward to lunch, glancing out the window at the lush green pitch and everblue sky. Unfortunately it was a theory lesson, making them a little dozier than usual. Harry smiled as Leo used his textbook as a pillow.

"Alright, Dobson, can you tell me what a Foe-Glass is used for? Don't look at your textbook, please..."

There was a slight disturbance as Scorpius entered with his usual mess of books, parchment and quills, his inkstained bag overflowing.

"Ah, Malfoy, take a seat," Harry said, marking Scorpius as present. "We're just discussing Foe-Glasses, a very helpful object, particularly for the paranoid amongst us." A cloth was draped over the Foe-Glass which Harry then removed. Some of the more eager class members stirred, fanning the heat away and looking with interest at the object. "As you can see, there are probably some shadows in this glass." Harry gestured. "It will probably depend on the viewer, it changes from individual to individual. But you should all be seeing silhouettes without any colour. If any of you can see whites in their eyes, I suggest you get your wand out."

The class all raised their eyebrows at each other; some of the more paranoid leaned forwards with wide eyes, trying to see their shadows.

"Alright," Harry said. "Now can anyone think why or when a Foe-Glass could come in handy?"

"For Aurors?" Dobson suggested brightly.

"Absolutely. Five points."

"For people working or living in high-risk areas, like Azkaban or the Magical Law Enforcement department," a girl piped up.

"Very good, Madley. Five points to Ravenclaw. The Magical Law Enforcement is a particularly good point. For example, when surrounding a dangerous location or persons, it would do very well to see if you're not about to be ambushed from behind. This is where the Sneakoscope also comes in handy – particularly if you think you've got a double agent on your team. But I digress. These are very good for those thinking of careers in these areas, but what about ordinary, every-day use by normal wizards and witches?"

Harry turned to write on the blackboard and caught movement from the corner of his eye, in the doorway.

Draco Malfoy stood there, staring at him.

Harry glanced quickly at Scorpius and saw the boy with his head down, diligently writing away. Leo and Teddy, on the left of him, were swapping notes and looking busy as they always did. No smirking or nudges to Scorpius. Nothing seemed amiss besides the fact Harry had never seen Scorpius so studious.

He glanced back towards the door and, surprised, saw McGonagall there, standing and murmuring to Draco. She went to walk into the room but Draco shook his head and after a

moment she stepped back again, catching Harry's eye. He realised they wanted Scorpius but for some reason wanted it to be discreet.

"Alright," he said to his class. "How about we get into pairs, and you can come up with your own reasons for using Foe-Glasses, Sneakoscopes, Secrecy Sensors and Revealers? I'll want a presentation and examples by the end of the lesson. Could I get someone to go to the library and pick up some books for the class?"

"Oh, sir, me, sir!" Leo's hand shot up and Dobson rose an arrow-straight arm. But Harry ignored them.

"Malfoy, can I trust you to do that?"

"Yes, sir." Scorpius rose, not looking Harry in the eye as he went to the door; as soon as he saw McGonagall standing there he gave a cry and turned back towards Harry, fast as lightning, but McGonagall was faster and she grabbed Scorpius by the arm, pulling him away.

"Scorpius!" Leo cried, jumping to his feet, parchment going everywhere. "Hey! What're you doing?" he shouted at McGonagall, who ignored him.

"I already told you, Malfoy, there is no need to return to class," she said sternly. "You must go to your dormitory immediately." With that, she put a hand on Scorpius's shoulder and directed him away.

"His dormitory?" Teddy repeated dumbly. "What's going on?" he asked Harry, who was at a loss. He had no idea what was happening. Leo started towards the now-empty doorway but Harry grabbed him as he went past.

"Mancini, sit down. You can't do anything."

"But sir -"

"Sit down." Harry waited a moment then let Leo go, watching as he returned to his seat. His class watched him with pale, distracted faces. He knew the lesson couldn't go anywhere now.

"Class dismissed," he sighed. "Go and enjoy the day. It's beautiful."

Harry raced to the school gates and once outside, Disapparated directly to Hogsmeade. His guess was correct; Draco had not Apparated or Portkeyed to Hogwarts but had driven up. The light blue Audi was waiting outside the train station, Scorpius yelling as Draco forced him into the car as though he was a toddler.

"I don't want to fucking leave! You – can't – make – me!" Scorpius screamed, kicking out at his father with each word. "They're – fucking – lying -"

"Are you alright?" Harry asked softly; Scorpius paused for breath.

"No, I'm fucking not!"

"I was talking to your father."

Draco gave Harry a look as Scorpius resumed his struggles.

"Expelled," he said shortly, managing to shove Scorpius into the front seat and slamming the door. Scorpius abruptly stopped his yelling and sat still and silent, staring straight ahead and apparently fuming.

"Expelled?" Harry said, incredulously. "Expelled? But – he can't be -"

"Well, he is."

"But – where will he go?" Harry asked, still shocked. "What will he do?"

Draco didn't answer him, getting into the driver's side and slamming the door. Harry watched him drive away.

He stood alone for some time on the train platform.

Harry struggled to resume his third-year Defence classes. A few of Scorpius's more studious classmates were smug but most of the class was silent. Even Dobson looked pale and troubled. There were no smiles or cheerful words exchanged. They sat, still and watchful, as though waiting for something.

An explanation.

Merlin knew they deserved it, but Harry couldn't offer them one. He watched Leo sit silently by Scorpius's seat. Teddy sat next to him and the two waited there, apparently immune to the satisfied looks the study nuts gave them.

"Today we're discussing Dark Detectors," Harry said, his heart heavy. The class watched him, unsmiling.

The lesson went slowly. Harry never thought he'd miss Scorpius's constant interruptions, his jokes and pranks and smart retorts. But he did, and the class seemed to as well, as much as they'd made a fuss of him interrupting their education.

At the end of the class, Teddy approached Harry's desk.

"Hey, Harry," he said quietly. "Any news of Scorpius?"

"None," Harry said.

"Mr Malfoy, he tell you anything?" Leo cut in, standing next to Teddy.

"No. Nothing."

"He must have told you something!" Teddy exclaimed. "He must have written!"

"No," Harry said and the answer hurt him as much as it did Teddy. It had been a week and there was nothing. Not a letter, not a note. It was if Draco had simply disappeared from the face of the planet.

Easter break.

He had fifty-two essays to go through.

Thirty-seven tests to mark.

He needed to review the housekeeping rules.

He had to tidy up the Gryffindor rooms, to clean off the noticeboard.

He had to review lists of students who were going away for the week.

He went home instead.

Teddy had initially refused to come home for break.

"It's only a week and I've got three essays to do," he said. But just an hour before Harry was about to leave, he appeared in his office looking shifty.

"You're going home to Tulip Hill, right?" he asked Harry.

"Of course."

"So, while I'm in the area, I may as well visit Scorpius..."

"I suppose."

"Great. Except Leo really wants to see Scorpius too."

Harry said nothing, highly suspicious.

"So I told him he was welcome to stay with us for a few days," Teddy went on, carefully examining Harry's expression hopefully.

"Alright," Harry sighed. "As long as his parents are alright with the arrangements. And only for a couple of days."

"Wicked, thanks," Teddy said gleefully. "Going there by train?"

"Yes. Be ready to leave in a half hour," Harry ordered, knowing Teddy would take at least an hour.

He did.

Scorpius answered the front door and when he saw Leo and Teddy, his face split into a wide grin and within the next moment they were enthusiastically punching each other, laughing and chatting and knocking over the coat stand and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

"Professor Potter let me come along," Leo said and Scorpius looked gratefully at Harry.

"Thanks a lot, sir, I knew you weren't a tosser like Clearwater," he said, another high compliment.

"Er, you're welcome," Harry said. "I hope we haven't imposed, I did want to call ahead but Teddy and Leo wanted it to be a surprise."

"Nah, no problem sir, wicked surprise," Scorpius said and Leo, apparently overwhelmed with emotion, hit Scorpius over the head with the coat stand.

After Harry had managed to calm the boys down, return the coat stand to its rightful place, repair the fruit bowl and retrieve all the oranges, he inquired as to Draco's whereabouts.

"Upstairs resting, I think," Scorpius said, his smile fading and his face becoming slightly troubled. "He's been getting sick a lot, since I came back."

"Oh. Well, I shouldn't really be bothering him then, we should come back another time -"

"He's alright," Scorpius protested. "I reckon he'd really like to see you, sir, you should go up and say hello."

"No, I think I'd rather -"

"Oh, go on, you two should catch up," Teddy joined in and the two looked at him so beguilingly

he gave up and made his way upstairs.

He stopped on the landing and frowned, hearing the deep strum of the cello. He stood for a long while outside the studio door, staring at the delicate but simple brass lock.

He put his hand on the door handle, feeling its smooth coldness beneath his hand and turned it gently, opening the door and closing it behind him.

Draco was sitting by the window in a stream of golden late-afternoon sunlight. Outside, the leaves on a tree danced in the wind, sending flickering shadows across Draco's face. Nevertheless, he remained undistracted, staring at the music, his fingers dancing quickly across the strings, light but sure. Harry watched as his eyes flicked backwards and forwards, reading the music like a book.

Harry didn't move and Draco didn't stop, continuing on until he'd finished the last bar. Then he examined his bow and picked a small rectangle of rosin from the music stand, drawing it down the bowstrings in long strokes so that the fine white dust rose, the particles illuminated in the dance of light and shadow. He then sat down, settled and played through the piece again. Harry didn't mind because he'd missed the start anyway and it turned out to be very beautiful and slow. Draco was always very patient, taking his time. Never rushing into the higher, quicker notes. He savoured every note as though it was a particularly fine dessert or a long summer day.

When he'd completed the second rehearsal, he finally slackened the bow and put it away, gently laying the cello in its case and turning to Harry.

"I thought Scorpius was being particularly raucous," he said.

"Leo and Teddy are here," he said, shrugging helplessly. "I wanted to ring ahead but the boys insisted on surprising Scorpius. I'll go collect them now."

"Let them stay," Draco said. The shadows of the leaves danced across his face, and Harry couldn't make out his expression.

"I'm sorry I disturbed you."

Draco's lips curved into a soft smile. "I don't mind. Barely noticed you."

It was the truth, Harry thought. Draco's face had a focussed but pensive look to it; Harry could tell he was locked away in a different world.

"How's things with Scorpius?"

Draco shrugged and sat down in the chair again, his eyes cast downwards. "Impossible. I honestly don't know what to do. I don't want to send him away to an overseas school but I

haven't the time or experience to homeschool him."

"Expelled," Harry said softly, feeling the mellow afternoon sunlight warming his face.

"From two schools."

They said nothing for a while, both lost in their own thoughts. Harry was racking his mind, trying to think why Scorpius could have been expelled. He really didn't want to ask Draco, feeling the question was irrelevant and insensitive.

"Tell me something," Draco said. "You raised Teddy, didn't you?"

Harry shrugged. "With his grandmother's assistance, yes, I suppose. I taught him how to tie his shoelaces, how to ride a bike (and a broom), how to use a knife and fork."

"Manners?"

"Yes. He learned to eat his vegetables before he got dessert. Not to put his elbows on the table, to ask to be excused, to take his plate to the sink. To always say please and thankyou. To wait his turn in queues, to mind his language, to tidy up any mess he'd made." Harry shrugged.

"You've done a wonderful job," Draco said quietly. "You should be really proud of him." He lifted his head and gazed at Harry. "Can you say the same to me?"

Harry hesitated, just for a second, but Draco saw it and he turned away, his face hidden in shadows as the afternoon melted into evening and the shadows grew long and deep.

Harry left.

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Chapter: 22

Draco didn't write to Harry anymore but Harry was determined to send letters. Draco held the latest one in his hand, staring at it, re-reading it.

*Dear Draco,*

*Once upon a time there were three wolves, three brothers: Sevel, Mele and Finn. They lived in a strange world, a world where it was always winter. The oldest wolf, Sevel, loved colour, and he wanted red and gold and yellow, he wanted brightness in his world. He spent his days digging in the snow, hoping to catch a glimpse of pretty colour.*

*The middle wolf, Mele, loved the scent of flowers and grass, and spent his days cursing at the ice and trying to break through it.*

*The youngest one, Finn, dreamed of warmth and light, and so he hated the winter world, and spent his days wishing for a place of sun.*

*One day when the three brothers were out exploring, they came across a princess trapped in a cage of ice. The three wolves felt pity for her and spent several hours snapping and digging at the ice until it gave and they were able to free the princess. She was so grateful she decided to grant them each a wish.*

"*Sevel, eldest brother," she said. "What does your heart desire?"*

"*I seek colour," he said, "I seek brilliant reds and rich yellows, and earthly browns." And so the Princess made Autumn, and Sevel lived there happily.*

"*And Mele, middle brother, what is it your heart desires?" she asked.*

"*I seek scent," he said. "I seek the fresh wildflowers and their beautiful perfumes, and the smell of green grass."*

*So the Princess made Spring, and Mele lived there happily.*

"*Little Finn," she said. "What is it your heart desires?"*

"*Beautiful princess of the icelands, I wish only to live with you," Finn replied, "and see that no harm shall befall you."*

*But the Princess was troubled, for she could see into the heart of Finn and she knew he dreamed of Summer.*

"*If you are to be my companion," she said, "you will never feel warmth or see light, but you will be trapped in Winter forever, for I am Winter and Winter is me."*

*But Finn loved her so much he refused to part from her, and the Princess relented and allowed him to be by her side. And as the long months went on, Finn dreamt more and more of Summer until he faded away to nothing but a ghost. And where he walked, a warm breeze sprang up, and where he slept, green grass grew. And the Princess wept for she was afraid, but as the gold and blue spread and Summer came, her ice did not melt because she was Winter and Winter was her, and Summer could not take that away. And so the Princess was not afraid any more, and alongside her crown of frost lay a mantle of sunlight.*

Draco placed the letter down gently and stared out the window, the light flickering through the leaves, the shadows dancing.

He picked up his pencil and added a few more notes to his composition.

Summer.

The students lazed by the banks, the trees dipped and danced in the breezes, the cloudless sky was an everlasting blue. The heart-shaped leaves of a tilia tree blew over the grounds, floating and dancing over the sleepy heads of students, the adoring faces of couples. They had their entire future ahead of them and Harry watched for a moment as a young man picked up one of the heart-shaped leaves and twirled it absently.

He smiled and looked back down to the letter lying on his desk, picking his quill back up and writing in the few last words.

*Again, many thanks for entrusting me with the care and education of so many bright, young witches and wizards. I pray I have contributed to their knowledge and assisted them in gaining a sound education; however two years as a Defence teacher is, as you know, one year too many. I have broken tradition and I apologise.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Harry Potter.*

*P.S: Enclosed you will find a phial of clear, tasteless, scentless liquid. Think what you may of it; I have nothing to say except I noted Eugene Dobson, a third-year Hufflepuff, discussing plans to purchase a firespell several weeks ago.*

Having signed his name, he folded and slipped the letter into an envelope and addressed it to Professor McGonagall, leaving it sitting on his otherwise empty desk and walking from his office.

As he went through the grounds, students turned and smiled.

"Going home early, Professor?"

"Beat the rush, eh, sir?"

"Happy holidays!"

"Goodbye, sir!"

He laughed and farewelled the familiar faces he knew so well before walking away and disappearing through the gates of Hogwarts.

McGonagall read the letter, at first frowning over the task of finding another Defence teacher and then over the phial. She examined it for a moment before sending Grimble out to find Dobson and request that he meet her in Professor Potter's office.

Dobson arrived, looking alert and beaming at her.

"Professor Potter's already guaranteed me an Outstanding Achievement," he said, looking around as though waiting to be presented with an award.

"I daresay he has. He's mentioned on several occasions that you're quite an ambitious student," McGonagall replied. "A lot of potential, he said. He did mention, however, that he found you quite a serious boy. Lacking humour."

"I'm very serious about my study," Dobson said proudly. "I certainly wouldn't regard that as being a negative trait."

"So you would agree you're not the type for pranks, tricks, mischief?" McGonagall asked, idly rolling the phial across her palm.

"Er...no," Dobson said, eyeing the phial. "Is that...is that Veritaserum?"

"Ah! Quite the detective," McGonagall said. "Harry was right, you're a very promising student. So much more potential than young Scorpius Malfoy. A troublemaker, always up to no good. But we won't speak of him, shall we? He was expelled two months ago. An unfortunate case."

Dobson was looking distinctly uncomfortable. McGonagall carried on.

"Friendly with him, were you?"

"Oh...no...he was quite mean to me on several occasions. A bully," Dobson said anxiously. "You can ask Professor Potter, he once stabbed me with a quill -"

"Oh, yes. Quite the mischief maker. I imagine you wouldn't enjoy his company."

"Yes. I find pranks quite distasteful." Dobson wiped a sleeve across his damp forehead, looking uncomfortable in the warm office.

"Really? Then why, pray tell, would you be purchasing a firespell?"

"A...what?"

"A firespell. Designed to explode on contact. Surely you remember two months ago, when our own Professor Clearwater was the victim of such an unkind – and quite unfunny – prank. Poor girl, she suffered quite nasty burns."

Dobson squirmed.

"Tea?" McGonagall said, turning her back to him and letting the phial clink gently on the desk.

"Alright!" Dobson bursted out. "It – it was just a bit of fun, my friends and I were sick of Malfoy always getting up to tricks, we thought it -"

"That it would serve him right?" McGonagall said, a thin eyebrow arched. "That he would get into serious trouble, and the biggest joke of all would be that nobody would believe him when he said he didn't do it?"

"Exactly, everyone knows him and Professor Clearwater hate each other," Dobson said. "But we didn't mean to hurt anyone, we thought Professor Clearwater would just do a flame-freezing charm or something, I mean, really -"

"She was in shock," McGonagall said coldly. "I daresay you may have reacted exactly the same."

"And we didn't mean for Malfoy to get expelled," Dobson said, visibly upset. "We thought at most, he'd get a week of detentions."

"And once he was expelled, you decided not to speak up?"

Dobson said nothing, staring at the floor.

"I – I'm not going to be expelled, am I?" he whispered miserably. "Only...I got here on a scholarship, see, and my guardian, he'd be awfully disappointed in me...I've spent all year studying to get really good grades for him...he'd be devastated if I was expelled..."

McGonagall's expression softened slightly. "I can see everything just got out of control," she said gently. "You'll have to be punished, certainly, but I don't think you'll be expelled."

He sagged with relief. McGonagall dropped the phial of water back into her pocket and gazed out into the summer day.

*Dear Mr. Malfoy,*

*I write to inform you that your son, Scorpius Malfoy, was wrongly and unjustly convicted of injuring Professor Penelope Clearwater and was subsequently issued an expulsion from the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry on the 23rd of March 2010.*

*Fortunately this decision has been reversed and the student responsible has been punished. I sincerely apologise for the trauma and immense inconveniences incurred by the expulsion and extend an invitation for Scorpius to resume his education at Hogwarts. He has been given the*

*grade average for this year; if you require any additional information regarding Scorpius's education please do not hesitate to owl me.*

*Regards,*

*Professor M. McGonagall,*

*Headmistress.*

Harry dropped the letter.

"So?"

"So," Draco said, "go ahead and tell me you weren't involved."

"I just overheard something and got suspicious, told McGonagall," Harry shrugged. "I didn't pull any strings."

Draco just smiled.

Their companionable silence was ruined by the sound of somebody falling down the stairs. Draco sighed.

"First day of the summer holidays, and they're already wrecking the house." He opened the studio door and disappeared. After a while, Harry heard some angry yelling and couldn't help but suppress a smile.

"...don't try telling me it was Teddy's idea to ride your bike down the stairs either, Scorpius, now you can go clean off all that mud! And if that bike isn't outside in five seconds, I'm taking it to the tip!"

Scorpius muttered under his breath, wheeling the bike outdoors whilst Teddy looked anxious.

"And don't put it in the garage either, it's full moon tomorrow night!"

"I'm not going to chew up my own bicycle," Scorpius protested but nevertheless put it in the garden shed instead. Draco sighed, seeing Harry standing at the foot of the stairs.

"He still deludes himself that he can control his actions in werewolf form. Tea?"

"Of course," Harry said, wandering into the kitchen and tripping over Teddy. "Go help Scorpius. And I don't care if it wasn't your idea, you should have had the sense to talk Scorpius out of it."

"Good, next time *you* can try talking him out of something," Teddy shot back.

"Point taken. Have a biscuit. Not the last Nice, that's mine."

Teddy took a digestive and wandered away; Draco shook his head and opened his teabox. Harry watched his hands, the movements familiar to him now.

"I liked your story."

Harry said nothing, watching Draco's hands measure out the dried tea, his actions quick and sure.

"I read it to Scorpius. He liked it." His fingers tapped on the teaspoon, pale against the silver. Harry saw that beneath Draco's thumb it was tarnished, the outer coat of metal rubbing away from so much use.

"What are you doing on the fifth?" he asked Draco, who glanced at him, startled.

"The fifth? Let me see...I've got head into London on Friday to do some recordings, but I should be back by late afternoon."

"Who are you recording for?"

Draco shrugged. "I lose track. There's a couple of regular bands that constantly want a string quartet, solo cello or even an orchestra in their songs, but for most artists it's just a one-off track. I can never remember names."

He handed Harry his tea and Harry stirred it with the teaspoon, staring at the tarnished spot on the handle.

"Are you alright?" Draco asked, glancing at him, and Harry shook his head as if he was trying to physically free himself of his dreams.

"Yes, I'm fine. Sorry, I'm just a little distracted." Harry met Draco's eyes and lightly changed subjects. "Scorpius said you were ill."

"I get migraines a lot," Draco said. "Stress-induced. Nothing serious."

"It's hard to imagine you being stressed," Harry commented. He couldn't imagine Draco losing control or screaming his head off or panicking over anything. Draco was cool and calm. He was careful, he never spoke rashly or acted without thinking. Everything he did had a reason, a purpose.

He looked up and for some reason found himself smiling as Draco glanced up at him, stirring his tea.

"What?" he asked in confusion.

"Oh, nothing," Harry said and Draco smiled to himself, shaking his head.

"Sometimes I think you're mad."

"But you enjoy my company, nevertheless."

"Yes," Draco said, wrapping both hands around his cup of tea and gazing out the window to where Scorpius and Teddy were climbing the apple tree. "Yes, I do."

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Chapter: 23

"Bloody hell, Scorpius, sit still or I'll Petrify you."

"You wouldn't, sir!"

"Oh yes I would." Harry adjusted the lens and shooed Teddy out of shot. "Now sit still, and – Scorpius! Don't pull faces like that -"

"Coffee?" Hermione offered.

"No, I'm alright. Thanks for lending me this photography stuff, Hermione."

"You're welcome. I don't think you're making much progress though."

"I'd say. *Scorpius!*"

Scorpius dropped the hatstand guiltily and Teddy rubbed the back of his head, glaring.

"Maybe you should just let them run around for a bit," Hermione said, hastily rescuing her hatstand. "Go for natural shots instead of formal portraits."

"Yeah, maybe." Harry was ready to give up on the whole idea.

"Outside, perhaps, where the light is more natural."

"Okay."

"Black and white, that would look really gorgeous."

Harry wordlessly handed the camera over to her and wandered off.

"Oh no, I'm not doing it for you!" Hermione called out quickly but he was gone and she sighed.

Harry and Ron wandered out into the garden, watching as she shooed the boys outside and let them run around, snapping away.

"I should help her," Harry said, but Ron waved a hand dismissively.

"Nah, she's got it all under control."

Harry laughed, clinking his butterbeer against Ron's.

"Happy birthday!"

Draco stared blankly at Scorpius. He'd just arrived home from the recordings, put his treasured cello away, made dinner, watched Dr Who and now Scorpius had appeared out of nowhere, holding a muffin proudly. There was a green candle in the middle of it.

"I made it myself," Scorpius said proudly. "And picked out the candle. Here's your present." He handed over a flat parcel importantly. "Come on, open it up, I wanna see what it is!"

Draco stared at him. Scorpius began back-pedalling.

"It *is* your birthday right? Because if it isn't -"

"Yes," Draco said quietly. "Yes, it is. I'd forgotten." He'd learned to forget his birthdays over the years. Of course, Scorpius's were always marked with plenty of celebrations, embarrassing singing, friends, cake, presents. But not Draco's birthday.

"Oh, good," Scorpius said with relief. "Come on, open it up!"

Draco hesitantly and carefully removed the silver paper, edging it off to reveal a beautiful photo frame . It was black and simple. Exactly Draco's style. But he was more interested in the actual photographs. Somebody had painstakingly cut out white cardboard to create nine little frames within the larger frame, and each frame had a little photograph of Scorpius. A moving photograph.

"Wizard photographs," Draco whispered, staring at the photographs. Here Teddy and Scorpius played cricket; there Harry stood at the foot of a tree, talking animatedly to Teddy and Scorpius peering through the leaves.

"Oh, I thought Potter would've given you something more interesting," Scorpius said. "Like one of the latest Strikes or something..."

"It's perfect," Draco murmured.

"Are you going to eat your muffin?"

"Give that to me," Draco laughed, drawing in a deep breath. "Thank you, Scorpius."

"You're welcome," recited Scorpius. Harry had taken him aside and demanded he be nice for Draco's birthday. 'You might be a little brat for the other 364 days,' he had said. 'But you'll be good today.' And he had been. He'd helped set the table, he'd peeled the potatoes for dinner, he had gone upstairs and left Draco alone to watch his favourite show. He'd even cleaned up the lounge, so his father could walk across it without breaking either his ankles or a possession.

Draco looked up at him and smiled, quite a beautiful smile, and Scorpius thought he'd never seen his father happier.

"*Accio* rosin. *Accio* rosin. *Accio* rosin."

"You're not holding your wand right."

Draco looked behind him. Harry leaned against the doorframe, neither smiling nor frowning. He simply looked pensive, his voice gentle. He slowly unfolded his arms and made his way across the room to Draco, standing directly behind him. His breath tickled the nape of Draco's neck.

"You need to adjust your grip for the wand movement to be precise." Harry wrapped his own hand around Draco's, bringing the wand a little higher up and gently changing Draco's grip.

"*Accio* rosin," he said, his hand moving with Draco's, and the rosin flew towards them. Harry brought his arm up against Draco's other side and smoothly caught it.

"Just like that," he said and stepped away from him. However Draco dropped his arm, his wand loose in his hand.

"I feel stupid."

Harry looked at him, surprised.

"Practising third-year skills. Scorpius can do this and I can't."

"You've been thirteen years without magic, Draco. Don't be so hard on yourself. You know your skills are going to be a little rusty. It's just as if you didn't play the cello for thirteen years."

Draco sighed, bringing his arm up again and concentrating on the music stand. Harry watched his face, the muscles tightening with determination, his eyes narrowing with focus. His fingers adjusted, readjusted, adjusted again.

"My hand doesn't feel right. I've got the grip wrong again, haven't I?"

Harry smiled and came up to him again, this time standing in front of him and changing Draco's grip, pushing his hand further along the wand. He stepped back and Draco brought up his wand.

"*Accio* pencil."

The pencil began moving in a painfully slow manner. It took five minutes to reach Draco, who caught it with a sigh and began adjusting his grip.

"Harry, could you help me again? I'm -"

"Actually, I just remembered I promised I'd, er, meet Ginny," Harry said quickly. "Sorry, I've got to go." He strode quickly towards the door, opened it and closed it again, leaving Draco staring in disappointment and confusion at the spot where he'd been standing.

He stood alone in his sunwarmed studio, light and shadow playing on his face for a long time, trying to identify the feeling in his heart. Sadness, perhaps.

Harry's hands were still trembling by the time he'd reached his own home. What had happened? Standing in the studio, feeling everything...the warm sunlight on his back, the smooth floorboards beneath his feet, the comfortable quietness, the shadows dancing across Draco's hands, the sun illuminating fine blond strands of hair, so close Harry could smell Draco's aftershave...And he'd found his heart racing, his breath caught, his hands trembling.

What was wrong with him? Perhaps he'd had a moment of claustrophobia, shortness of breath, something like that.

He sighed and waited until his hands stopped shaking before making a cup of tea and calling Ginny. He may as well arrange to catch up and salvage their friendship.

"How did your meeting with Ginny go?"

"What? Oh, yes. Actually, we had a long talk and...well...the engagement party is next week."

"Oh." Draco tried to add a teaspoon of coffee to Harry's cup and his hand slipped, scattering coffee granules everywhere. He tried to sweep them up and ended up bumping the cup, making it fall from the counter and smash across the floor.

"Are you alright?" Harry asked with concern. "Here, let me help."

"Harry, it's fine."

"*Reparo*!"

"Just leave it."

"*Scourgify* -"

"I said fucking leave it alone, alright!" Draco shouted and Harry stopped, staring. "Just fucking leave it, Potter, I don't need your stupid magic to fix everything, alright? It wouldn't take that much effort to fucking just pick up the pieces yourself, would it? But if you're that keen, go ahead! Here you go!" And with that, he swiped his cup to the floor where it shattered, the fine china splintering loudly. Draco reached for another cup standing on the sink, smashing it onto the floor, reached for another – but Harry reached out and took hold of his wrist.

"Draco, what's wrong?"

"I already fucking told you, didn't I?" Draco snarled, bringing his other arm around, his hand already forming a fist as it swung towards Harry's face. However Harry reached up and gently caught the other wrist too.

"Please calm down -"

"You're one to talk," Draco hissed. "Let me go."

"You're being irrational," Harry said. "Please, just tell me what's wrong."

They stood that way for a long time. Draco was standing with his back to the counter, his eyes resolutely cast downwards; Harry was holding both his wrists, staring searchingly at his face.

"I'm sorry," Draco said, forcing his voice to be calm. "I've just got a migraine, I get very irritable."

"A migraine?" Harry said sceptically.

"Yes."

Harry sighed and released Draco's wrists.

"Do you want to come to the engagement party?"

"No. Thank you," Draco added.

"Come on, I'd really love the company. I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm very happy for Ginny and Dennis, but..." Harry trailed off, looking unhappy. "I just think it would be really awkward."

Draco stared at him for a long time. "Ginny Weasley and Dennis...?"

"Dennis Creevey. Ginny Weasley and Dennis Creevey. What a pair." Harry started laughing.

After a heartbeat, Draco joined in.

"Do you want me to stop practising magic around you?"

"Oh, no. Don't worry about it. I need to get used to it anyway."

"I'm sorry," Harry said. "I didn't realise it was annoying you."

"It's fine. How were you supposed to know, anyway?"

"True. You never give anything away. You always look calm, unemotional." Harry paused. "It's nice to see you're human."

Draco looked at him, startled. *Proof you're human...* The words echoed as though he'd heard them before.

They sat on Draco's front porch watching fireflies. Draco had lit a citronella candle to keep the mosquitos at bay and Harry found the slightly acrid scent quite soothing.

"I give some things away," Draco said quietly as they watched the fireflies dance above them.

"If you're talking about Scorpius, you can have him back," Harry said, referring to the fact Scorpius had spent the majority of the week at Harry's place. Draco laughed and shook his head.

"That's *not* what I was talking about."

"I know," Harry said, smiling.

"Oh, you do? Enlighten me," Draco said, a faint smile gracing his lips. "What do I give away?"

"Stories," Harry said seriously. "Memories. Time. Thoughts, ideas, advice, songs, truths." He paused, glancing at Draco. "Are you alright?"

"I think I've got a migraine coming on," Draco murmured, his eyes closed.

"Do you want me to get you something?" Harry asked. "Water, paracetamol?"

"I've got some codeine upstairs," Draco said softly. "In my room. Bedside table."

"I'll get it for you," Harry said quickly, not liking how quickly the headache had hit Draco. "I'll be back soon." He got up from the steps and hurried inside, making his way to Draco's room and

reaching for the light switch.

"Right, bedside table," he murmured, seeing in a glance that it wasn't on top of the table. There was a drawer underneath however and Harry opened it, expecting it to be filled with the usual junk that bedside tables always were.

However there was nothing but two black scraps of robe, placed – and the word which came to Harry's mind was lovingly – inside, carefully folded. Harry frowned and picked one up, gently unfolding it and recognising instantly the Slytherin crest. Pansy's torn robe. He frowned and reached for the other piece and as it fell open, gold thread caught in the light and glittered richly.

The Gryffindor crest.

Harry was suddenly in the middle of last summer, gazing up at the stars, lying next to Draco Malfoy. Handing him his wand, wrapped in a scrap of old robe.

He shook his head as if to clear away the memory, as if to clear away the stars and summer and Draco Malfoy.

*Allegra.*

The first spell in thirteen years, a calming spell given to Harry Potter. No curses or dark spells or violent magic. Just soft words from soft lips.

He abruptly turned away, folding the material quickly and placing it back in the drawer, shutting it with a snap as though he wished it was really his memories he was shutting away, wanting them to stay dark and dusty forever.

He turned and saw the codeine. It had been knocked off the bedside table and was lying on the floor. Harry grabbed it roughly and went downstairs, filling up a cup with water and returning to the porch. Draco had his face buried in his arms and seemed asleep but when he heard Harry's footsteps he opened his eyes slowly, carefully, as though any movement would harm him.

"Here's your codeine," Harry said, popping out the pills for him. "And water."

Draco wordlessly took the pills and washed them down with the water.

"Do you want to go inside?"

"No," Draco mumbled. "You can go in though if you want."

Harry sat next to him. "I'll wait with you, Draco."

They fell asleep under the stars.

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Chapter: 24

Stars, white and glittering. He remembered that, looking up and seeing the stars reflected in Harry's dark pupils.

He rolled over and glanced at the clock. Midday.

"That codeine seemed to knock you out."

Draco twisted his neck round and gazed at dresser where Harry was helping himself to the Maltesers.

"I was starting to get worried about you," Harry said. "Very disconcerting not to see you up and about as early as annoyingly possible."

"I'm okay," Draco said sleepily. "Why am I wearing yesterday's clothes?"

"You fell asleep on the porch," Harry grinned. "I carried you to bed."

"You...*carried* me?"

"Yes. No magic."

Draco smiled. "I wouldn't have minded. I was unconscious."

"Yes, but it's the principle of the thing."

"All the way up the stairs?" Draco asked wonderingly.

"Yes. My back is still recovering."

"I'm sorry," Draco said, frowning.

"Scorpius has been running around asking where you are. I told him you came home drunk, had a fight with the coat stand, then drove off and shagged your ex."

Draco burst into laughter.

"There you go," Harry said. "Much better. Now hurry up and have breakfast, they made pikelets and want you to try some."

"Oh, God," Draco said. "Are they pink?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Give them to the cat."

"The poor thing," Harry said indignantly, but Draco just laughed and Harry retreated, smiling, closing the door behind him.

"Hey, don't think I didn't notice you ate all my Maltesers," Draco called, but there was just silence and he smiled, ready for the day.

"Professor Potter's always round here."

"So?" Draco asked, his heart unexpectedly skipping a beat.

"So, how come he's not here today?" Scorpius sulked. "Teddy and I can't play Monopoly now."

"You hate Monopoly. Harry beats you every single time."

"Yeah, but he's cool about it," Scorpius sighed, kicking at the counter.

"Well, he's gone home and there's nothing I can do about it."

"I reckon if you called him and asked, he'd come over," Scorpius suggested.

"I just can't call him up and ask him over," Draco said irritably, examining a pikelet and frowning. "I've told you before not to use ketchup instead of milk."

"Yeah, you can. You're friends, friends do that all the time," Scorpius said, ignoring the jibe at his pikelets.

"He only just left, give the man some peace," Draco snapped.

"See," Scorpius muttered. "You miss him too, you always get grumpy when he's gone."

"Scorpius, I'm really not in the mood for this discussion. Go find something to do other than annoying me. Go play Snap or something."

"I'm not five," Scorpius sulked, but when he caught Draco's eye he slunk away and Draco sighed, turning back to the pikelet and morosely dissecting it. Scorpius was right. He was already missing Harry, and the man had only been gone an hour.

He frowned.

He sat on the porch for some time, staring up at the stars, the candle burning low. Harry had sat next to him last night, smiling, talking. Watching the stars.

Draco sighed and went to bed.

The night was warm and he was restless, trying to find a cool spot on the sheets. He slid a hand under the pillow next to him, enjoying the coldness, until his hand brushed something even colder. He slowly fitted his palm around it, feeling the shape.

He sat up, frowning, and turned on the lamp.

Harry's phone.

A habit, Draco supposed. Placing it under the pillow each night so he could hear the alarm in the morning. Or perhaps in case he received important calls.

The why wasn't important. What was important was the fact that Harry had slept next to Draco last night, had lain beside him. He would have woken early, taken his wand and wallet and keys from the bedside table, smoothed over his covers, made it look as though he'd never been there. Only he'd forgotten his phone, slipped so casually under Draco's pillow.

He curled his hand around the phone, falling asleep holding it, dreaming of stars and moons and winter and summer and wolves, three wolves.

Ginny was crying in the kitchen and Hermione rounded on Harry.

"Harry, honestly, she's really upset -"

"Look, I told her I was bringing a friend along and she seemed fine with it!" Harry hissed. "You can go ahead and call me insensitive, but I think she should just grow up."

"Look, mate, I know where you're coming from," Ron said anxiously. "She's overdoing the whole 'Malfoy is evil' thing and yeah, alright, she should grow up like the rest of us. But come on, it's her engagement party, just let her have her way..."

Harry folded his arms. "No. She's stressing Draco out. He's out the back having a smoke, and he only ever does that when he's stressed."

"Yeah, alright, you can kick up a fuss afterwards," Ron said impatiently. "Just..."

"Just what? Explain to Draco that Ginny thinks we're all eleven again? Or shouldn't I even bother

with an explanation?"

"Merlin, I knew this was going to happen," Hermione groaned. "I told Ginny not to invite everyone and expect them to get along...look, she even invited Lavender and Parvati, and they haven't spoken since that incident with Dean Thomas two years back..."

Harry glanced momentarily over to them where they were coldly ignoring each other, a very uncomfortable Neville between them.

"This is a complete disaster," Hermione muttered under her breath.

"Look, she was just trying to be nice," Ron said defensively. "Alright, maybe not the best decision, but she meant well!"

"I'm not saying she didn't," Hermione protested but Ron had stormed off.

"Great," she muttered, sitting next to Harry. "Fantastic."

"Well, I'm off," Harry said shortly.

"What? You can't go yet, we haven't even had lunch!" Hermione hissed.

"I'm not hungry. Got a headache, had a late night, blah blah."

"Harry, come on, please don't leave me here," Hermione whispered desperately but he was gone.

She sighed and fished a book from her handbag.

"What a bloody nightmare," Harry said, turning his keys in the ignition. Music blasted through the speakers and Harry accelerated sharply, speeding down the road and turning a corner without slowing down. He glanced across at Draco who seemed to be quite enjoying himself, the window wound down as he gazed out into the blue sky.

"Hey," he said. "I've got an idea."

Draco looked at him expectantly.

"A Firebolt 2000," Harry said tenderly, lifting the broom from its case.

"Aren't you a little old for Quidditch?" Draco asked.

"Never. Ron and I still have games."

"It's awesome, sir," breathed Scorpius, gazing at the broom in wonder. Teddy was more casual, casting an expert eye over it.

"Not as good as the Strike," he said.

"Oh, quiet, you," Harry said.

They had arrived at the fields just on dusk. Again the scent of heather drifted through the purple and soft blue glow of evening, the fireflies dancing, the grass moving with the summer breeze. The boys took instantly to the skies, weaving around each other, laughing. The crescent moon rose above them, perfect and pale.

"Let's see how I manage," Harry said and he kicked off, strong and graceful as ever, weaving and looping around the thrilled boys. Draco laughed at their antics, watching them feint and loop and dive, moving through the sky as though they were part of it, just another string of stars elegantly thrown across the canvas of sky.

Harry dived low, skimming across the grass, quick and graceful, landing at Draco's feet.

"Your turn."

Draco shook his head mutely.

"Come on," Harry said breathlessly. "It's been years, hasn't it?"

"It's alright," Draco protested, but the next moment he was sitting behind Harry, his arms wrapped tightly around him.

"Relax," Harry said and Draco felt his voice vibrate through his back.

"I'll try," he replied and they took off into the sky.

Draco had forgotten it, the feel of it. The air in his face, the beauty of it all. Here he followed the Milky Way, there he chased a stray leaf across the night sky. Harry dipped and skimmed with the leaf as though he were part of the breeze, moving with it. Always with it, never against it. Draco lifted his head and stared up at the dizzying sky with its myriad of stars and beauty, blurred into beautiful, glittering chaos.

Harry turned and dived sharply, and suddenly –

*Crabbe's tortured screams, swallowed by flames...clinging to the back of Harry, the burning body...ashes choking him, suffocating him...*

Harry flew on towards the stars, Draco holding onto him tightly, until the soft smell of heather soothed him, the breeze chasing away the ghosts of ashes and flames.

Afterwards, when the boys landed and they made their way home over the dewy grass, Harry tactfully didn't notice the dampness on his shoulders.

"Leaving on Monday?" Draco asked. Harry would be going again. The hazel tree would lose its green leaves, Venus would diminish. In the unfamiliar place, there would be no smile. Only cold faces.

"No," Harry said. "I resigned."

"You resigned?"

"I resigned."

They sat in silence.

Late afternoon.

The dance of light and shadow began, the leaves shifting, the sunlight filtering through them, Draco's face flickering with sunlight as he drew the bow slowly across the strings, long and melancholy like the howl of a wolf to a lonely moon, like winter's memory of summer.

"That sounds sad," Harry said.

"It is." Draco busied himself with slackening the bow and putting away his cello. "Coming downstairs?"

"In a moment," Harry replied, and Draco left him.

He stood in the flickering sunlight for a moment, then reached out and gazed at the music piece. All of it was written in pencil, quickly and gracefully, notes crossed out and added, notes in the side margins: *Affectueusement, Mezzo-Forte, Decrescendo.*

He looked at the title.

*Lonely Moon*

*(Harry's Song)*

He stood for a long while in the dying light, holding his song, Draco's song.

Scorpius and Teddy wanted one last play around the fields before they left for Hogwarts. Before

autumn came and stole summer's loveliness.

Harry and Draco watched their boys laugh as they flew across the evening sky, their shadows dancing across the grass below.

"If you could change anything in your life," Harry asked Draco, "what would it be?"

Draco twirled a four-leaf clover between his fingers, gazing up at the sky.

"Nothing."

"What about the Battle?"

"I don't know. Maybe I would've held onto you a little tighter."

Harry watched the sun set, a brilliant and momentary dazzle of colours.

"I would have held onto you too," Harry said quietly. "I would've held onto everyone. Somehow they just seemed to fall through my fingers, like sand. Like time. How many people have slipped from my hands?"

"Maybe they just let go," Draco said.

And in the dusk, in the long dewy grass, Draco's hand tightened on Harry's.

Scorpius joined Teddy, flying alongside him.

"I just saw the most disgusting thing in the whole entire world."

Teddy grinned. "I *told* you they would. You owe me five galleons."

"Ah, come on! It was only holding hands, maybe it's just a friend thing -"

"Nope. Pay up."

"I haven't even *got* five galleons!"

"Someone's got to go get a job then, don't they?"

Scorpius chased a laughing Teddy all over the night sky.

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Chapter: 25

"See you, Harry!" Teddy raced over to Harry, giving him a quick, one-armed hug. "Fourth year already, eh?"

"They grow up so fast," Harry said in sickly sweet voice; Teddy laughed.

"Hey, Harry, can you do me a favour?"

"Yes?" Harry said suspiciously.

"Get with Draco, yeah? Because I really want those five galleons. And Scorpius will have to do my homework for a week."

Harry watched, open-mouthed, as Teddy ran off to jump onto the train.

"Are you alright?" Draco asked.

"My godson made a bet on my love life. I'm going to *kill* him."

Draco smiled and led the way to his car. Harry and Teddy had carpooled with Draco and Scorpius, much to the latter's joy.

"I'll really miss him," Harry sighed, getting into the Audi.

"You'll see him in a few months, for Christmas," Draco said.

The drive home was relatively uneventful, both men locked in different worlds. Harry hesitated to say anything, ask anything. Without the boys, what excuse did he have to see Draco? Absolutely none. He wouldn't see Draco until Christmas.

"Harry?" Draco asked softly, pulling him from his daydreams.

"Hmm?"

"Do you want to hear me practice a piece?" Draco asked. "I have a performance tomorrow, and I'd like a test audience."

Harry glanced at Draco, but he was staring resolutely ahead at the road. Draco Malfoy was scared, Harry realised. He didn't know where he stood either.

"Sounds good," Harry said.

It was ten o'clock at night. Draco had decided to play all the performance pieces and Harry was only too delighted to listen. As Draco finished the last piece he began slackening his bow, ready to pack it away, but Harry touched his arm.

"Wait. I want to hear one more piece."

"A request?" Draco smiled, but Harry remained serious.

"I want to hear Lonely Moon."

Draco's smile faded.

"Lonely Moon?" he murmured.

"Yes. I want to hear my song."

Draco said nothing, flipping through the music sheets scattered around the floor before picking up a particularly tattered one. He tightened the bow again, soothed it with rosin and began.

How different, Harry thought. How very different from the performance pieces, all so short and peppy with quick light notes and dramatic long ones and crashing crescendos, soft arpeggios. They held so much variety but in Harry's song it was all long, melancholy notes. Long after Draco finished the last note it still lingered in the air, a lonely echo.

"It's beautiful," Harry said and hesitated. "But...so sad. Am I a sad person?"

"No," Draco said quietly. "No, you're not."

"Then why does it sound so sad?" Harry asked.

Now it was Draco's turn to hesitate. "Because that's how you make me feel," he said finally.

Harry turned away. He made Draco feel sad? Excellent. Perfect. That's exactly how he wanted Draco to feel.

"Do I ever make you feel sad?" Draco asked him.

And Harry suddenly knew exactly what he meant. He met Draco's clear grey eyes and was amazed at how close they suddenly were.

"Sometimes," Harry murmured.

"Yes, sometimes," Draco repeated softly.

Their lips met and Harry brought his hand up automatically, cupping Draco's face, his fingers resting along his cheekbone, savouring the softness of the kiss –

The bow fell, clattering onto the floor and Draco broke away. He went to pick it up then seemed to change his mind, straightening back up.

"Please, just tell me," he said. "What's going on between us? What do you want?"

Harry opened his mouth.

"You said *what*?"

"I know, I know," Harry groaned, burying his face in his hands. Hermione stared at him in horror.

"He asked you what you wanted, and you said you really, really wanted to be anywhere but there?" Hermione asked, apparently still having problems accepting this. "Harry, what on *earth* were you *thinking*?"

"I've said some pretty stupid things," Ron said, eating a cupcake. "But that really takes the cake. You know it's bad when you beat *me* in the stupid stakes."

"Ron, you're not helping," Hermione snapped, before turning back to Harry with a worried expression. "Harry, please explain the logic here. What were you thinking?"

Harry shrugged helplessly, morosely accepting a cupcake from Ron.

"Well," Hermione said, "the situation is still salvageable, I think. You like him, yes?"

Harry shrugged again and Hermione growled impatiently.

"You either like him or you don't, make up your mind."

"I dunno, I've always liked women, haven't I? Before he came along. So, logically, I can't like him because I don't like men."

"He's clearly been slipping you some gay potion in your raspberry tea," Ron said.

"What?" Harry stared at him. "Really?"

"Harry, there's no such thing," Hermione snapped, Ron roaring with laughter behind her. "Ron, could you please be a little sensitive?"

"Oh, come on, you should've seen his face." Nevertheless, Ron straightened up, brushing cupcake crumbs from his robes. "Okay. Sorry, mate. But lighten up, you're just having a little

moment."

"A little moment?" Harry asked incredulously. "Your best mate is in love with Draco Malfoy, and you sit around eating cupcakes and joking?"

"Ah, so you *are* in love," Hermione pounced.

"What were you expecting, a tantrum?" Ron asked Harry. "If it makes you feel better, I can throw some cupcakes at you, shout a few things, then storm out dramatically. But quite frankly, I'm not that fussed. He seems to have grown up and gotten a fair bit of decency along the way."

"You're not throwing my cupcakes anywhere!" Hermione said. "I spent ages icing them, and they're meant for guests, Ron."

"So? I'm a guest."

"I mean people who are *invited* here," muttered Hermione.

"I'm having a dilemma here," Harry said loudly and they turned back to him.

"Right. Sorry," Ron said.

"Well," Hermione said tentatively, "how did he react? When you told him you'd rather be anywhere else?"

Harry sighed, examining the icing on the cupcake critically. "He didn't do anything."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Nothing."

"What did he look like?" Hermione tried.

"I don't know. Neutral."

"Ah," Ron said sagely. "Now I can empathise with you. Big problem, interpreting female expressions."

"He's not female," Harry pointed out. "And it's just his expressions I have issues with. I don't have a problem with everyone else. For example, right now, Hermione is looking anxious."

"Amazing," Ron said. "How did you do that?"

"Oh, there are classes you can attend," Harry said seriously.

"Really?" Ron's face brightened hopefully.

Harry went back to his cupcake, Hermione sniggering beside him.

"That was revenge for my gay potion jibe, wasn't it?" Ron asked.

"Okay, look," Hermione took control again. "What did you do after you'd said that? Did you try to talk to him or apologise or did he leave or -"

Harry looked up at her, squirming.

"Oh, no," Hermione said warningly. "What did you do?"

Harry mumbled something.

"What?"

"I Disapparated, alright!"

"Harry! You never Disapparate in someone's home! It's the height of rudeness!" Hermione was outraged; Ron was amazed.

"The stupid stakes just get higher," he muttered.

"Shut up, Ron. Harry, what do you mean by Disapparated? Immediately afterwards, or after a while, or -"

"I don't know, I mean, after about half a minute of silence. I didn't want it to get awkward." Harry looked up at her like a child caught getting into the biscuit jar or kicking the dog.

"So, let me get this straight," Hermione said slowly. "You kissed, right?"

"Yeah."

"And...he returned the kiss?"

"Well, he wasn't running away screaming or trying to beat me up."

"Okay," Hermione said. "I'll put that down as a yes. And then he asked you what you wanted, and you said 'I really, really want to be anywhere but here.' And then you Disapparated."

"Okay," Harry said, "I can see how this looks."

"Yeah, it looks like you're a total bastard," Ron said, licking icing off his fingers.

"Ron!" Hermione hissed.

"What? I'm just saying what you were all thinking."

"Oh, Merlin," Harry groaned, burying his head in his hands again.

"Calm down," Hermione said soothingly. "I'm sure all of this can be sorted out, you just need to talk to him -"

"I'm not talking to him," Harry said quickly.

"Why not?" Hermione asked, surprised.

"Um..."

"Wow," Ron said. "I'd hate to be in love with someone who terrifies me."

"He doesn't terrify me," Harry sighed in exasperation. "He just...he's...it's impossible to tell what he's thinking, that's all, and...er..."

"Fear of rejection," Hermione said. "It happens to all of us. But someone's got to make the first move or we'd all end up nowhere."

"I did make the first move," Harry pointed out.

"Yeah, and you ran away afterwards like a scared little schoolgirl," Ron grinned.

"Ron!" Hermione snapped. "That's it, I am so sick of your insensitivity and complete lack of tact! Do you have to be so negative all the time? And you've got icing all over my brand new armchair, I specifically asked you not to eat in the lounge -"

Harry sighed loudly and they both turned to look at him.

"Oh, quit whining about it," Hermione snapped. "So you got scared and made a mistake, like everyone else in the world. Here's what you do: Go under your bed, get out the dusty little shoebox, get your courage out of it and go apologise."

"She knows how to pack a punch," Ron muttered to Harry. "And she knows about the shoeboxes under your bed."

Harry couldn't help it; a smile tugged at his lips.

"There you go," Ron said, satisfied. "I knew I'd get a grin out of you. See, Hermione? I made him feel better, whereas you just yelled at him. Who's insensitive now?"

Hermione narrowed her eyes.

Harry hastily left.

*There were once three wolves, three brothers.*

Harry stared at the letter, written in Draco's strong and graceful handwriting.

*Vikt, Bene and Cygnus.*

Ginny, Scorpius and Draco.

*Vikt wanted the warmth, the sun.*

Ginny wanted the past, bright and shining.

*Bene wanted the shiny things, the stars.*

Scorpius wanted the present, never thinking ahead.

*Cygnus wanted companionship.*

Draco wanted a future with someone.

*Vikt was given the sun.*

Ginny was given the past.

*Bene was given the stars.*

Scorpius was given new things, better things. A new school, new friends.

*Cygnus wanted to be with the princess, but he had to spend a week with the lonely moon.*

Draco was given Harry but felt there was a catch. Harry didn't want him, perhaps, or Harry was just being nice to him because Harry was nice to everyone. In the end, Draco would always be alone, only him and the moon. Harry would fade away.

Harry folded the letter and gazed out at the stars.

Time to get the dusty shoebox out.

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Chapter: 26

He played beautifully.

Harry watched, far above, as Draco played, his face filled with serious concentration. When he had a break in his music he remained with his arm held ready, his wrist flexing, his fingers balancing lightly on the strings, ready at any moment to rearrange themselves and create something beautiful. Harry liked listening, liked trying to separate the cello from the rest. He had never been educated in classical music, fine art, all the cultured things, but now he wished he had at least some knowledge of it. He wanted to be able to separate all the instruments, hear them together and yet apart. He could already pick out the violin, the viola and of course the double bass. The double bass was unmistakeable, thrumming deep and low beneath the strong cello and lighthearted violin. The string quartet had been last in the medley. Harry decided they were the best, next to a piano solo and a nervous but excellent violinist.

When the set had finished he made his way downstairs and waited just outside the lobby in the pouring rain. He could have waited inside but he liked the rain. It reminded him of Draco, that day at the station where he and Draco had dashed, laughing, through the rain together.

He waited and waited, getting steadily soaked. The audience bustled through the doors in a rush, then a few stragglers, then one or two lingering for a cigarette. At last the orchestra began to file out, holding their instruments, laughing and talking to each other. First the flutists, then the violas, the violinists...Harry liked the violinists. They were smiling at each other and you could tell they were old friends. Perhaps they'd studied at the same college, practised in the same places, played in the same venues.

Draco was the last out, drawing a scarf about his neck, buttoning his coat, setting his battered cello case down on the pavement momentarily. His eyes met Harry's briefly, as one would glance at a stranger lingering nearby. He glanced at Harry a second time then exhaled, his breath silver in the cold October air.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I came to watch you play."

Draco said nothing, picking up his cello and walking past him.

"I liked the piano solo," Harry said, picking up pace beside him. "What was that song called?"

"No. 14 in C Sharp Minor "*Quasi una fantasia*", Op. 27, no. 2," Draco said.

"Oh."

"Also known as the *Moonlight Sonata*," Draco said, his voice softening a little. "One of Beethoven's most recognised compositions." He paused, reaching the train station. "Are you going to follow me all the way home?"

Harry shrugged.

"That might be construed as slightly creepy."

This didn't appear to bother Harry; he merely asked for a one-way on the Bakerloo line and followed Draco aboard.

"You could just Apparate home," Draco sighed.

"Or you could just talk to me."

"About what?"

"Anything," Harry replied.

"I don't want to talk about anything," Draco said, gazing at an advertisement, his grey eyes unreadable.

"Okay, I'll give you something to talk about. How about this: Scorpius sent me a letter."

"He did?"

"Yes."

Draco looked doubtful and Harry produced a letter from his pocket, smiling. On the front, in Scorpius's instantly recognisable and terrible handwriting, was:

*Professor Potter,*

*422 Tulip Hill Rd,*

*Tulip Hill*

Draco reached out a hand but Harry quickly folded the letter away.

"A very interesting letter, I'd have to say," he said.

Draco said nothing, resuming watching the scenery. For a long time there was silence between them.

"Alright," Draco sighed. "I'll bite. What did it say?"

"I'll give you the letter," Harry said.

Draco waited.

"As soon as you invite me over," Harry finished.

"Why bother?" Draco asked. "Why bother with an invitation? Why don't you just Apparate into the middle of my kitchen?"

"Do you know how to put up Anti-Disapparition wards?"

"No," Draco said shortly.

"Excellent, I'll come over and put some up for you."

Draco didn't say anything for the rest of the trip.

True to his word, Harry began work straight away on the wards, muttering complicated spells under his breath and holding his wand steady. Draco ignored him for the entire hour it took to raise the wards, lying on the couch reading a book. *Snow Falling on Cedars*, Harry noted.

Harry murmured something and drew his wand in a straight line. A thin gold thread appeared and he nodded in satisfaction, setting about creating a second thread, a third, until he finally joined them all up, creating a perfect square which shimmered for a moment before imploding.

"There you go," Harry said. "Finished." He walked up to Draco's kitchen counter and tossed the letter upon it. "There's the letter. Do you want to test the wards?"

Draco shrugged, turning the page of his book. Harry wandered over and took hold of his hand.

"Hey -" Draco said, just before they Disapparated together with a loud crack, directly outside Draco's front gate. Before Draco could move, they Apparated back into the lounge.

"Huh," Harry said. "Works perfectly."

"What are you talking about?" Draco snapped. "Nothing worked. The wards let you in."

Harry smiled and Disapparated.

*Hey Professor,*

*Listen I don't know what you've done to my dad but he hasn't owled me for like two weeks and Teddy and I have both agreed you must've done something or gone away maybe coz Dad's always real happy when you're around.*

*Anyway Teddy says you'd tell him if you went away, so the only solution left is you did something mean to Dad, which is seriously uncool, or gotten back with that Weasley chick (which is even more uncool). Also Teddy says he'll be really annoyed too if you've gotten back with her.*

*Anyway just go and cheer Dad up again, I bet Teddy five galleons that you guys didn't fancy each other, but it's pretty obvious so if you could just snog Dad for me that'd be nice. And I mean, this is a pretty huge sacrifice on my part, I'm giving up a whole five galleons just so my Dad can get some. He'd better be fucking grateful.*

*Anyway this is the longest letter I've ever written (another sacrifice) and Teddy keeps wanting me to add all this shit in, I'd tell him to fuck off but I need your address. Teddy also says I shouldn't swear in letters but who gives.*

*See ya,*

*Scorpius*

*PS Teddy's being annoying, so you know what, sir? HE HAS A GIRLFRIEND. Yeah, if he didn't want me to fucking tell you, maybe he shouldn't be pissing me off –*

Draco fumed, dropping the letter.

He was going to have Words with Scorpius.

"I was only trying to be nice!"

"Scorpius, just leave it, alright? And you can reclaim your five galleons, because nothing's going on."

"But -"

"And stop bothering Harry."

Draco angrily got to his feet, turning to face Ron and Hermione.

"Thankyou for letting me use your fireplace," he said coldly. "I don't know any other witches to ask."

"You're, um, welcome," Hermione said, slightly nervous. "Is there anything else I can help with? You seem a little...um..."

"Migraine," Draco said shortly; his stock excuse. "And Harry did something to my house."

"He didn't!" Hermione gasped. "What did he do?"

"He told me he was putting up Anti-Apparition wards, but they don't work so clearly he was doing something else."

"Oh," Hermione said, chewing her lip. "That doesn't sound good. Maybe he just made a mistake with the wards. Do you want me to have a look?"

Hermione and Ron stood outside his house, frowning.

"There's definitely something there," Hermione said. "A barrier or ward of some sort."

"Nice place," Ron told Draco. "Build it yourself? Nice."

"Well," Hermione said, "Let's see you try and Apparate inside, Malfoy."

Draco Disapparated and a long silence followed, Hermione looking anxiously towards the house. In the next moment, Draco reappeared by her side.

"Oh," Hermione said. "I see the problem. Clearly there's some kind of gap allowing you to pass through..."

"D'you want me to have a look at the ward from the inside?" Ron asked, stretching lazily. Draco nodded his consent and Ron Disapparated with a loud crack, only to reappear a second later looking quite ruffled.

"Ran into something halfway! Definitely a ward up! Merlin, I nearly splinched myself. Harry better have a good explanation."

"Really?" Hermione asked, frowning. "That's really odd, it's – oh."

"What?" Draco asked, his heart sinking.

"Blood wards," Hermione breathed. "He's designed wards that allow only you into the house. That's really complicated, really difficult magic. That's really nice of him -"

"He was able to Apparate too," Draco said softly. Hermione's smile faded.

"He must've made it so he can enter too. I'm really sorry, he shouldn't of done that...but...wow...that's really complicated. The more people allowed through, the harder the magic is to work..." She paused. "I'll see if I can get someone in to sort them out. I'm really not

experienced enough to be dealing with these sorts of wards..."

"Leave them," Draco said quietly.

"What?" Hermione looked at him, confused.

"Leave them," Draco repeated. "Leave them up. Let him come and go."

"Harry James Potter!"

"Ouch!" Harry ducked a spell, leaping up from his couch. "What the -"

"You'd better go and apologise to him right now, you ungrateful little -"

"Sod?" Ron suggested. Hermione paused.

"No, something stronger."

"How about tosser?"

"No, I really don't feel comfortable using that word."

"Git?"

" – git!" Hermione finished. "I don't know what you think you're playing at, but you'd better go right now and take down that stupid ward – well, alright, not really stupid, it's a very impressive bit of magic, but -"

"You're losing him, Hermione," Ron pointed out as Harry's expression of terror was replaced by one of confusion and then indignation.

"Losing him? I'm not the only one losing somebody!" Hermione shouted, picking up slack again. Harry dodged another spell. "You stupid idiot, all that advice I gave you about talking to him and making things up and you go and screw it all up again! Stop doing stupid things, you thoughtless, selfish bastard!"

"Bastard? Wow, you've made her really mad," Ron told Harry, stretching back on the couch.

"And what about your bloody shoebox? Still under the bed, isn't it!" Hermione yelled, striding down the hallway and reappearing a few moments later looking mildly surprised. "Look, there really is a shoebox."

"Filled with courage," Ron said encouragingly, steering Hermione back on track.

"Yes! But it's still dusty and forgotten and filled with" – the lid fell off – "...seashells? Oh. That's a little odd."

"I collected them a few months ago from the beach and put them along the windowsill," Harry explained. "But whenever I shut the curtains they got it in the way, so I put them into storage."

"You could put them along the spice shelf in the kitchen, they'd look really good there," Hermione suggested.

"Hermione!" Ron said sharply. "Stay on track! Remember, we're really angry with Harry, aren't we?"

"You just want to see me get my arse kicked, don't you?" Harry said accusingly. Hermione rounded on Ron too.

"Yes, and what do you mean *we're* angry? You're just lazing there whilst I try to pick up the pieces! Thanks for all your input!"

"Yes, thanks so much for your support!" Harry added.

"Alright, alright," Ron said quickly, slightly alarmed. "Look, I think it was a pretty underhanded thing for Harry to do, putting up blood wards like that. But still, what's done is done, isn't it? And I think Harry should just say sorry in the best way he knows how. To say sorry to Hermione you just grovel, and to say sorry to you, Harry, you just admit you're wrong and shake hands, and to say sorry to Ginny you give her a hug, and to say sorry to Neville you give him an interesting cactus or something...so obviously there's a way to say sorry to Draco, and Harry hasn't figured it out yet so he's just going around doing stupid things until he works it out."

Hermione and Harry stared at him.

"Ron," Harry said, "that's really...insightful."

Hermione looked teary-eyed.

Ron exhaled with relief.

*Once upon a time, there were three leaves that fell from the same tree, although all were different. One was a heart-shaped tilia leaf, one was an oak leaf, and one was a cedar leaf. The oak leaf fell in Autumn and drifted downwards until he landed in the ocean, where stormy waters tattered him and calm waters soothed him*

*The cedar leaf fell in Summer and he landed in long green grass, where the sun warmed him and the dew cooled him.*

*However, the heart-shaped tilia leaf fell in February on a strange, windy day with moody skies and sunshowers. And the wind picked him straight up and carried him away. He skimmed over water and brushed through long grass, until the wind picked him up higher and higher. Then he flew past the treetops, past houses, past steeples and kites. There he met bird, a raven, who asked him where he was going.*

*He said he did not know, so the raven picked him up and flew higher and higher with him, towards the setting sun.*

*The tilia leaf had aways looked downwards on his tree and had never seen the night sky before. The raven asked him if he wanted to see the stars.*

*No, the tilia leaf said.*

*So the raven dropped him and the leaf fell away into darkness.*

*It is easy to see why the raven dropped him but not easy for the tilia leaf. The tilia leaf did not know what a star was and was afraid to say yes.*

*So the tilia leaf fell into darkness and far out of reach of star and bird.*

"That's a sad story," Hermione said. "Did you write it?"

"Yes," Harry said, folding it into the envelope.

"You're sending Malfoy a sad children's story?" Hermione asked.

"It's my way of apologising," Harry said. "He'll understand."

But uncertainty beat its wings in his stomach as he inked Draco's name and address onto the envelope and gave it to Hermione's owl.

He watched it fly away into darkness.

*Maybe they just let go.*

Harry sighed, examining his palm, ignoring the people jogging past. He'd watched Draco perform again but had not lingered this time. He'd left halfway through the performance to sit in the park, staring at nothing and thinking. People let go, people moved on. And so should he. It had been a week and there was no answer from Draco.

He stared at the lines criss-crossing his palm. Trelawney, she had seen death in his hands. Other people had seen light, had seen life.

A pale hand grasped his and he glanced up, startled momentarily.

"You are such an idiot sometimes."

"I know," Harry said softly.

They kissed.

"Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!"

"Shut up."

"You owe me five galleons, excellent, just in time for Christmas -"

"Shut *up*."

"Who's the winner now, eh? Yeah! Come on, cough up -"

"Just ignore them," Draco sighed, steering smoothly round a corner.

"At least they're taking the news well," Harry shrugged.

"Are you sure? Because I think your godson is getting beaten up."

Harry twisted round, alarmed.

"Scorpius! You put that pudding down right now!"

"Sir, why is there a pudding back here?" Scorpius asked, stopping mid-swing.

"Hermione gave it to us," Harry said. Teddy groaned.

"I'm not touching it. Scorpius, don't touch it. It's like eating a big old dragon dung that's been frozen rock solid and then iced," Teddy said. Harry smiled reluctantly as Draco zig-zagged all over the road, apparently overcome with mirth.

"I'll tell Hermione you said that," Harry told Teddy, leaning across and steering whilst Draco composed himself.

"I'll tell her what you said about her fruit mince pies," Teddy said meanly.

"Point taken."

"So, what'd you get me for Christmas?" Scorpius demanded, sticking his head between the two

front seats.

"A lump of coal," Draco sighed. "I'm already looking forward to the end of Christmas break." He looked suspiciously at Scorpius. "Is your seatbelt on?"

"Yeah, course it is." Scorpius discreetly put it on.

"Scorpius, that's really dangerous," Draco said with exasperation.

"Yeah? Well I don't think you should hold hands with someone when you're driving," Scorpius retorted. "You can't drive with one hand."

"Watch me," Draco said, laughing.

Harry gazed out the window, smiling.

"*Should old acquaintance be forgot*

*And never brought to mind,*

*Should old acquaintance be forgot*

*In days of auld lang syne!"*

The crowds cheered, the champagne flowed. Harry found Draco outside, gazing at the stars.

"Not having a smoke, are you?"

"I decided to quit the day you told me you didn't like it," Draco replied.

"What, that day in Hogsmeade?"

Draco smiled and Harry leaned forwards, capturing his lips.

"Oh Merlin, kill me now," Ron muttered behind them. "What a great start to the New Year, I think I'm going to be sick -"

Harry felt Draco's lips curve into a smile beneath his own and couldn't help but smile too, wrapping his arms around Draco's waist and breaking the kiss to rest his forehead against Draco's.

"So," Draco said, making his voice loud for Ron's benefit. "Your place or mine?"

The door slammed open.

"Hey Dad, Teddy and I can't figure out how to turn the oven on properly and – oh."

Scorpius stared at Draco, who reached out sleepily and grabbed the alarm clock.

"Eight o'clock? Bloody hell."

"Mmm, who cares," Harry said, reaching out and pulling Draco closer to him.

Scorpius shot out the door, apparently to discuss things with Teddy.

"Well?" came Teddy's impatient voice. "Which dial do we use?"

"I dunno, him and your godfather are in there naked -"

"*What*?"

"We're not naked!" Draco said loudly. Scorpius appeared in the doorway.

"Oh yeah? Then how about you come over here and tell me that?"

There was a pause. Draco didn't move.

"I thought so," Scorpius said triumphantly, and marched out the door.

"Eight o'clock. I'm going to kill him," Draco sighed.

"Kill him later, in the afternoon," Harry said sleepily.

"Okay, so not meaning to intrude on your sexy time, but those pancakes won't cook themselves -"

"Get out!" Draco groaned as Harry hurled a pillow at him. Scorpius, ducked, grinning.

"Okay, okay." He retreated.

"Sexy time?" Harry asked, smiling. Draco burst into laughter.

"I'm really awake now," he said. "I'll never get back to sleep. I hate him. *Accio* pillow," he added, catching the pillow and handing it to Harry with a yawn.

They snuggled for a while, Harry drifting in and out of sleep.

"We forgot to close the curtains last night."

"Yes, but we had to watch all those fireworks," Harry mumbled, a tiny smile on his face.

"What are you thinking about?" Draco asked, noticing his smile.

"You."

"What about me?" Draco asked suspiciously.

"A very smooth Accio spell. With my wand, too. I'm impressed."

Draco sat up. "I didn't...I didn't even think about it."

"See," Harry said. "Your magic came back to you, fourteen years later."

"Amongst other things," Draco said, smiling.

But Harry was already asleep.

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Chapter: 27

*A/N: One of my readers has made an amazing fanvid for this fic; it's available on Youtube and Vimeo under the name "Lonely Moon harry/draco" (there's a link on my profile) if you'd like to soak in the artistic brilliance and Drarry love.*

"Lawson, Nathan."

Somebody settled in next to him and he turned, glaring.

"You nearly missed it!" he hissed.

"Oh, I did not. Calm down," Draco said soothingly. "I left in the middle of the J's, and they had all those awful Jacobson triplets to go through. Reminds me of the Weasleys."

Harry laughed despite himself but straightened up. Draco glanced at him, smiling, as they read out the names.

"Lovett, Reica. Loxin, Charles." McGonagall drew another breath. "Lupin, Theodore."

Teddy strode up to take his certificate and stand with his fellow graduates, winking devilishly at his girlfriend.

"He looks so tall," whispered Harry. "I can't believe he's seventeen already..."

"You're not going to cry, are you?" Draco teased.

Harry laughed, shaking his head. The next name was read out.

"Malfoy, Scorpius."

Draco's hand instinctively flexed around Harry's as Scorpius bounded up to accept his certificate. Instead of the traditional handshake, he embraced McGonagall. Her eyebrows disappeared into her hairline as the students laughed, Scorpius grinning madly away.

"Is McGonagall blushing?" Draco said disbelievingly. "That old minx!" But Harry could tell he was proud, watching Scorpius stride easily across to stand next to Teddy, the two swapping roguish grins.

"He's not winking at anyone," Harry observed.

"Course not, he's got three girlfriends. He can't give the game away," Draco pointed out.

"Mancini, Leonard."

Leo hurtled across to McGonagall who shook her head in despair at his lopsided tie and ink-stained hands. He just grinned and accepted his scroll of parchment, joining his friends.

"Look at them," Harry whispered. "All ready to leave Hogwarts forever, go out and find themselves."

"Don't cry, you'll embarrass them."

"Oh, I wasn't going to," Harry said. "I think the Jacobson mother is doing enough crying for everyone. Oh, here we go with the awards..."

Draco smiled and glanced towards the front of the Hall again, applauding politely as the Duxes were handed out.

"Dux of Defence Against the Dark Arts...Theodore Lupin!"

Teddy hurried forwards, accepting the certificate and returning to his seat, only to be called back up again, to much laughter.

"Dux of Advanced Potions...Theodore Lupin."

Scorpius and Leo slapped Teddy on the back as he returned, laughing, to accept the certificate before retreating again.

"Two Duxes!" Draco wondered.

"He never said anything about Potions," Harry said. On his other side, Andromeda dabbed discreetly at her eyes.

"Dux of Care of Magical Creatures...Scorpius Malfoy."

If Scorpius was pleasantly surprised, he didn't let on. He accepted the certificate and returned to his gobsmacked class, looking carefully casual as though he regularly received prestigious academical awards.

"Dux..." whispered Draco.

"You're not going to cry, are you?" Harry mocked. Draco just smiled quietly, squeezing Harry's hand for a moment.

In the end, Scorpius triumphantly emerged with two Duxes: Care of Magical Creatures and Herbology.

"You two don't have to look so amazed," Scorpius said breezily when he met them later by the lake. "I find that rather offensive."

"You can go if you want," Teddy said, piling Harry's arms up with his various awards. "The other parents are leaving..."

"Alright, alright, we'll take the hint," Draco laughed. "I'll whisk Harry away before he embarrasses everyone and begins sobbing over the two of you."

Harry just laughed but couldn't help and reach out to ruffle Teddy's hair. He sidestepped him neatly.

"Don't mess it up, please."

"He spent five hours in the bathroom this morning," Scorpius said wickedly. "Got to look good for his girl."

"Whereas you don't bother to look good for *three* girls," Teddy retorted, loosening his tie a little. Scorpius smiled again, his little smirk that he had so clearly inherited from his father.

"Don't be jealous," he teased Teddy. "Come on, we've got the Merlin-awful photos to sit through.

We'll see you on Platform 9 ¾," he told Harry and Draco.

"We'll be waiting."

Scorpius and Teddy were swallowed up in the chaos, converged upon by crowds of congratulatory classmates, by friends hollering and laughing and flinging their arms around each other, bellowing out the school song as if they were drunk. Harry and Draco watched them disappear into the castle, the grounds becoming empty and still.

"There they go," Harry said. "Our two prodigies."

Draco laughed. "Except in the kitchen."

"Remember the microwaved cheese platter?"

"How could I forget?"

The summer, so damply hot and smudgy-skied, opened up with a thunderous noise as the clouds tore apart, the rain suddenly streaming down. Harry and Draco laughed at each other, their shirts soaked to their skins, their hair already darkening with droplets. They ran on through the grounds of their childhood, through the wide Quidditch pitch where they had chased each other and their dreams, past the lake with the rain dappling across it, the forest where the water ran heavily down leaves and boughs.

And there they were at the gates, running through them, exultant with joy and exhilaration, laughing into the rain and holding each other as though they would never let go. Behind them, at Hogwarts, their futures walked amongst the ghosts of their pasts. Teddy and Scorpius raced joyfully through the corridors, tracing the footsteps of the long-ago enemies as outside, the lovers ran on through the summer rain.