Storyid: 2476594
FanFiction.net
Name: Draco Malfoy & the Heart of Slytherin
Author: Saber ShadowKitten
Chapter 1 to 23

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Chapter: 1

Title: DRACO MALFOY & THE HEART OF SLYTHERIN

Author: Saber ShadowKitten

Spoilers: PS-GoF only. Story takes place in an alternate Fifth Year. This was written right after GoF came out. No, I will not be rewriting it to incorporate new canon.

Length: 23 chapters, complete

Category: Drama/Action/Adventure/Romance

Author's Notes: About Harry and Draco's size - Harry is big compared to Draco. If Draco was 3-feet tall and Harry is 4-feet tall, Harry will appear huge in Draco's eyes. I never give their heights, only that Draco is shorter than Harry by half a head by the end of the summer. Harry has also been working out constantly and has bulked up in the thirty or so days he's been at the Dursleys at the end of GoF. I have done my research and this is possible. I will ignore any comments left regarding Harry's size.

Author's Notes 2: Regarding the OC Martin - no one seems to believe that Martin isn't a Gary Stu, and so I've changed his name to Blaise Zambini and, oh look, it's the same exact story with the same exact dialogue, because Martin doesn't do anything other than point out the obvious. However, to appease the complainers, I have changed Martin to Blaise in this story, so if you've read it before you won't be so confused.

Author's Notes 3: As you can tell by my prior whining, this is a repost of this story. The original is up on my site. This is an edited version of it based on the above. I hope you enjoy!

Summary: ***At the heart of every Slytherin...***

Chapter One: Summer Holiday

This was not how he'd planned to spend his summer holiday.

Draco Malfoy's pale gaze burned into the faux wood door at number four Privet Drive. Albus Dumbledore stood beside him, firmly gripping the back of his neck so he couldn't run or turn the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry into a newt - either was a strong possibility at the moment.

Draco silently cursed his father for putting him in this predicament. The infallible Lucius Malfoy wasn't quite so infallible as he'd boasted. The Ministry of Magic had arrested him that morning for the murder of a family of Muggles. Rumor had it that the Ministry had an eye-witness, and the case against Lucius was air-tight. Draco wasn't surprised. His father had been growing careless since the Dark Lord's return, and while Draco had no compassion for Muggles, Lucius' actions were just stupid. Voldemort was more likely to kill Lucius than praise him.

Draco's mother, Narcissa, was on holiday in France, and Draco doubted she would return until Lucius was either released or locked in Azkaban. Draco would have gone to her if Dumbledore hadn't appeared at the Malfoy estate within moments of Lucius' arrest. "For his protection," Dumbledore had decided Draco should reside with the Dursleys for the summer, at number four Privet Drive, Little Whining, Surrey - the home of one Harry Potter.

Draco clenched his jaw as Dumbledore rang the bell. The silver-haired Slytherin had received no explanation as to why he had to stay with Potter of all people. Any number of his friends and their families would've taken him in, or he could have stayed at the Manor alone. He had on numerous occasions in the past and, at fifteen, he was more than capable of taking care of himself.

But here he was, glaring petulantly at the door with Dumbledore's death-grip pinning him to the stoop. Draco decided to go along with the placement for now. Although he didn't dare use magic outside of the protective wards of the Manor (he didn't want to be expelled from Hogwarts), he could leave at a later date and take the Knight Bus to one of his friends' homes.

The door opened, and the cold sneer Draco had adopted faded. The boy who'd answered the door was not the same boy Draco last saw on the Hogwarts Express coming home for the summer holiday. Draco himself had grown taller and his voice had slid smoothly down an octave in the scant month that had passed, but he was still boyishly smooth-skinned and whipcord thin.

Compared to Draco, Harry Potter was huge.

The barefoot Gryffindor wore torn trousers that only came down to mid-calf. The fit muscles of his legs were partially hidden by the slightly loose tan cotton. The trousers were clinched at the waist by a length of cord. It was obvious that the trousers were borrowed from someone much fatter and shorter than Potter. The loose t-shirt he wore was also obviously borrowed, however, the sleeves had been torn off. Most likely to accommodate Harry's muscular arms.

Dark, dark circles underlined Potter's eyes, but otherwise his face was the same, as was his messy black hair. He had a summer tan, which contrasted greatly with Draco's always winter pale skin. The lightning bolt scar on Harry's forehead wasn't as vivid with the tan.

"Sir," Harry greeted in a voice that cracked. Draco smiled inwardly. At least puberty had *some* negative effect on Potter.

"Harry," Dumbledore returned genially. "It is always a pleasure."

Harry cast a dispassionate glance at Draco before addressing the Headmaster again. "May I ask the reason you've come calling?"

"Who is it, boy?" a booming baritone called from behind Harry.

Harry half-turned to answer. "It's Professor Dumbledore, Uncle Vernon, from Hog- my school."

An ox with a big, bushy mustache lumbered into view, crowding Harry out of the way. "Ah, so it is you. Come to take Harry back, I presume?" Uncle Vernon said with a hopeful gleam in his eyes.

"No," Dumbledore replied. "I've come to solicit your aid by taking in young Mr. Malfoy for the remainder of the summer."

Draco heard a snort coming from behind Vernon Dursley, presumably from Potter. Draco's fingers itched to grab his wand.

"We can ill afford to house Harry, and you expect us to take on another?" Vernon said derisively.

Dumbledore removed a very thick billfold from his robes. "You shall be justly compensated for your assistance, Mr. Dursley."

Vernon licked his lips greedily and reached for the billfold. "I suppose we could keep him until the school term begins. Harry, show Mr. Malfoy to your room. He'll be staying there for the duration."

"Yes, Uncle Vernon."

"Thank you, sir," Dumbledore said to Dursley. Vernon nodded absently, flipping through the

billfold as he returned into the house.

Harry came back out, gave Draco a long look, and then flicked a glance at the trunk on the walk. "Is that yours?"

"What do you think?" Draco said sarcastically.

Harry's features hardened briefly before he snapped his fingers and mouthed something. Draco heard a small pop. He turned to look and found his trunk had vanished. "Hey!"

"Harry, a word," Dumbledore begged politely, finally releasing Draco.

Draco rubbed the back of his neck as Harry and Dumbledore walked partway down the front walk. Draco doubted Dumbledore's favorite young wizard would get into trouble for that show of magic, which pissed him off. The rules were always bent to accommodate The Great Harry Potter.

"How are you doing?" Dumbledore asked with concern. The two hadn't moved far enough away for Draco not to overhear.

"Fine, all things considering," Harry replied. "I know that Snuffles has been reporting to you on the contents of my letters, so you know about the dreams."

"I do."

Harry dragged his fingers through his ebony hair, messing it further. "I take it Draco's being here isn't by random. Do you want me to teach him?"

Draco frowned. Teach him? There was nothing that Potter knew that Draco hadn't already learned, with Lucius Malfoy as his father.

"I shall leave that to your discretion," Dumbledore answered. "Although, Mr. Malfoy could be a formidable ally..."

"Sir, your hints are about as subtle as an anvil dropping on my head," Harry said dryly.

Dumbledore chuckled and clapped his hand on Harry's shoulder. "Be well, young Harry. I shall see you on the first of September."

"I'll bring Malfoy's corpse with me," Harry returned.

Dumbledore stepped back, nodded to Draco, and apparated. Harry stared at the empty space where the Headmaster had been, wearing a thoughtful expression. After a minute, Draco cleared his throat in annoyance at being ignored. Harry's vibrant green gaze shot to Draco and he briefly looked surprised, as if he'd forgotten Draco's presence.

"Oh. You," Harry said, adding to Draco's irritation. "Follow me."

Draco thought of a number of hexes he wanted to cast on Harry as he fell into step behind the other boy. They entered the house, and Draco lifted his nose in disdain. The entire home was the size of the Malfoy front entryway. It was also obvious the Dursleys had no house elves. Draco was reluctant to touch anything. Who knew what he might catch?

The second room at the top of the stairs was full of toys, books, and other broken electronics, along with a single bed, two trunks - Harry's and Draco's - a writing desk and chair, and a single window half-covered in iron bars. Hedwig, Harry's owl, perched in her cage, and Harry's Firebolt leaned against the wall near the open window.

"You can have the bed," Harry told Draco.

"You'd thought otherwise?" Draco gave him a haughty look.

Harry leaned against the windowsill and folded his arms, unimpressed and non-threatened. "I assume you're not here by choice, so let's dispense with the formalities, eh? You only get the bed because I rarely sleep. I don't know if Uncle Vernon will treat you like a guest or a houseboy like me, so be prepared to work."

Draco began to protest, but Harry continued speaking over him. "You may use magic within the boundaries of the Dursley property, but not against the Dursleys or any other Muggle who pays a visit," Harry said. He narrowed his eyes. "Use magic against me, and I'll turn you inside out and take my chances with Dumbledore's punishment."

"I'd like to see you try," Draco sneered.

"No, you wouldn't," Harry stated calmly.

Draco felt his hackles rise, and he reached for the wand tucked in the back pocket of his pressed trousers. Harry simply looked at him through those ridiculous NHS glasses. Infuriated by Harry's lack of concern, Draco pointed his wand at Potter. Harry still didn't move. "Aren't you going to protect yourself, Potter?" Draco snarled.

"*Accio wand*," Harry said calmly.

Draco's wand snapped out of his hand and flew into Harry's outstretched palm. "I'm not impressed, Malfoy, nor threatened," Harry told him. "A lot has happened in the thirty-odd days since the term ended, and while you might be admittedly better than me in most subjects, I far exceed you in charms and hexes."

Harry pushed off the windowsill, crossed to Draco, and offered back the wand. "I've spend the last thirty days training for a fight against Voldemort and will continue to train until I am certain

his defeat will be final. Regardless of your animosity towards me, you are either my ally or my enemy in the fight. It is your choice."

Draco arched a pale brow. "And if I choose to side with the Dark Lord?"

"Then I hope you enjoy your stay at Azkaban along with the other Death Eaters." Harry headed for the door, adding over his shoulder, "Unless, of course, you're dead."

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Chapter: 2

Chapter Two: Hating Harry Potter

Draco Malfoy hated Harry Potter.

He hated the way Potter was treated like a hero, even though he flagrantly broke the rules. He hated the attention always being focused on the Boy Who Lived, both positive and negative. He hated that Potter was indeed better at charms and hexes, as evidenced in the days that passed. He hated that Harry bowed and scraped to the Dursleys despite his superiority to the Muggles. He hated that Harry wore hand-me-downs from that fat, short slob Dudley and didn't even have shoes that fit. Draco also hated that the Dursleys and Harry ignored him completely no matter what he said or did, pretending he wasn't even there.

Mostly, though, he hated that he was starting to sympathize with Harry.

Harry hadn't lied when he'd said he didn't sleep. Four nights out of seven, he was up reading or practicing charms and hexes in the yard. The other three nights he chased a luminous snitch on his broom, proving that seekers needn't be small and lithe to be excellent players. Puberty, Draco had learned, wasn't the total cause of Harry's size. The Gryffindor did hundreds of sit-ups and push-ups every day. Draco got tired from just watching him.

During the day, Harry performed manual labor for the Dursleys, ignoring his porky cousin Dudley who cruelly taunted him on a daily basis. Harry ignored Draco's taunting, too, much to the Slytherin's annoyance. Harry never angered, nor did he smile. He took everything in with calm indifference and projected a hard, confident attitude to the outside world.

Draco hated it. He wanted Harry to fight with him. He wanted to see Harry's face redden in anger. He wanted to draw wands and zap each other. He wanted to punch Harry in the gob and

cause a plebeian schoolboy tussle. He wanted to stop being treated as nothing.

He wanted to stop feeling a hint of worry for Potter.

Draco watched Harry toss and turn on the grass in the backyard. This was the fourth time in as many weeks that Harry had dropped from exhaustion in the yard and slept like the dead for five solid hours before the nightmares started. Draco didn't know what Harry dreamed, nor did he ask, but when Harry finally awoke he pressed his hand against his scar and gasped for breath for several minutes. Then, he'd return to the bedroom, write a letter, and send it off with Hedwig. She always returned in a few days with a reply letter, which Harry read stoically and destroyed, and then pushed himself even harder in training.

Draco refused to allow that to happen again. He was going to demand that Harry tell him about the dreams, then put a stop to them. He knew several anti-nightmare spells and could whip up a dreamless sleeping potion with the potions kit in his trunk. Hopefully by helping, he'd put an end to both the dreams and the feelings of sympathy he had for Harry.

Draco was just finishing his last scroll of summer homework - being ignored had some benefit - when Harry came into the bedroom. Harry walked right to the desk and began his ritualistic letter. Draco put away his books, crossed to Harry, and hopped up onto the desk. "What was the dream about this time?" he asked without preamble.

Harry paused in his writing and glanced up at Draco. "Why?"

"Because I want to know."

"Why do you want to know?" Harry questioned.

"Because I can help you to stop having them," Draco replied.

"Again - why?"

Draco glared at Harry. "I'm being altruistic. Take it or leave it, this is a short time offer."

Harry studied him with such intensity, Draco felt like he was under a magnifying glass. He forced himself not to show how uncomfortable Harry was making him.

The other boy must have found whatever he was looking for, because he nodded once, set aside his quill, and leaned back in the desk chair. "My dreams aren't dreams, they're visions of things that are occurring wherever Voldemort is," he said.

"Premonitions?"

Harry shook his head. "The dreams are of the present, not of things to come." He brushed his fingers over the scar on his brow. "This scar connects me to Voldemort, and if he's doing

something extremely malevolent when I'm asleep, I see it in my dreams. I stopped sleeping after the eleventh Muggle family I saw horribly murdered by Voldemort and the Death Eaters."

"They're only Muggles," Draco pointed out.

"And you're an asshole, but you don't see me torturing you to death because of it," Harry said bluntly.

"Point taken," Draco conceded, though he had no compassion for Muggles. They were the cause of the wizarding world's problems, making wizards hide their magic like it was a disease and not a benefit.

"Look, I know you agree with Voldemort about the Muggles hindering wizardry, which is as natural to us as breathing," Harry said, practically reading Draco's mind. "But killing them is not the answer. Doing so makes us no better than savages, and I'd like to think I'm more intelligent than a bloody animal."

"So what do you want to do?" Draco said.

"Stop Voldemort once and for all," Harry answered firmly.

"How ambitious of you," Draco said, "though what else could be expected from the famous Harry Potter."

Harry's laugh was bitter, and it left a bad taste in Draco's mouth. "The famous Harry Potter, expected to be the greatest wizard ever. He can't be just a boy in ill-fitting hand-me-downs who happens to be good at Quidditch."

Harry picked up the quill and began writing again. The silence was thick with tension, the scratch of the quill on the paper grating to Draco. Still, Draco felt his sympathy for Harry go up an notch. He knew what it was like to have to live up to a name. Perhaps that's what Dumbledore hoped he'd learn by placing him with Harry. He hated Harry, though, that hadn't changed. Still...

"I can whip up a sleeping potion that will block your dreams and visions," Draco ventured, as Harry neared the end of his letter.

Harry didn't pause in his writing. "In exchange for..."

Draco frowned. He hadn't planned to ask for anything in return, which was odd. He never did anything for free. "Um... you can teach me some of those charms and hexes that I've seen you cast."

"I've been waiting for you to ask that." Harry glanced up. "What took so long?"

Draco scowled. "Smugness does not become you."

Harry returned to his letter. "Tomorrow, eight o'clock, we'll start."

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Chapter: 3

Chapter Three: The Key To Magic

Draco entered the yard and watched for a minute as Harry slowly raised and lowered himself in the grass, his arms bulging with every push-up. It was hot outside, and sweat plastered his ebony hair to his head and soaked clean through his sleeveless t-shirt. Draco shook his head at the idiocy. "Why do you bother, Potter? We're wizards, not Muggle laborers."

"Exercise clears the mind," Harry stated, rising to his feet. He wiped his forehead with the back of his arm and pushed his glasses into place. They immediately began to slide down his nose again. "Plus, it gives me an advantage."

"Yeah, your stench could kill a bloke at twenty paces." Draco waved his hand in front of his face. "You bloody reek."

"There is that." Harry circled Draco. "Draw your wand."

Draco drew his wand, glancing over his shoulder at Harry. "Are you planning to teach me a deodorant charm?"

"No." Harry struck with the speed of a seeker, sliding his arms under Draco's and linking his hands behind Draco's head, effectively trapping him. Draco immediately fought, trying to break out of Harry's hold. When he couldn't, he aimed his wand as best he could at the larger boy behind him, but Harry caught the attempt to cast.

"*Expelliarmus!*" The wand flew from Draco's hand, landing in the grass several yards away. Harry laughed softly, cruelly. "Now what are you going to do?"

Draco struggled again, anger heating his face. Sweat beaded on his upper lip. "Let go, you pillock!"

Harry's breath was hot against Draco's ear as he whispered, "*Titillandus*."

Hundreds of invisible fingers suddenly danced along Draco's ribs and other sensitive parts of his body. He was shortly gasping in laughter, squirming in Harry's iron hold. "Stop! Stop! Stop!" he begged.

"Stop it yourself," Harry said. "Remember what I've taught: the magic is inside you. The wand is just a tool."

Draco was going to kill him. "*Fin- fin- finite incantatum- um!*" The invisible fingers were still tickling him mercilessly. "Potter!"

"*Finite incantatum.*"

The tickling stopped instantly, and Harry released Draco immediately thereafter. Draco spun and shot Harry a deadly glare. Harry simply stared back expectantly.

Draco growled. "Fine! You're right, exercise give you an advantage."

"I'm glad you said so." Harry started for the house. "I want ten push-ups and ten sit-ups before I return."

"I hate you, Potter!" Draco called after him.

"Ten of each!" Harry yelled back.

Draco's arms felt like jelly and his abdomen hurt like a bugger later that night, from exercising unused muscles. He was lying in bed, cursing at Harry, who sat with his bare feet up on the desk across the bedroom, an open book in his lap. Draco's wand was balanced on Harry's knees, and he expected Draco to retrieve it by magic.
It had only been five days since Harry had started teaching Draco and already he expected miracles. Still, if Harry-Bloody-Potter could perform wandless magic, so could Draco Malfoy. Though it would be easier to concentrate if his muscles weren't screaming.

The sleeping draught Draco had brewed worked perfectly, but he was damning himself for making it. A well-rested Potter was three-times as masochistic as a sleep-deprived one. Draco's own need for perfection only added to his stress, and he had a feeling he'd soon be taking the draught, too.

"Hmm. I think it moved a bit that time," Harry said, glancing at the wand. "Oh, nope. I was wrong. It was me that moved."

"Bastard," Draco muttered.

"Aw, you say the sweetest things."

"When I get hold of my wand-"

"*If* you get hold of your wand," Harry interrupted. He turned the page in his book. "At this rate, I'll die of old age before you can follow through on the threat."

Draco felt anger boil inside of him. He wanted his wand so badly at that moment, he could taste it. "*Accio wand!*"

THWAP. "Ow!"

Harry clapped. "Not bad, Malfoy. Not bad."

Draco rubbed his face where his wand had smacked him, clutching the offending object in his other hand. It took him a moment to realize that he'd actually done it, he'd cast a working spell without his wand. He sat up, ignoring his protesting stomach muscles, and stared at the length of wood in his hand. "Wicked."

"What did you feel right before you cast?" Harry inquired, putting his book aside. He set his feet on the floor and rested his forearms on his knees.

"Anger," Draco replied.

"What else?" Harry prompted.

"I *really* wanted my wand," Draco said thoughtfully.

"That's the key to magic, Draco," Harry said softly. "You have to really want the results, beyond question or doubt. Everything else is flair."

Draco lifted his gaze and looked at the teen seated across the room as if seeing him clearly for the first time. Harry's ebony hair was falling every-which-way, the lightning bolt scar peeking between the thick strands. Emerald green eyes stared back with earnestness and a haunted maturity he shouldn't have yet. "Why aren't we friends, Potter?"

"Because you're a bigoted snob with a mean streak a kilometer wide and I'm the goody-goody wonderboy who can do no wrong," Harry replied with a shrug. "Things probably would be different if I'd been sorted into Slytherin, like the Sorting Hat wanted to do."

"You don't have the heart of a Slytherin," Draco said coldly.

"Oh, I don't know about that." Harry turned towards the open window with a slight frown. "A murderer would fit right in, don't you think? Heads up, incoming."

Draco was stunned silent by Harry's casual admission that he'd killed. Draco had heard nothing

of the same, unless Harry actually *had* killed Cedric Diggory last June.

Hedwig flew into the bedroom, carrying a package by her claws. She was followed by a Hogwarts school owl, also carrying a package. Both dropped their parcels onto the desk behind Harry and settled on top of the owl cage.

Draco snapped out of his shock when a tiny owl burst through the window, clutching a grey motley-looking bird, who in turn was clutching a paper bag. The grey owl and bag were dropped on the bed beside him, and the tiny bird let out a sound like a groan of relief before landing on Harry's head.

"What's going on?" Draco asked, prodding the dead-looking bird beside him.

Harry glanced at the digital clock on the desk. "It's my birthday in ten minutes."

"You mean, you're just turning fifteen now?" Draco picked up the paper bag and began to open it. "I turned fifteen months ago."

"Hey, shove off, they're my presents." Harry snatched the bag from Draco and reseated himself at the desk. The bird on Harry's head chirped in annoyance at the sudden movements.

"You don't have many," Draco noted as another owl flew in, dropped a parcel in Harry's hands, and immediately left again.

Harry shrugged. "I used to get none, so I count my blessings that I have friends who care to send gifts now."

"Who would send you a dead owl?" Draco poked at the grey bird again.

"That's Errol, and he's not dead. He's... resting."

At that moment, Errol opened an eye and nipped at Draco's finger. Draco yanked his hand away and glared at the bird. "I'm going to take a wild guess and say that Errol belongs to the Weasleys."

"Say anything disparaging about my friends and I'll turn you into owl kibble," Harry warned, not raising his eyes from a letter that came from the bag.

"Very well," Draco sighed. "So, who're the extraordinary number of gifts all from?"

"The Weasleys, as you know," Harry answered, setting the bag and letter aside and picking up another. "Hedwig brought Hermione's, I've got one from my godfather, and the school owl brought Hagrid's and a letter from Dumbledore."

"How exciting for you." Draco shoved Errol off the bed and lay down. "Try not to make too

much noise celebrating. I'm knackered."

"Whatever, Malfoy."

Draco closed his eyes and listened to Harry unwrapping his gifts. He heard no laughter, no oohs or aahs of excitement or pleasure. If it weren't for the crinkle of paper, he wouldn't know anyone was in the room.

Draco remembered his own fifteenth birthday was a loud, boisterous gala with his family and friends at the Manor. He'd gotten more gifts than he had room for in his bedroom. Even his father had been in a good mood and had shared vintage Doubletec, a wizard's cognac, with him.

The soft flap of wings roused Draco's attention and he opened his eyes to find the bedroom empty of both birds and boy. Rising, Draco noticed Harry's Firebolt was gone, too, and he went to the window. Potter hovered in the yard, unmoving and looking up at the nearly full moon. The luminous snitch hovered in the air beside him.

Draco retrieved his own Firebolt and kicked off. Silently, he pulled alongside Harry and surveyed the Surrey countryside. It was lovely, lush and green, for a Muggle territory.

"Dumbledore wonders if I've killed you yet," Harry said, not turning away from the moon.

"You might, with all the bloody exercises you're foisting on me."

"I might," Harry agreed stoically, falling silent again.

Below, Draco could see glowing eyes from nighttime animals, both magical and non, in the hedges and under the neighbor's back porch. Harry had told him that the Dursley's property had been magically cloaked by Dumbledore and Professor McGonnagal at the beginning of the summer, when they had brought advanced materials for Harry to learn over the holiday. They could practice magic without fear of being expelled or being investigated by the Ministry of Magic and the neighboring Muggles would turn a blind eye to anything happening within the boundaries of the property. The Dursleys themselves ignored any magic that Harry or Draco did, yet they still treated Harry like dirt.

"Hermione sent me a book, like she does every year," Harry commented, continuing the conversation as if they hadn't floated silently side-by-side for five minutes. "*Current Events in the Wizarding World*. It updates itself and deletes anything prior to the last twenty years."

"Sounds like something Granger would send," Draco said with a snort.

"I'm in it," Harry said, his voice barely a cracked whisper. "I'm in it several times, in fact. 'The Boy Who Lived miraculously defeated You-Know-Who not once, not twice, but three times, before his very own blood brings He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named presumably back to life.'" He glanced at Draco. "I saw your father's name in the last few pages, but I didn't read it."

"You can if you want." Draco shrugged. "I don't care." Though he did care, because he shared the Malfoy name. He could easily imagine the pity he would receive once others read what his father had done. There'd also be the whispers of wonder if he'd follow in Lucius' footsteps, and the wariness of true Light Wizards towards him. He silently cursed his father again for putting him into this predicament.

Enough brooding, Draco decided. He cast a sidelong glance at the other teen. "Up for a game, birthday boy?"

"I suppose I am," Harry said with a fast exhale of breath. "I've not played against anyone in a bit, so this should be a laugh."

With a flick of his wrist, the luminous snitch flew off. A few seconds later, the boys flew off after it.

tbc
Thanks to everyone who's left comments. I'm posting a chapter about every other day, since this story isn't contingent on anything currently canon (OotP or HBP). For those who think this is familiar, it's been posted before back in 2003 when I wrote it. This is an edited version.

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Chapter: 4

Chapter Four: Into the Cupboard

The days passed more quickly than Draco had expected. He couldn't recall what had prompted him to remain with the Dursleys after Dumbledore had left, but he wasn't disappointed that he had stayed. He still hated Harry, but Draco had a grudging admiration for him now, for his skills and quiet strength of character.

Harry knocked the wand from Draco's hand and seized both of his wrists in an iron grip. They were in the yard having a lesson, the morning sun beating down on them. Both wore cutoff shorts - Harry in Dudley's castoffs and Draco in Harry's old trousers - and sleeveless shirts, which were comfortable in the muggy August weather. The grass was soft beneath their bare feet.

"Tom will be expecting us to use the portkey at precisely 11:28 a.m. tomorrow," Harry said,

explaining the plan for the last day before the school term started. "That will give us half-an-hour to settle in our room and visit Gringotts before meeting Ron and Hermione."

"You mean, before *you* meet them," Draco corrected, focusing on a rubber ball in the grass. "I have no desire to make myself ill a day prior to the start of term. *Mobilarbus*."

"Ill?" The rubber ball thwacked Harry in the head. "What do you mean ill? *Titillandus.*"

"*Finite incantatum,*" Draco said quickly, before the tickling truly affected him. He smirked at Harry and replied to the question. "Granger's face is enough to turn a person's stomach."

"I wouldn't say that to her if I were you." Harry dropped and used his momentum - and his foot in Draco's stomach - to throw Malfoy over his head and onto the grass. "She's bigger than you. Shrimp."

Draco tilted his head back and looked at Harry. "*Petrificus totalus*. I am not a shrimp," he declared, which was the truth. He'd grown half-a-head taller (though he was still shorter than Harry) and put on a solid layer of muscle, thanks to the requisite of torture Harry called "exercise". Like Harry, Draco was going to have to visit Madam Malkin's for an entire new wardrobe for school. "Besides, you haven't seen the dozy mare all summer. How do you know what she looks like?"

"*Finite incantatum*," Harry managed to say without moving. The *petrificus* charm broke, and he sat up and faced Draco. "Don't call her a 'dozy mare.' Hermione's a very pretty girl."

Draco smirked and sing-songed, "Potter fancies Granger. Potter fancies Granger."

"No, I don't," Harry stated. He plucked a blade of grass. "I think Ron does, though."

"Granger and Weasley." Draco chuckled, picking up the rubber ball by his arm. "They deserve each other."

"Hmm," Harry hummed non-committaly.

Draco tossed the ball up and caught it on its descent. "So, who does the Famous Harry Potter fancy then? Any special chit that makes you want to dip your wick?"

"No one." Harry tied the blade of grass into small knots. "I don't think of girls much."

"You're a pouf?" Draco said, surprised.

"Love involves trust, Draco, and I don't trust anybody anymore," Harry said in reply.

Draco noticed that the sweaty Gryffindor hadn't answered the question, but before he could ask again they were interrupted.

"Boy!" Vernon Dursley bellowed from the open window of the house.

"Yes, Uncle Vernon?" Harry called back.

"Come in the house, and bring the other one with you."

"Yes, sir." Harry dropped the knotted blade of grass onto Draco's upturned face. "Come on... Shrimp."

Draco sneered, rose, and looked around from his wand. *"Accio wand*," he cast when he saw it. The wand flew smartly into his palm and he tucked it into the back pocket of his cutoffs.

It was becoming easier to perform wandless magic. Draco could brag that he wasn't too poor at it, though he was still nowhere near Harry's level. Surprisingly, Draco didn't hold that against Harry. Some wizards simply excelled more in certain areas. Draco knew he could rival Snape in potions and Draco was just entering his fifth school term. Draco could thank his father for that. Lucius Malfoy might have been an overbearing, zealous Dark Lord supporter, but he encouraged Draco to be the best and supplied the tools to become so.

The boys met Vernon in the front hall. The Muggle scowled at the two of them. "Marge is coming for a visit today, so it's into the cupboard with you both."

Into the cupboard? Draco was confused. Harry looked resigned. "Why can't we stay in our bedroom?" Harry asked.

"Because I don't trust you not to cause a scene," Vernon stated. "I've put up with your... 'tricks' all summer without complaint. I think you can spend the day in the cupboard as repayment."

Harry's shoulders slumped. "Yes, Uncle Vernon."

"Good. Good." Vernon rubbed his hands together. "In you go."

Draco was in a cupboard under the stairs.
Flabbergasted by the turn of events, he simply stared at Harry. They were both seated on the dusty hardwood floor, knees bent, backs propped against opposite walls. There was barely enough room for one person, let alone two boys their size. The dingy area was lit by a single bulb light, which did nothing to appease Draco. They were in a *cupboard*, for bloody sake!

An iridescent spider with the body the size of a grape dropped on a web in front of his face. It waved its pincers hungrily at him. "Potter!" he squeaked. His breath caused the spider to swing on its web, moving away briefly before coming right at him!

"*Avada kedavra.*" Harry snatched the spider before it hit Draco in the face.

Draco's grey eyes became huge. "Harry, you just cast...," he trailed off in shock.

"I did." Harry held out his hand, the dead spider resting on his palm. "Does that bother you?"

"Does it..." Draco stared incredulously at Harry. "You're as barmy as a blue banana."

Harry nodded sagely. "Possibly." He focused on the spider and uttered another spell. "*Revivicus*."

The spider came back to life and started crawling up Harry's wrist.

To Draco, the world went wonky for a moment. Then, Harry began to explain.

"No matter what they tell you, every spell has a counter-spell, it just might not be created yet." Harry was still focused on the spider. "*Tattooum arachnid. Tattooum animatus*." The iridescent black spider appeared to melt into Harry's skin, becoming two-dimensional, and continued to crawl up his arm. Harry wrapped his other hand around his forearm and, when the spider reached it, it turned around and headed back towards his wrist.

"The *revivicus* spell is the counter to *avada kedavra* ," Harry continued in a bored, factual tone. "I found it in a diary of my mother's, which had been given to me by Hagrid. He's been hoarding items that he 'appropriated' from my parents' house and giving them to me as going away gifts at the end of each school term. I suspect that my mother created the spell and used it when Voldemort attacked. When he zapped me, I had two lives in me: mine and my mother's. And that's why I lived."

"You're going to be even more famous now, Potter," Draco surmised. "The Boy Who Revives The Dead. Though, it's not as catchy as your old title, is it?"

"The spell doesn't work like that." Harry leaned forward and lightly grasped Draco's wrist. The spider, which had crawled down one of Harry's fingers, crossed to Draco's skin. "It's a life for life spell that has to be used almost immediately upon death. I gave the spider some of my life to revive it. Since it's a small creature and only lives a very short time anyway, the spell didn't take much from me. Only a year or two, perhaps. But when we're talking about another human being..."

Draco understood: the caster would give his or her life to the dead so the dead may live, which prompted the question, "Who would you cast it for?"

"Anyone," Harry answered instantly, "as long as it's feasible to do so." He folded his arms across his knees and rested his chin on his wrist. "Casting it on someone while Voldemort or one of the Death Eaters is present isn't very smart. You'd die and the person you'd revived would most likely die again before they even stood up."

"I could see how that would cause a problem." Draco watched the iridescent black spider tattoo creep around his bare arm. He couldn't feel the spider moving and it looked rather neat. "Still, it's

a smashing spell."

"And now you know it. *Tattooum animatus duo*." Draco glanced at Harry in question, and Harry said, "The tattoo can now only be passed between the two of us."

"What makes you think I won't end the spell entirely?"

Harry shrugged and closed his eyes. "Do what you wish."

Draco scowled. He hated Harry Potter. "How long do we have to be in this cupboard?"

"Until Aunt Marge leaves," Harry said without opening his eyes. "It's safer in here, anyway, with her around. She's a right bloody cow."

Draco sighed, leaned his head against the wall, and closed his eyes. What an exciting way to spend the second to last day of summer.

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Chapter: 5

Chapter Five: Death of a Malfoy

Resembling a pair of street urchins, Draco and Harry appeared with their trunks and Hedwig's cage at the Leaky Cauldron at precisely 11:28 a.m. Tom, the Cauldron's bartender, clapped jovially and smiled at the boys. "You made it safe and sound, I see."

"The portkey worked fine, sir," Harry said, handing Tom the garish lady's handbag that served as the portkey. The teens had appeared in the room they'd be renting for the night. Harry had made arrangements for a taxi to take them to King's Cross in the morning.

"Very good." Tom headed for the door. "I'll leave you boys to it. Busy day and all."

After Tom left, Harry turned to Draco. "Gringotts?"

Draco checked to make sure he had the Malfoy vault key and nodded. "The sooner I obtain new clothing, the better. People are going to think I've been adopted by the Weasleys if they see me

like this."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Just don't toss anything. I plan for our lessons to continue once we return to Hogwarts and you might be more comfortable in the old Muggle clothing."

Draco snorted as he followed Harry out of the room. "You honestly believe I'll continue to associate with you at school?"

"Yes."

"And why's that?"

Harry stopped on the stairs and looked back at Draco. "Because knowledge and power are addictive. Because you know I won't ask anything in payment. Because you know eventually the student exceeds the Master."

Draco was irritated by Harry's factual tone of voice. "Then what do you get out of this, Potter?"

A blank mask descended over Harry's features. It was a mask Draco was familiar with; Harry wore it ninety percent of the time.

Harry turned and continued down the stairs, saying over his shoulder, "Ask me another time."

Draco's lips compressed in a thin line. He fell back into step behind the aggravating Gryffindor. If what Harry had said wasn't true about Draco's reasons for continuing the lessons, Draco would tell the other boy where to shove it. If they had still been within the boundaries of the Dursleys home, Draco might have shoved it to Harry himself.

Diagon Alley was bustling with wizards and witches as the two boys crossed through the portal behind the Leaky Cauldron. Students and parents hurried from shop to shop, gathering school supplies. Excitement permeated the air as classmates met again after the summer holidays. Conversation was loud and boisterous, punctuated by laughter and the occasional childish scream.

Draco and Harry strode in fluid step, side by side, as they made their way to Gringotts Bank. Draco was amused by the number of heads they turned. Staring and whispering followed in their wake, and the few snatches he heard questioned their identity and commented on their clothing. A group of girls giggled when they passed and Draco shot them a wink. They squealed.

Harry didn't react to the attention they were getting. Draco didn't see him look in any direction except the way they were heading, but he had a feeling Harry saw everything that was going on around them.

At Gringotts, their ragged appearance didn't matter as long as they had their vault keys. Draco was pleased to find the Malfoy vault untouched. He'd secretly feared his mother would have

cleaned it out, though he wouldn't have blamed her. With Lucius in Azkaban, their saved wealth was their only source of income.

After signing some papers that transferred the vault into his name - Draco assumed because of his father's imprisonment - and with a bag filled with galleons, Draco bid goodbye to Harry in the lobby and made his way to Madam Malkin's alone.

Madam Malkin was measuring two first years for their robes when Draco entered the shop. The smell of fabric and tailors chalk greeted him, sending him back in time. Having had a private tailor fit him when he'd last grown, he hadn't needed to come to Madam Malkin's since his own first year - when he'd unknowingly met Harry Potter for the first time. Draco didn't remember being as small as the two students on the measuring blocks, though.

"I hope I'm sorted into Slytherin." The tow-headed eleven-year-old on the left slanted a look at the brunet on the second block. "What about you? What House do you want to be sorted into?"

"Gryffindor," the other first year replied. "Slytherins are slimy. Gryffindors are great!"

"Sly, not slimy," Draco spoke up, drawing the children's attention. Madam Malkin looked around the Gryffindor-wannabe's legs and smiled in welcome.

"Mr. Malfoy! My how you've grown," Madam Malkin said. The measuring tape hanging around her shoulders twitched in anticipation. "Come for new school robes, have you?"

"An entire new wardrobe, actually," Draco corrected. Both students were now staring at him with a mixture of fascination and fear. "I'm sure you've heard about my father."

"Terrible, that," Madam Malkin said, though whether she was referring to the fact that Lucius had murdered a Muggle family or that he was locked away in Azkaban, it was hard to tell.

"Isn't it, though?" Draco responded, equally as vague. "In any event, I'm in need of clothing, as I'm sure you can see."

"I'll be with you as soon as I finish with these boys," she said and continued to work.

"Are you Draco Malfoy?" the Slytherin-potential asked tentatively.

"I am," Draco acknowledged with an affirmative nod.

"Aren't you supposed to be kidnapped?"

Draco's pale brow arched. "Kidnapped?"

"*The Daily Prophet* reported you were missing," the dark-haired one piped up. "And Rita Skeeter sepcu- specta- suspec-a-lated that it had something do with your father."

"You're both finished," Madam Malkin quashed further conversation. "Off you go, now. Your robes will be delivered later today." She turned to Draco. "Now, Mr. Malfoy, let's see what we can do for you."

Dressed comfortably in new school underrobes, which resembled a Muggle shirt and trousers tightly cuffed at the ankle and billowed in the legs, Draco left Madam Malkin's with a faint smirk. The tattoo spider was still crawling around his body and it had caused Madam Malkin to shriek when she saw it.
Draco had school supplies to purchase - Snape had owled his list shortly after Potter's birthday - but his feet took him from the sunny and populated Diagon Alley to the shadowy and silent Knockturn Alley. He had potion ingredients he needed to replace that weren't available to students in the regular shops. Most of the ingredients for Harry's sleeping draught, which Draco knew he needed to replenish soon, were just a few of the items.

Draco had visited Knockturn Alley with his father since he was old enough to walk. The sliding shadows and hidden, watchful eyes had no effect on him. He was left alone by the vendors and not beckoned by side-alley cutthroats as he made his way confidently through the streets.

Thecary's Potions smelled cloyingly of cloves and Draco wrinkled his nose as he entered the dark, dreary shop. Deep wood shelves, lined with jars and boxes, were covered in dust. Cobwebs stretched across corners, catching the faint sunlight coming through the chipped paint-covered window.

Draco crossed purposefully to the long wooden counter and rapped his knuckles hard on the surface. Those who shopped at Thecary's knew that most of the business was held in the back rooms of the shop. While Draco waited for the shopkeeper to emerge, he removed his ingredients list from his pocket and double-checked to make certain everything that he needed was on it.

Conversation preceded the shopkeeper and a customer as they emerged from the back. Draco recognized the witch in fuchsia robes as Pansy Parkinson's mother, Posey, and he sniffed in disdain. Posey was a whiny clinger like her daughter, always fawning over the Malfoy men.

Draco put on false airs and smiled politely. "Mrs. Parkinson, how lovely to see you again."

"Draco, darling!" Posey rushed over and hugged him to her ample bosom. "How *are* you? Everyone's been worried about you!"

Draco doubted that, but he refrained from saying so. "I've been busy," he lied smoothly. He extracted himself from her hold and laid his list on the counter. "I require these, if you would, sir."

"Yes, Master Malfoy," the shopkeeper said, taking the list and heading into the back again.

"How have you been, sweetums?" Posey asked, brushing invisible lint from his shoulders. "I'm

dreadfully sorry about your father. Nasty business, that, but you know how it is."

Draco frowned slightly. "How what is?"

"Why, the sacrifices one must make in the name of our Dark Lord," Posey said. "Really, Draco, your father couldn't have expected anything less after being tossed into Azkaban, not after last time. The Dark Lord isn't taking any chances."

"Chances about what?" Draco was getting annoyed. Posey was talking without saying anything.

"About anyone confirming His return." Posey shook her dark head. "It's a pity. Your father was a good man. I'm sure his death was painless."

Draco stared at her, unblinking. The shop was extremely quiet suddenly and his breathing very loud. "My father... is dead?"

Posey's face pinched. "I'm sorry, luv, it must still hurt so. And to have the news splashed on the front page of *The Daily Prophet*," she tisked. "The reporters should be ashamed of themselves, taking advantage of someone's grief to sell papers. I would want to pretend to be kidnapped, too, if I were in your place. I imagine it would be dreadful to be asked what I felt like knowing that my father was toes up in the dirt."

Posey Parkinson was a rather insensitive cow, Draco noted absently. He turned to the shopkeeper, who had returned from the back. "Send everything to the Cauldron for me, please," he instructed, placing a handful of galleons on the counter. He nodded to Posey. "Mrs. Parkinson. It was a pleasure. You'd best make your purchases. I think the shop has broke a water pipe." At the volume of the rushing sound in Draco's ears, he figured they'd soon be swimming.

He left Thecary's Potions and started back to the Leaky Cauldron. He needed to be there for the delivery and wanted to hide the ingredients deep in his trunk. Plus, his chest hurt something fierce and he was having trouble breathing. If he lay down, perhaps it would stop. He hoped he wasn't becoming ill. He'd rather not spend the first days of school in the Hospital Wing with Madam Pomfrey.

"Ow! Hey, watch where you're bloody going, Malfoy!"

Draco blinked. An extremely tall Ron Weasley was suddenly towering over him and glaring daggers. The noise of hundreds of people speaking at once bombarded Draco. He was in Diagon Alley in front of *The Daily Prophet*. A photo of the Publisher beckoned for him to go inside and purchase the latest edition.

"Aren't you going to apologize?" Hermione Granger stood at Ron's side, hands on her hips. Harry had been right, Draco thought dazedly. She *was* taller than him.

"I doubt I'll get one unless I beat it out of him," Ron stated, his overly large hands clenched into

fists.

Harry abruptly stepped between Ron and Draco. Draco hadn't seen Harry before, but where there were two, the third couldn't be far away.

Green eyes focused intensely on Draco for a long second and Draco felt like Harry was reading his mind. Perhaps it was something he'd learned in Trelawney's class.

Harry finally asked softly, though Draco heard him clearly because everyone else had suddenly gone quiet again, "Have you gotten your books?"

"No." Draco hadn't had time to get his books. His potion ingredients were to be delivered and he needed to return to the room at the Leaky Cauldron and his father was dead and he didn't want to leave the ingredients out because he technically wasn't supposed to have them...

"I'll get them. You go on," Harry told him.

Draco nodded once in affirmation. It was getting rather cold out, anyway. He was shivering already. He rounded Harry and Ron and continued to the Cauldron and up to the room.

The moment he crossed the threshold his knees gave out and he collapsed to the floor. Harry must be testing him again. He could've done without the floor burn, though, and the pressure in his chest rather hurt.

"*Finite incantatum*," he choked out, but nothing happened. He was stuck on his knees on the wood floor, and it was getting harder and harder to breathe. Oh, and his father was dead.

It was later when Harry came into the room, though how much time had passed was unknown. Silently, Harry set a few parcels down, pressed a handkerchief in Draco's hand, and left again.

The handkerchief had to have been hexed like the floor, because Draco's cheeks were suddenly wet.

"My father is dead," Draco spoke for the first time since yesterday, when he had found out the news. He and Harry were pushing baggage carts with their trunks and school supplies along the Muggle platform at King's Cross Station. The train to Hogwarts was due to leave in a quarter hour.
The prior evening and the entire morning was a blur to Draco. He had moved on automation, following Harry's lead. He had a vague recollection of breakfast and the taxi ride to the station. Harry had made it simpler by not trying to console him, or even talking to him other than a few instructions. Whether by instinct or experience, Draco was thankful for the silence, until now.

"I know," Harry responded. "I'm sorry. No one deserves to lose a parent."

"You-Know-Who killed him," Draco continued conversationally.

"I presumed as much."

Draco's hands tightened on the baggage cart handle, knuckles whitening. "I hate him."

"Hmm," Harry made a sound of acknowledgment. They arrived at the entrance to Platform 9 3/4 and waited as another wizard family used it.

"Do you mind terribly if I killed him?" Draco inquired, glancing over at Harry.

"Since that's already the plan, I suppose not," Harry replied. He gave Draco a measuring look. "You do realize that if you kill him, you become a murderer." Harry's gaze shifted and his eyes became unfocused. "Once you take that step, something inside you is forever gone and the way you view life is eternally altered."

Harry turned abruptly and started for the brick curving column between Platforms 9 and 10. "Wait for me after breakfast tomorrow in the Great Hall and we'll go over our timetables," he said over his shoulder before disappearing through the wall.

Draco followed more slowly. Harry's words had made him uncomfortable. He had expected cheers to wanting the Dark Lord dead. Acceptance of help at the very least. What he got instead was a second glimpse of what really lay beneath the mask Harry had worn all summer; the first being on Harry's birthday when he'd received Hermione's book.

Draco didn't want to know what made Harry tick. Harry was not his friend, nor did he want the other boy to be. Their relationship was a business arrangement, lessons for potions, and nothing more. Friendship required caring and he hated Potter... right?

"Get on the train, Malfoy," he mumbled to himself. Standing around wasn't solving anything and neither would missing the train to school. Besides, he was still angry and upset over his father's death and not thinking with a clear head. His feelings of animosity toward Harry would return to normal once he arrived at Hogwarts.

Or so he hoped.

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Reminder: This story is an Alternate Fifth Year story. Nothing from OotP or HBP has happened.

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Chapter: 6

Chapter Six: The Sorting Hat Ceremony

The train ride to Hogwarts was semi-torturous for Draco. Everyone had heard about his father's arrest and subsequent death by now, and the pitying looks and whispers Draco heard as he traversed the corridors of the train gave him a splitting headache before the Hogwarts Express even left the station. He bumped into Hermione and Ron at one point and both of them offered their condolences with true sincerity, which surprised Draco in light of what they knew about his father, the Death Eater, and the way Draco himself had always treated them. He would never understand Harry's friends.

In the train compartment, things weren't any more pleasant. Crabbe and Goyle seemed not to know how to behave. Draco suspected that their parents told them they didn't have to suck up to him any longer, or maybe even to avoid him completely so as not to get in He-Who-Would-Soon-Be-Dead's bad graces. Pansy Parkinson, however, spouted sympathy with all the gentleness of a rhino dancing ballet. She glommed herself to Draco immediately upon entering the compartment, jabbering non-stop in her nasal whine in his ear, until he muttered under his breath, "*Silencio*."

Pansy's mouth kept moving with no sound coming out for a moment before she realized she was voiceless. Crabbe and Goyle began laughing like buffoons at her as she frantically attempted to garner help. Draco closed his eyes and tuned them out before he either hit them, or started crying.

The lightly tanned Malfoy held his head high when they arrived at school. The triphammer pounding at his temples provided something to focus on rather than the stares, whispers, and false sympathy that tripled when he reached the Great Hall.

He took his usual seat at the Slytherin table and reflexively looked past the Hufflepuff table to the Gryffindor's. His seat had always been in direct line with Harry's, whether by fate or design was questionable. Harry's seat was still empty, although Ron and Hermione were in their usual spots as were the other fifth year Gryffindors.

Draco glanced around at the other tables and noticed many of the students were wearing yellow and black arm bands. It took him a moment to realize they were in memory of the Hufflepuff, Cedric Diggory. It was no wonder Harry was not in the Hall.

The professors at the head table eventually called for attention and the Hall quieted. Albus Dumbledore entered through a side door and moved to his place in the center of the table. "Hello. Hello," he greeted jovially. "Let's bring the new first years in, shall we?"

The main doors opened and the first years followed Professor McGonagall into the Great Hall. They looked very young and tiny. Draco watched them file in and wondered if he ever was that

small. He recognized the two he'd met at Madam Malkin's and smirked evilly when the Gryffindor-wannabe caught his eye. The eleven-year-old paled considerably and clung fast to another first year.

Draco turned his attention to the front of the Hall. Professor McGonagall set the Sorting Hat on a worn stool and stepped back. The first years held their breaths nervously, the older students in anticipation, waiting for the Sorting Hat to open its 'mouth' and sing.

Draco spotted Harry just as the Sorting Hat began to twitch. Harry was leaning against the doorframe of the side room Dumbledore had come from. Harry's expression was blank as he surveyed the first years. He held the same air of indifference that had surrounded him all summer.

Across the Hall, Draco and Harry's eyes met, and Harry acknowledged him with a slight nod. Draco's headache pounded a little less, and he turned back to the Sorting Hat just as it began to sing:

Oh, I am the Hogwarts Sorting Hat
though I look rather worn
I have been sorting students
since well before you were born.

You might think I'm ugly;
yes, pretty I am not
but if you wish to school here
I'm the only choice you've got.

So slip me on your noggin'
and let me look and see
in which of our four Houses
are you supposed to be.

If you're brave and chivalrous
and are a fierce protector
there's nowhere else to place you
but into Gryffindor.

Those who think they're smart
and possess a clever wit
at the Ravenclaw table
is where they'll always sit.

If you are a hard worker
and have a lot of patience
it is without question that

Hufflepuff is your station.

At the heart of every Slytherin
is a love that's deep and pure
if magic is what you want to do
I'll place you there for sure.

So step right up, one by one,
and put me on your head
and let me learn where each of you
will be making up your bed.

The Sorting Hat finished its song and the ceremony continued. Professor McGonagall read each first year student's name and they were sorted into the four Houses. The two from Madam Malkin's ended up in the exact opposite House that they wanted, which brought an amused curve to Draco's lips.

When the first years were all seated and the Sorting Hat and stool put away, Dumbledore stood and addressed the students. "I have several first of term notices: first, the Forbidden Forest is, as always, off limits to students. Secondly, students are not to be out of their dormitories after 9:00 p.m. without permission. There is to be no magic in the corridors between classes. Also, if you see certain students in a physical or magical altercation, do not become involved, but rather inform a professor and allow them to handle the situation.

"Finally," Dumbledore said ominously, "because of the dark times ahead, Quidditch... will resume immediately." Cheers filled the Great Hall. Dumbledore raised his hands after a moment and continued when it quieted. "Prior teams are to meet here tomorrow at 3:00 p.m. to choose new captains, set tryouts and practice times, and receive the game schedule for the term." He smiled benevolently. "And now, let the feast commence."

Food appeared on all the tables with Dumbledore's words. Despite the delicious sight and smell of the food, Draco wasn't hungry. He poured himself a goblet of pumpkin juice and sipped slowly as conversation and feasting went on around him. He heard his name mentioned several times along the Slytherin table, but he ignored the content of the discussions. Twice, he caught the professors looking at him as they whispered to one another. The pounding in his temples had picked up again, adding a calypso beat.

Draco lasted a half-hour. Without excusing himself, he rose and walked stiffly from the Great Hall. Thankfully, no one stopped him on his way to the Slytherin dormitory. He didn't know the password but that didn't hold him up. "*Repetica password*."

Glowing green words appeared on the stone wall guarding the Slytherin entrance: *Slytherin pride.*

Draco rolled his eyes and said, "Slytherin pride."

The wall swung open, and he entered the common room. A fire was burning in the fireplace, dispelling the cold gloom of the dungeon. Draco flopped into one of the chairs in front of the fire, leaned his head back, and stared up at the ceiling for a very long time.

tbc
Author's Note: Again, since there seems to be some confusion, the story is complete, as in 'finished' not a work in progress, it is 23 chapters long, and I will be posting a chapter about every other day. Nothing after GoF happened in this universe.

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Chapter: 7

Chapter Seven: Timetables

The Great Hall was slow to empty after breakfast the following day. Class schedules had been delivered early on in the meal, and Draco saw that he had relatively the same timetable as last year. The fifth year Slytherins shared Charms and Double Potions with Gryffindor, Herbology and DADA with Hufflepuff, and History of Magic and Care of Magical Creatures with Ravenclaw. His Arithmancy class was a mix from all Houses.

Draco looked across the Hall to the messy-haired Gryffindor he was patiently waiting for. Crabbe and Goyle, who'd apparently decided to continue their friendship with Draco for the time being, had beckoned Draco to return to the dorms with them to retrieve the correct books before their first class, but Draco had waved them off. He was the last Slytherin at the long table, but wasn't uncomfortable alone. His headache from yesterday had settled into a dull throbbing behind his left eye. It was something to ignore, just like the continued whispers about his father.

A first year Gryffindor tapped Harry on the shoulder and asked something when the older student turned. Draco's brows rose when the first year paled drastically and fled the Hall after Harry replied. Harry immediately received a tongue-lashing from Hermione, which Draco could partially hear from where he sat. He wondered what Harry had said to his younger Housemate.

Eventually, Hermione left with Ron and Harry strode to the Slytherin table. The few students left in the Hall started whispering to each other while staring in Harry and Draco's direction.

"Morning." Harry placed his class schedule on the Slytherin table above Draco's and leaned in to look over Draco's shoulder. "We don't have long until our first class, so let's do this quickly, eh?"

Draco nodded, and Harry went on. "All right. Dumbledore has given us both *carte blanche* permission to do anything, anywhere, anytime, as long as we don't abuse his generosity. This includes being outside after hours, so I hope you'll continue to play midnight Quidditch with me."

"I'd be happy to," Draco said truthfully. Their late night competition was both exhilarating and relaxing at the same time, and it was one of the things he knew he'd miss now that they were back at school. It was great that they could still play. Draco's headache suddenly vanished entirely.

"Good," Harry responded. "Secondly," he tapped Draco's timetable, "Charms for us will be Independent Study. We're to work here in the Great Hall or outside where we can't destroy much."

"We're not planning to keep our lessons a secret?" Draco questioned, somewhat surprised.

"I see no reason to," Harry replied. He braced a knee on the bench beside the other teen and leaned on his forearms. Turning his head, he could easily meet Draco's eyes. "Voldemort already knows I'm working to defeat him and, because of your father, I doubt he'd readily accept you as a Death Eater. He can somewhat sense lies, which makes direct subterfuge difficult. Unless, of course, you really are on Voldemort's side and plan to give me to him as proof of loyalty."

Draco grabbed Harry's wrist, his thin fingers grasping tightly. Pale eyes flashing, he ground out, "That bastard murdered my father. I will *never* join with him, no matter how I feel about Muggles, Squibs, or Mudbloods."

Harry nodded once. "That's good to hear."

Draco pressed his lips together and focused on his hand clasped to Harry's wrist as he fought to bottle up the anger surging through his veins. He saw the tattoo spider scurry out from beneath his robe sleeve, cross over to Harry and disappear under the cuff of his robe. Draco felt a pang of disappointment. He released Harry's arm.

"Everything okay?" Harry questioned quietly.

"Yes," Draco answered firmly. "Continue."

"Well," said Harry, "I think we should also have a set time on the weekends. Is right after breakfast good?"

"That's fine," Draco agreed.

"All right." Harry gathered his timetable and tucked it in his robe. "There's one other thing: Snape's given permission for you to use his Potions classroom, plus everything in it, on Friday

mornings during your free period."

"Really?" Draco was stunned. He was a favorite student of Snape's, but the professor was very possessive of his potions ingredients.

"Really," Harry confirmed. "You'd mentioned before that you'd love time to experiment, so I asked Dumbledore, Dumbledore prodded Snape, and Snape agreed." He cast a glance around the now-empty Great Hall. "We'd best be getting to class. Unless you have any more questions?"

Draco shook his head, gobsmacked because Harry had remembered an off-handed comment Draco had made while brewing Harry's sleeping potion the first time.

"Right, then. I'll be seeing you." Harry headed for the grand double doors of the Great Hall. Draco called to him before he crossed the threshold.

"Potter-." Harry looked back. The words of thanks felt too awkward on Draco's tongue and he changed his mind about saying them. He hated Potter anyway. Instead, he asked, "What did you say to that first year Gryffindor at breakfast?"

The indifferent mask Harry constantly wore didn't slip a centimeter as he replied, "He asked if the rumor that I killed Cedric Diggory was true. I told him yes."

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Chapter: 8

Chapter Eight: Trust

Harry never smiled. He didn't laugh, either.

Two months had passed since the start of school and everyone had settled into a routine. Things seemed the same as they did every term: students complaining about classes and homework, teachers complaining about students and grading, which House would win the upcoming Quidditch game, could anyone pull a prank under the current Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher's nose.

There were differences, though, this school term. Many of the older students still wore armbands

in memory of Cedric Diggory. Trips to Hogsmeade were no longer allowed. More owls were sent back and forth between parents and students. Voluntary extra classes were held in Charms and Defence Against the Dark Arts.

And Harry never smiled, he didn't laugh, and neither did Draco.

There was really nothing for Draco to smile or laugh about. His father was dead. His friends all but abandoned him once they found out he was working with Harry. With O.W.L.s this year, his classes were harder and involved more homework. Quidditch practice was actually boring since his skills were phenomenal due to playing with Harry. Plus, any free time Draco had he spent either researching in order to create experimental potions, sleeping, or eating.

He wasn't completely anti-fun, however. He and Harry met almost every night to play midnight Quidditch. They harped, sometimes, on classes and other students with each other, or shared war stories if they had a particularly bad day. Mostly, though, they let the speed and the wind and the competition and the challenge of capturing an enhanced snitch chase their daily nightmares away.

Draco glanced across the Great Hall at the always messy-haired Potter, who was conversing with Hermione and Ron. Lunch was over, but a few stragglers remained as long as possible before their afternoon classes started. It was Thursday, so once everyone was gone, Draco and Harry would begin their own lessons.

Four times a week the two teens met, to practice charms, hexes, and other spells. They were more than three-quarters of the way through their fifth year Charms text, which they needed to complete to receive credit for their Independent Study. They didn't have scrolls to write, but once a month Professor Dumbledore planned to observe their lesson, and the O.W.L.s would serve as their only Charms test.

"I don't understand you, Draco," Pansy said with disgust from behind him. "Really, Harry Bloody Potter?"

Draco turned and scowled at her. She refused to associate with him any longer - a blessing in disguise for Draco - but she still asserted her opinion on him whenever the desire hit her. "What are you talking about?"

"I thought you were better than most students in this school," Pansy said, "but you've fallen under the Great Goody-Goody Potter's spell, too. I thought you were just being forced to work with him, but after watching you these past two months I can see that you're mooning over him like his other groupies."

"I am not mooning over him!" exclaimed Draco, aghast.

"Please. I do have eyes," Pansy laughed. She looked down her nose at him. "I'd be careful if I were you. Some Slytherins aren't as tolerant as I am of your involvement with Potter."

Draco watched her leave, somewhat dismayed by her thinly veiled warning. She had to be joking; no one was going to come after him because of his association with Harry, and Draco most certainly was *not* mooning over him. Draco told Harry as much, once they were alone in the Great Hall.

"Hmm, that's odd," Harry said as he flipped through his Charms text, smoothing out bent edges and glancing at scraps of paper stuck between the pages, as he tried to find where they'd left off. "Ron thinks I fancy you, as well."

Draco's pale brows lifted. "Do you?"

"In my nightmares," Harry responded. He leaned his cheek on his fist, elbow propped on the open text, and looked across the table at Draco. "Actually, I think Ron is jealous of you. Hermione, too, to an extent."

"Well, I am better than them in every way," Draco bragged unabashedly as he watched the tattoo spider emerge from beneath Harry's sleeve to crawl over his hand.

Harry rolled his eyes. "You're quite modest, too."

"Aren't I, though?" Draco utilized his bookmark to open to the correct page in his Charms test. "So, why is ickle Ronnie jealous and how can I rub it in his freckled face?"

Harry shrugged. "I'm not entirely sure why he's unhappy. I've not spent much time with him since school began. We haven't even had time to play a game of Wizard's Chess, between my working with you, playing midnight Quidditch and then sleeping through breakfast, regular Quidditch practice, homework, my own extra reading, and Hermione's bloody O.W.L. study sessions." He sighed disgustedly. "I can't believe she insists we study already. The O.W.L.s aren't until May."

"The O.W.L.s are extremely important," Draco stated. "They measure your basic mastery of wizardry and determine your focus of study for the last two years of school. The more O.W.L.s you receive, the more freedom you have to choose."

"You've already started studying as well, haven't you?" Harry said wryly.

"So what if I have? My father expects-" Draco cut off abruptly, a sudden twist in his gut. He looked blindly at the open textbook, jaw clenched against the familiar wave of grief and anger.

Harry reached across the table and lightly squeezed Draco's clenched fist. The tattoo spider dancing across Harry's knuckles crossed immediately onto Draco's hand.

Draco's chin shot up and he met Harry's gaze squarely, determination reflecting in his glittering pale eyes. "Teach me the killing curse."

Harry studied him a moment and nodded slowly. "All right. We'll need to go outside and collect some insects."

They left their books and school robes in the Great Hall and went out into the warm fall day. Dressed only in their underrobes, they passed Hagrid's Care of Magical Creatures class, garnering strange looks from the other students. The whole school knew Harry and Draco had Independent Study together during the week, and rumors ran rampant as to what the two did when they disappeared on the weekends, ranging from the truth (they were practicing magic in one of the empty classrooms) to wild lies (they were shagging each other rotten). Still, for second years and up, seeing the once-malicious rivals striding causally beside each other was always a shock.

(It would also be a shock if the general student body knew of the boys' midnight Quidditch games, but surprisingly that was, as yet, uncommon knowledge.)

Harry and Draco walked along the edge of the Forbidden Forest, away from Hagrid's and towards the lake. The trees were vibrant in color: reds, yellows, oranges, and browns; and the leaves danced when they chose to fall from the branches. Harry cast a *petrificus* spell on a rotted log and, once they were out of both earshot and sight, they sat in the neatly mowed grass and broke open the log. Inside, roughly fifty insects of various types were frozen in place by the spell.

"Before we start, I want your word that you will never, ever, *ever* use this spell unless you have no other choice," Harry said, green eyes serious behind his glasses.

"Why not?"

"That would make you a murderer, Draco, and no better than Voldemort," Harry said flatly. "You might as well have killed your father, yourself."

Draco was silent as he thought about what Harry told him. "I understand," he said finally.

"Then you know what to do." Harry plucked a petrified centipede from within the log and dropped it on Draco's knee. "*Finite incantatum*."

"Wait-," Draco trapped the suddenly mobile insect with his hand and looked questioningly at Harry, "-don't you want me to promise or something not to use the curse?"

Harry shook his head. "No. It's not necessary. I..."

The mask Harry wore dropped briefly, and Draco saw fear, sadness, worry, and... hope? The emotions flashed so quickly across Harry's features, Draco couldn't be sure. Harry lowered his chin, preventing Draco from further examination. Harry's almost inaudible words made it unnecessary. "I trust you."

It was a good thing Draco hated Harry, or else he might've done something ridiculous, like smile. "That's good to know." Draco wondered when he swallowed a frog. "I trust you, too, Potter... which makes us two of the most feckless gits on the planet."

"It will certainly chafe Voldemort if *we* are the ones to bring him down," said Harry conversationally as he looked up. The mask was back in place, but there was a slight curve to his lips.

"Well, then, we'd best stop acting like a couple of poufs and get to work," Draco told him. He lifted his hand, stared at the centipede, and said, "*Avada kedavra!*"

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Chapter: 9

Chapter Nine: Breaking Point

Saturday dawned crisp and clear, a perfect day for a House Quidditch game. The stands on the Quidditch field were filling quickly for the second game of the season. The first had been played in early October, Slytherin against Hufflepuff, and Draco, as Slytherin seeker, had caught the snitch within seconds of its return to the game field, twenty minutes into the game. A victory for the Slytherins, but a hollow one for Draco because of the lack of challenge. He'd hoped all games wouldn't be that boring or it would be a very long season.

Draco perched on the end of the second row of benches in the Slytherin section of the stands. Today's game was Ravenclaw versus Gryffindor and, while the Slytherins would be rooting for Ravenclaw, Draco was there specifically to watch Harry play. To others, it would seem he wanted to check out the competition, but Draco already knew how well Harry played. Draco was there just to watch his classmate play like a friend would, if he didn't actually hate the Gryffindor seeker.

Draco looked down at his hands, lightly gripping his knees. The tattoo spider was on his left pinkie, splayed around his finger like a ring. It reminded him of his successful casting of the killing curse on Thursday and the conversation with Harry prior to then. Harry trusted Draco, and that either made the other boy extremely foolish, or Draco extremely lucky. Draco hadn't decided which, yet.

A third year Slytherin boy sat down beside Draco and gave him a tentative smile and a "Hello." Draco nodded politely and turned his attention to the field as Dean Thomas, Lee Jordan's replacement, started the pre-game announcements.

"Welcome students and professors to the second Quidditch game of the season!" Dean's voice boomed in the stadium. Everyone cheered. "Today's match-up: Ravenclaw versus Gryffindor!"

The two teams flew onto the field, a mixture of blue and white, and red and gold, as they lapped the playing area. Madam Hooch was the referee and, as she walked to the center of the field, the players took their starting positions. The beaters and chasers formed a circle, the two keepers hovering on their brooms slightly behind them. The two seekers, Harry and Cho Chang, sat on their brooms high above the center of the circle.

Draco focused on Harry and Cho as Dean introduced the teams. Cho wore a yellow and black armband over her team uniform and her facial expression was not a friendly one. She said something to Harry, who reared back as if he'd been hit, although the blank mask he always wore did not flicker. Cho's expression grew darker when Harry said nothing to her.

"Madam Hooch has released the bludgers and the snitch-" The golden snitch flew straight up between Harry and Cho, and Harry's head tilted back as he followed the small gold ball with his eyes as it disappeared into the blue sky. "- And there's the whistle. Let the game begin!"

As Draco watched, Harry veered his broom and shot straight up in the air, almost vertically and at an unbelievable speed, Quidditch robes flapping wildly behind him. He sped higher and higher: 100 meters... 200 meters... 300 meters... Suddenly, he spun on his broom as if it were a pole, hand shooting out to snatch something Draco could not see.

"Harry Potter has caught the snitch!" Dean screamed over the amplifier, a pair of omnioculors pressed to his eyes. "Harry Potter has caught the snitch!"

The two teams on the field froze on their brooms, mid-first-play. The students in the stands roared. Harry slowly circled towards the ground.

"Thirteen-bloody-seconds!" reported Dean excitedly. "This has to be a Quidditch record!"

Harry flew past the Slytherin stands. He was not smiling. His expression was one of stone. His eyes looked dead.

Draco stood and made his way out of the stands.

Draco circled the Quidditch field slowly, flying low to the ground. The moon was dark and the stars dim, but his eyes had grown used to the night and he could see without trouble.
Without a sound, Harry glided beside him. Harry had appeared shortly after midnight and quietly joined Draco in the air. Draco had known instinctively that Harry didn't wish conversation, just

companionship. Sometimes, being alone made the silence scream.

The night was peaceful; the flying a soothing activity for them both. They'd been lapping the field for an hour, now, and neither one had said a word.

Draco pretended he didn't see the tears staining Harry's cheeks.

On Sunday at dinner, in front of the entire student body in the Great Hall, Harry Potter finally reached his breaking point.
Draco was holding a quiet conversation with Blaise Zambini. The usually quite, olive-skinned fifth year was a potions fanatic like Draco, something that came as a complete surprise. Snape, apparently, had been bragging about Draco during detention and, as a result, Blaise had sought out his Housemate. He didn't seem to care that Draco was a growling recluse nowadays, or that he associated with Harry. Blaise was intelligent, too, which was different. Draco's former friends had the combined intellect of a box of rocks.

"Will you just shut up about the bloody game already?" Harry's agitated voice rose over the din of dinner conversation in the Great Hall. "We were all there; you don't need to keep rehashing it over and over again!"

Draco looked over to the Gryffindor table and saw Ron reply something. Harry exploded, shocking the Hall into silence.

"I caught the snitch in thirteen seconds because I didn't want to play the soddin game!" Harry shot to his feet, face flushed with anger. "It wasn't an amazing feat, it was desperation to get as far away from Cho as fast as I could!"

A collective gasp filled the Hall, followed by quick whispers and darting stares between Harry and the Ravenclaw seeker, who's features reflected shock. Harry rounded on her with malice.

"Don't act so surprised, Cho. You were the one who implied that I killed Cedric in retaliation for his catching the snitch and being the only seeker to beat me."

Cho goggled and reddened. The whispering grew in volume. Several Ravenclaws yelled at Harry in Cho's defense. The professors at the head table were prevented from doing anything by Dumbledore, who watched with speculative interest.

"Well, guess what, Cho? You're wrong," Harry continued hotly, shaking off Hermione's hand on his arm. "I didn't kill Cedric because he beat me. I killed him because I'm Harry Potter and there can only be one Boy Who Lived."

Silence again washed over the Great Hall. Harry's chest heaved as he glared in Cho's direction. Cho and her Ravenclaw friends shrank back. Everyone held his or her breath, waiting to see what would happen next.

Draco didn't stop to question what he was doing as he began clapping slowly; he'd puzzle it out later. "Bravo, Potter. I say, bravo," he drawled as all eyes turned to him. "I think you should win an award for that performance."

"Sod off, Malfoy," Harry spat.

Draco smirked nastily as he rose and started around the tables towards Harry. "Tell me: how, exactly, did you kill Diggory, eh? Did you use your bare hands to strangle him? Did you hold his face below water until he drowned? Did you beat his head against a rock until it cracked like an egg? Or did you go the boring route and simply cast *avada kedavra* on him?"

"Malfoy," growled Harry warningly.

Draco stepped right up to Harry, invading his personal space. "No, really, I want to know. I'm sure everyone wants to know."

"Shut up," Harry ground out, fists clenched.

"How did you do it, Potter?" Draco pushed. "How did it feel?"

"Shut up."

"Did he scream, Potter?" Draco asked with calm maliciousness. "Did he beg you to spare his life?"

"Shut up!"

Draco leaned intimately close to Harry and whispered, though his voice carried clearly in the silent Hall, "Did you enjoy it, Harry?"

"*Propellicus!*"

An invisible force slammed into Draco's chest and propelled him backwards. He hit the stone wall beside the open Hall doors, hard enough to knock the breath out of him.

The students gasped loudly. More professors stood to intervene, but again Dumbledore stopped them.

Draco pushed away from the wall and casually straightened his robes. "What's the matter, Potter? Was I too close to the truth?"

"Bastard," hissed Harry.

"Murderer," said Draco blandly.

Ron and Hermione leapt to their feet, wands out and curses on their lips. Harry's reflexes included a quick tongue, it seemed. "*Silencio*," he cast before his friends finished their own hexes. Without a glance at either of them, he brushed past Ron and stalked towards Draco. Draco would have appreciated the expressions on Ron's and Hermione's faces, if he wasn't so focused on Harry.

The blank stone mask had returned and Harry's eyes were flat and unemotional as he looked down at Draco. "You hate me," he stated.

Draco nodded. "True."

"Then, I know you won't sugarcoat the truth," Harry said. "I'm a killer, aren't I? A murderer, as you said."

Everyone in the Hall strained to hear Draco's reply.

"What you are is a pompous tit who thinks the world revolves around him." Draco snorted derisively. "Really, Potter, don't flatter yourself. You didn't kill Diggory, You-Know-Who did, just like he killed my father."

"But if it wasn't for me, Cedric would still be alive."

"No; if it wasn't for you, everyone would be dead by You-Know-Who's wand the first time he was around."

Harry's brows furrowed. "So, er, what you're saying is... the whole world does revolve around me."

Draco opened his mouth, closed it, and his own brows furrowed. "Huh. I guess it does. Fancy that."

"I'll try not to let it go to my head," Harry commented without inflection. He turned and glanced around the Hall at the listening students. His eyes landed on Cho Chang. "I still feel guilty."

"Of course you do," Draco said. "You're a Gryffindor; it's part of your bloody genetic code."

"Hmm," Harry agreed non-verbally. He glanced around again. "You do realize the whole school is staring at us and Dumbledore's smiling like a loon."

"Sod them," Draco said with a shrug. "Want to go play a real game of Quidditch?"

"Okay."

They turned together and walked out of the Great Hall without looking back.

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Author's Note: Thanks again, everyone, for the feedback. I'm happy you're enjoying watching the tale unfold.

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Chapter: 10

Chapter Ten: *Tattooum Arachnid*

Students were still abuzz about what happened between Harry and Draco on Monday morning, when classes started. The rumors about their relationship now centered on them being boyfriends in some way: from a strictly sexual relationship to a deep romantic love. Only Hermione and Ron knew and believed the truth, although, to Draco, the truth seemed to have become rather ambiguous. Draco didn't want to claim Harry as a friend, but they were much more than simply classmates or student and teacher... even though Draco hated Harry.

Draco contemplated his relationship with Harry while waiting for Double Potions to start. The messy-haired seeker (did Harry even *own* a brush?) sat in front of Draco, with Hermione and Ron protectively flanking him on either side. Draco was surprised the two were speaking with Harry, considering the way he cut them off and then left with Draco at dinner the night before. Their loyalty was admirable.

"Malfoy, scoot over a seat, eh?" Crabbe's request pulled Draco's attention away from the Gryffindor Trio. "I want to sit next to Pansy."

Draco turned to Crabbe with a dark look. The oafish Slytherin stood beside the last stool in the row. Although Draco didn't necessarily want to sit beside Pansy, principle declared that he not move readily. He opened his mouth to speak scathingly-

- and closed it with a snap when Crabbe suddenly smacked him on the forehead with the heel of his palm.

"You have something..." Crabbe loomed up in Draco's face, and Draco, startled, jerked back. He bumped into Pansy, who had come up on the other side of him, and knocked her books from her hands. Draco's head whipped around at the clatter.

"Hey!" Pansy snapped, glaring at him. "Watch what you're do-aiiii!" she shrieked, and slapped him across the cheek.

Draco's mouth dropped open in shock. Pansy continued to shriek shrilly. She slapped Draco again before turning to cling to Goyle, standing behind her.

Almost the entire Slytherin/Gryffindor class stared in confused silence.

Harry... laughed.

Harry started rocking back and forth, holding his stomach, laughing. He rocked so much, he overtipped and fell off his stool, cracking his head on Draco's table before landing with a thud on the ground. The fall didn't stop the laugher. The rusty, unused sound rose up from the floor, slightly wild but wholly amused.

Draco leaned forward across the table and peered down at the prone Gryffindor. Harry was clutching his stomach, his glasses askew, as he continued to laugh. Eyes bright with tears of mirth briefly focused on Draco before they slammed shut and Harry, impossibly, began to laugh even harder.

Draco wasn't the only one staring at Harry like he'd lost his nut. Hermione and Ron looked like they were about to fetch Madam Pomfrey. It was quite possible one of the other Gryffindors already left to do so.

"Potter," Draco ventured blandly, as if speaking about the weather, "do you find something funny?"

Harry nodded emphatically, hooting like a hyena. He clamped his lips together suddenly, but the sniggers and snickers weren't entirely muffled. Pushing to his knees, he reached out towards Draco. Draco didn't jerk back like he had with Crabbe; he stayed unmoving as Harry touched a finger to Draco's nose. A moment later, Harry withdrew his finger and held it up for Draco to see. Draco's eyes crossed slightly as he focused on the calloused digit.

On the tip of Harry's finger was the tattoo spider.

Draco shifted his gaze and met Harry's dancing eyes behind cockeyed glasses. His lips started to quiver as laughter began to bubble inside him. Harry reached out again and touched Draco's inflamed cheek a moment, apparently returning the spider. He snorted once, hard, as he lowered his hand. Then, suddenly, he reached back out, lightly slapped Draco, slanted a glance at Pansy, and lost it. Draco wasn't far behind.

Silver-blond head thrown back, Draco's peals of laughter echoed against the stone walls of the potions classroom, Harry's scratchier laughter underlining it. Harry's head was downcast and he pounded a fist on the edge of the table in absent emphasis, their laughter seeming to perpetuate each other's. Soon, Draco's stomach muscles hurt and tears were streaking down his cheeks. It had been a very long time since he'd last laughed so much over something so ridiculous.

"Gentlemen, if you don't mind, I would like to begin class." Snape's annoyed tone broke through the laughter, and Draco attempted to calm down. It was difficult. Harry seemed to be struggling as well. He had removed his glasses and was wiping his eyes with his robe sleeve. His face was red and wet with tears of mirth, like Draco's. The two of them must have made quite a spectacle.

Harry slid his glasses on his nose and smiled a blinding Harry Potter smile at Draco; the same smile that used to make Draco want to slap him silly. Today, it made Draco laugh a little more.

Harry stood, wrapped an arm around both Hermione's and Ron's necks, and yanked them close. They both squawked in surprise. He pressed a loud, smacking kiss to the crown of Hermione's head, repeated the action on Ron, then released them both, took his seat, folded his hands neatly, and pretended to play the attentive student to Snape.

Snape glowered, but said nothing at Harry's behavior when he caught sight of Draco.

Crabbe, Pansy, and Goyle looked almost frightened, when Draco shifted his seat so Crabbe could have his spot. Draco's cheek tingled where Pansy twice slapped him. It was hard to believe that his fellow Slytherins hadn't seen the tattoo spider before, in the weeks since school began. He'd seen it crawling on Harry's neck just in the last potions class, before Harry had passed it to him on Thursday.

A stray chuckle escaped, and Harry cast an enormous grin over his shoulder at Draco.

Draco smiled in return.
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Chapter: 11

Chapter Eleven: Veritaseram

Things changed as the days continued to pass. Neither Draco nor Harry returned to how they were the prior school year, but the black cloud that had hovered continuously over them both had dissipated. Draco was still very quiet, serious about his studies, and quite busy with his potions, but he made a new friend in Blaise, and getting up in the morning didn't seem so tedious any more.

Draco had finally received correspondence from his mother. She offered written sympathy and

told him she never intended to return to Britain. She did expect him to live with her in France over the summer holidays, until he graduated from Hogwarts. However, she did not extend the invitation for Christmas. Draco didn't mind. He loved his mother, but she wasn't his favorite person. They were too much alike to really get along.

Draco also didn't mind having to stay at Hogwarts over winter break. It would give him a chance to work on a new potion that took several days to brew. The one he'd recently created was ready for trial, but he needed several people to properly test the potion's effectiveness. That was why he approached Harry during lunch one Friday, garnering suspicious glares from the other Gryffindors despite knowing of his and Harry's relationship, whether the truth or rumor.

"Malfoy, hello," greeted Harry amicably. "I was thinking of cancelling our lesson tomorrow because of the Hufflepuff/Ravenclaw Quidditch game. Do you have an opinion?"

Draco shrugged. "I wouldn't mind seeing the game."

"Good." Harry smiled at Hermione and Ron, who sat silently beside him, before turning back to Draco. "Now, what can I do for you?"

"I've finished the potion that I've been working on and I need to test it. Would you be willing to help?"

"Of course," Harry answered immediately. "Where and when?"

"After supper, in the potions classroom," Draco replied. He glanced at Ron and Hermione. "Bring your friends, as well."

As Draco walked away, he heard Ron's furious whisper, "It's a trap. I know it. Malfoy's been biding his time!"

"Not so loud, Ron," Hermione scolded. "Though I agree, this is the perfect opportunity to see if we can trust Malfoy."

"You shouldn't," warned Harry, causing Draco to stop and look back at him. Harry met his stare boldly. "Never trust anyone you wouldn't give your life for, if asked."

Draco sat still and quiet, deep in thought, as Blaise poked freely around the potions classroom while they waited for the Gryffindors. Since lunch, Draco had been silent and introspective. What Harry had said about trust had been on Draco's mind all afternoon. Harry trusted him, and that meant much more than he originally thought.
It was frightening, actually. Harry Potter would die for him, Draco Malfoy, upon request. Granted, Harry would die for anyone in extreme situations, sacrificing himself so another could live, but that was different. That wasn't a freely made choice. A freely made choice would be if Harry jumped off the Astronomy Tower to his death simply if Draco asked. *If Draco asked.* The power that Draco could hold over Harry was scary and Draco wasn't sure if he wanted that

power.

Then, there was the other side of the coin: did Draco trust Harry the same way? He did trust Harry immensely, almost without question, but... would he voluntarily die for Harry if asked? Could he entrust Harry with that power against him? Should he? And how did Harry know with such certainty that he would give his life upon request? Over the summer, Harry had said he didn't trust anyone anymore. Draco, it seemed, was now the exception. Or were there others? Did Harry trust Granger like that? The Weasel? Dumbledore?

Draco closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. He was getting a headache from the philosophical quandary. Since he wasn't reaching an answer by thinking about it, he figured he would just *know* when he trusted Harry as much as the other teen trusted him.

Stifled laughter in the hallway announced the arrival of the Gryffindors. Blaise came to stand by Draco's table as the other three waltzed into the potions classroom. Hermione and Ron looked suspicious, but Harry was affable as he greeted Draco.

"Hello, Malfoy. And you must be Zabini," Harry addressed the other Slytherin. "Draco mentioned he'd made a friend." He slanted a crooked grin at Draco. "Glad to see that the 'Friendship in Ten Easy Lessons' course paid off."

"And you seemed to have aced your 'How to be a Mincing Ponce' course," countered Draco. Harry chuckled.

"So, what's this about, Malfoy?" Ron crossed his arms and looked down his nose at Draco.

Draco could tell Ron wanted to add a biting remark, probably about being elsewhere on a Friday evening, but he refrained. Draco wondered fleetingly what Harry had said to the lanky redhead to get him to hold his tongue. Though Draco rarely engaged in scathing banter anymore unless provoked, he and Ron were like oil and water, and a verbal war was inevitable if they were together too long.

"Like I said earlier, I am testing a potion I created." Draco stood and walked over to a row of stools he'd set up at the front of the potions classroom, one stool separated from the other three. "Potter, I need you here-" He pointed to the separate stool. "-Zabini, Granger, Weasley, if you'll each take one of the other seats."

As they situated themselves, Draco retrieved a corked glass vial and three scraps of parchment from a nearby table. He gave Harry the deep gold potion and one of the slips of parchment to each of the other three.

"All right," Draco began. "You know that the Veritaserum potion forces a person who ingests it to tell the truth. Well, I've crated a derivative of that potion, which I call Veritaseram, that allows the taker to *see* if someone else is telling the truth or not."

Harry gazed wonderingly at the gold liquid in the vial. "Brilliant! How does it work?"

"Basic physiology," Draco said. "The human body will physically react when you tell a lie, from your eyes shifting, to increased heart rate, to perspiring. Even your brain reacts differently, because the truth is a memory and a lie is created. Veritaseram will basically enable a person to see those changes. This experiment we're doing is to test its effectiveness. Professor Snape has already made certain the potion is harmless, so don't think I'm attempting to poison you, Potter."

"I trust you, Draco," Harry said earnestly.

Draco paused, the reference to trust briefly throwing him, before going on. "The experiment is simple: Potter will take the potion and then ask you three questions." He addressed Blaise, Ron, and Hermione. "Your answer will either be the truth or a lie, depending on your instructions written on the scrap of parchment I've given you. Harry will then tell me whether you appear to change color or not."

Draco sat at the potions table directly behind the trio. He could see Harry clearly between Ron's and Blaise's shoulders. "Potter, go ahead and drink the potion. We'll do the experiment three times, ten questions each time. Begin whenever you're ready."

The experiment went smoothly from there. Harry was quite methodical with his questions, asking ones that he somewhat knew the answers to, such as name, age, House, and what professor taught which course. Draco was impressed by Harry's astuteness in laying a foundation to determine truth from lie.

Ron's answers were always the truth, Blaise's were lies, and Hermione had the choice. A subtle hand sign indicated when she told a lie. Draco dutifully recorded his observations and, at the end of ten questions, he switched the instruction slips so that Hermione always lied and Blaise had the choice, leaving Ron as the 'control' subject, or truth-teller. Harry repeated the same questions he'd asked the first time, in true scientific fashion. Draco's estimation of Harry's intelligence increased.

"Are we through?" asked Harry after the third round of questions.

"We're through," Draco affirmed, jotting down his conclusions on his scroll.

Harry clapped his hands together and smiled evilly. "Hey, Hermione. Do you have a crush on Ron?"

"Harry!"

"Come on, do you?"

Hermione gave him a dirty look. "No, I don't."

Harry's brow went up. He looked at Ron. "Ron, same question: do you have a crush on Hermione?"

"Sorry, Harry, but no," Ron answered.

Harry's other brow went up. He moved on to Blaise. "Blaise, how about you? Who do you have a crush on?"

"Draco Malfoy. I'm in love with him," Blaise replied tonelessly. The Gryffindor Trio snickered and Draco rolled his eyes.

"Hey, Draco," Harry said. "Do you think this potion works on yourself? Like, can you tell if you're lying to yourself?"

"Hmm. Good question." Draco waved towards a free-standing wood cabinet. "There's a mirror on that cupboard door."

Harry stood and went over to the cabinet. He opened the door and looked at himself in the head-sized mirror. He scratched his cheek, his reflection mimicking the action. "I'm mad for Draco Malfoy." He paused, staring at his reflection. "And I think he dyes his hair, because there's no way it could be naturally that color."

Draco self-consciously smoothed a hand over his hair as the others tittered. Harry closed the cabinet door. "It works," he said. "How long until it wears off?"

"Roughly another half-hour," Draco replied.

Harry nodded. "It's a great potion, Draco. The Ministry will be impressed."

Draco snorted. "Doubtful. The Malfoy name isn't too popular with the Ministry any longer."

"You'll change their minds," Harry said encouragingly.

"I think I liked it better when you weren't so bloody cheerful."

"Can we go now?" Ron inquired somewhat impatiently.

Harry glanced questioningly at Draco. "I'm done," Draco said.

"Okay. C'mon, guys," Harry said to Hermione and Ron. The two Gryffindors followed Harry out of the room without a word of goodbye.

Blaise hopped off his stool. "I need to go, too, Draco. Nott's waiting for me, to play Exploding Snap."

"All right. Thanks, Zabini," Draco told him.

"By the way, Potter was right, it's a really brilliant potion," Blaise said. "G'night."

"G'night." Blaise left, leaving Draco alone in the potions classroom. In the comfortable silence, Draco finished his work. Professor Snape was going to help him register the Veritaseram once his notes were in order and a report drafted.

"Malfoy-" Draco started when he heard his name, quill streaking across the scroll, as he whipped around to see Harry standing in the room.

"Sorry," Harry apologized. "Didn't mean to startle you."

Draco blotted the smear, annoyed. "What are you doing here again?"

Harry paused, before answering hesitantly, "I thought of a question to ask you before, but decided not to in front of the others."

Draco's turned on his stool to face Harry, pale brows arched. "And that would be?"

"Were you going to join the Death Eaters?" he asked bluntly.

"I suppose so, yes," Draco replied slowly, not bothering to lie, and not because Harry had taken the Veritaseram potion. "My father expected me to, and even you had admitted some of what the Death Eaters stand for makes sense."

Harry cocked his head slightly to one side. "Would you still join them now?"

"No, but you already knew that." Draco smirked. "I might start my own cult, though, since everyone worships me already."

Harry wandered over to a wall of shelves lined with potions ingredients, chuckling softly. "You're such a twit, Malfoy."

Draco tapped his quill on his scroll, studying Potter. "You know, I would've told you the truth if you'd asked, even without the Veritaseram."

"I know," Harry said, picking up a jar of yellow powder and reading its label. "The Veritaseram wore off an hour ago. You've been down here awhile."

"So, why don't you tell why you're really here?" Draco said.

Harry shrugged and put the jar back on the shelf. "Seamus claimed Ron for a game of Wizard's Chess and Hermione was invited to a Hufflepuff party that I didn't feel like going to."

"And-?" prompted Draco.

Harry glanced briefly over his shoulder at Draco. "And I prefer your company, anyway." He turned back to the ingredients and picked up another jar. This one held a milky white powder. "You understand that the silence doesn't need to be filled."

"Am I sensing there's trouble between the Terrific Trio?" Draco's tone didn't hold any glee like it would have in the past, only curiosity and perhaps a hint of concern, if he admitted it.

"No, not really trouble, but..." Harry dragged a hand through his midnight hair, causing it to stick up in places. "They think I should be cheery and sociable all the time. They expect everything to be the way it was last year, before I killed-" he paused minutely, "-before Voldemort had Diggory killed."

"But it's not."

"It can't be. I've seen and experienced too much, things they would never understand," Harry said. He returned the jar to the shelf. "Okay, yes, since Pansy slapped you-" he shot a grin over his shoulder, "-which was hilarious, by the way. You should've seen the expression on your face."

"I'm glad my pain amused you," Draco said dryly.

Harry sniggered softly and continued. "Anyway, since then, life hasn't been such a chore, but... I still like the quiet."

Draco watched as Harry began neatly lining the ingredients jars, turning labels to face front precisely. "I'm not your friend, Harry," he stated, though not cruelly.

"I never said you were," Harry responded. He faced Draco, fathomless green eyes focused fully on him. "But... you like the quiet, too."
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Chapter: 12

Chapter Twelve: Quidditch

November was nearing its end and the last game of the fall Quidditch season was about to begin.

The air was crisp. The sun played hide-and-seek as an abundance of white full clouds drifted across the blue sky. House banners fluttered lightly in the soft breeze, hanging from the rails of the stands. The stands were packed, every student and a fair number of professors having turned out to see the Quidditch match between Gryffindor and Slytherin.

Gossip ran hot along the stands, Harry Potter's and Draco Malfoy's fictional love affair the main topic. Would their torrid romance survive the competition? Would the teams suffer because of the lovers? Would Potter grab the snitch within seconds again? Would Malfoy allow him?

Draco and Harry hovered on their Firebolts high above the green field, waiting for Professor Vector, the referee for the game, to release the Quidditch balls. Ron, Captain of the Gryffindor team (chosen after Harry turned down the position), was doling out instructions to his players: Chasers Jordan Leaner and Bill Corley; Beaters Ginny Weasley and David Burdine; and Keeper Calvin Miley. Ron played the third Chaser position. Except for Harry, the entire team had gone through a changeover, though the Gryffindors didn't suffer for it.

The Slytherin team, consisting of Chasers Marie Smeaton, April Montague, and Marco Warrington, Beaters Joann Walter and Andy Bole, and Keeper/Captain Zane McCoy, was a mixture of old and new players. The competition promised to be fierce. The rivalry between Slytherin and Gryffindor was still the strongest between all Houses, despite losing Draco and Harry to "love."

"I hope everyone brought their omnioculars, because the long-awaited match between Gryffindor and Slytherin is about to begin!" announced Dean, eliciting cheers of anticipation from the stands. "As the Captains shout last second encouragement to their teams, Professor Vector comes onto the field. Professor Vector has been refereeing Quidditch matches for over a hundred years, so this promises to be a fair game."

Professor Vector, broom in hand and wearing protective goggles over his craggy face, tooted his whistle. "Players ready?" he called.

Ron and Zane fell silent, and the anticipation spiked. Professor Vector kicked the trunk in the center of the field and the lid popped open. The two bludgers sprang free with maniacal giggles, sailing high into the air. The golden snitch followed, zipping between Harry and Draco.

"*Finite protectum charmus*," Draco cast the second the snitch was in sight.

"*Camouflagus. Accio snitch*," Harry cast a hairs-breath after. With the protection charm broken, the snitch became almost invisible and flew into Harry's open palm. He quickly tucked it into his red Quidditch robe as he opened his other hand. A second snitch, which had a faint greenish glow, rested in his palm. It was the same one Harry and Draco played midnight Quidditch with. Harry thumbed the activation button. The snitch spread its filament wings and shot off at lightning speed.

"Think anyone noticed?" Draco asked.

Harry shrugged. "If they did it won't matter, considering we made it harder to play, not easier."

Professor Vector blew his whistle again. "Let the game commence!" he declared, releasing the Quaffle. The game began in a flurry of red and green robes. Draco and Harry watched the chaos below them for a moment before exchanging mock salutes and flying off in opposite directions.

"Slytherin Chaser Marie Smeaton has the Quaffle-," Dean was reporting, "-Gryffindor Chasers Jordan Leaner and Bill Corley are on her tail- they're not fast enough, though- Marie throws the Quaffle at the goal- and it's a block by Keeper Calvin Miley! Good save, Gryffindor!"

Draco drifted lazily in the air a good distance above the Slytherin goal. He scanned the field, half-watching the game unfold below as he searched for the snitch.

"- Slytherin Beater Andy Bole whacks a bludger at Gryffindor Chaser Ron Weasley- Captain Weasley rolls on his broom and kicks the bludger right back at Andy!-" Cheers erupted from most of the stands. "-Chaser Corley has possession of the Quaffle- he throws to Chaser Jordan Leaner- it's intercepted! Slytherin Chaser Marco Warrington darts in from nowhere and grabs the Quaffle!- He's flying hot and fast towards the Gryffindor goal- Slytherin scores!" The Slytherin area of the stands burst into loud cheering.

The Quidditch match picked up the pace. Within minutes, Slytherin had scored twice more and Gryffindor three times, causing the game to be tied 30-30. Red and green-clad players ducked and wove in and around each other at breakneck speeds, the bludgers dancing dangerously with them.

Gryffindor had scored two more goals, when a speck of greenish-gold caught Draco's eye. He tuned out the sounds of the game, focusing intently. It was the enchanted snitch! It hovered near the ground in the center of the filed, as if daring Draco or Harry to catch it.

Draco took the dare.

He dropped straight down from where he'd been hovering, startling the Slytherin Keeper as he free-fell past the goal. He came to an abrupt stop just before he would hit the ground.

"-Woah! That was a close one! Seeker Draco Malfoy stops his sudden fall mere centimeters from the hard ground- the snitch has been sighted center field- Malfoy shoots forward- and here comes Gryffindor Seeker Harry Potter from the other side!- Both Seekers are skimming the field, heading straight for one another and the snitch in the middle- neither one of them looks like he's going to yield-"

Draco and Harry were two meters away from each other and the snitch, when the snitch suddenly zipped straight up in the air. Undaunted, Draco aimed his broom slightly to the left. He raised his right arm and grabbed Harry's hand as they brushed past each other. Their tightly clasped hands became the axis that enabled them to instantly change course, propelling them after the snitch.

"Bloody hell!-"

"Mr. Thomas!" Professor McGonagall scolded the student announcer.

"-Malfoy and Potter, millimeters away from crashing, now seem to be working *together*!-"

The sun peeked out from behind the clouds, temporarily blinding both boys. The snitch vanished. Draco and Harry went separate ways once they had passed the other players and leveled out.

Draco slowed, winding back and forth across the field above his teammates. He tuned into Dean's commentary again.

"-This game will go in the books, guaranteed. Never have two Seekers combined efforts during competition. Both team Captains look furious, but they'll have to take it up later because the game is heating up again-"

Draco glanced at the Slytherin Captain. Zane, indeed, looked angry enough to crush a bludger with his hands. A quick look over at Weasley showed the same.

It dawned on Draco that no one knew he and Harry played Quidditch on a regular basis. It wasn't of consequence, if his teammates did or did not know, since it wasn't a secret. However, it did effect how he played. Aside from the snitch being enchanted to be quicker, Draco and Harry helped each other to make the game more challenging. There were no Wronski Feints during their matches, and no 'accidents' either.

"-Gryffindor scores! That puts Gryffindor ahead by 20! Nice work by Beater Ginny Weasley, protecting Chaser Jordan Leaner- Slytherin has the Quaffle- Chaser April Montague passes to Marie Smeaton who passes back to April- Beater Andy Bole intercepts the bludger headed for April- Gryffindor Chasers Ron Weasley and Bill Corley slip up from beneath April, suddenly blocking her path-"

The hours of practice had paid off. April managed to dodge the two Chasers and pass the Quaffle to Marco Warrington. Marco attempted to score, but the Gryffindor Keeper blocked with his broom. The Quaffle flew right back into Marco's hands, and he immediately threw it again.

"-Slytherin scores!- And there's the snitch in the center of the field again!-"

The greenish-gold snitch danced between the players mid-field. Draco tore off after it without hesitation. He saw Harry coming directly at him again from the other side of the field. Draco dipped and dodged a bludger, narrowly avoided being squashed between two Weasleys, and suddenly Potter was scant centimeters away.

Draco propelled his lower body off the broom and into a handstand. Harry dropped off his own broom, dangling by his hands beneath it. Their gloved knuckles scraped together and their

wicker broom bristles briefly tangled as they streaked past each other.

"-Aaahh! Did you see that! Did you see that! An amazing feat of daredevilry by Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy, preventing a head-on collision at the very last instant!-"

Draco dropped back onto his broom, swung around, and darted after the snitch. Harry, remounted on his Firebolt, came up beside him moments later. Neck-and-neck, they flew at heart-racing speed, weaving fluidly around their teammates in a dramatic dance.

The enchanted snitch changed direction abruptly, zooming between Draco and Harry back the way they'd come. Harry flipped his broom in a swimmers turn as Draco directed his Firebolt downwards in a loop.

"-Slytherin Keeper Zane McCoy blocks the Quaffle, sending it into the waiting hands of teammate Marco Warrington- Marco passes to Marie Smeaton- Gryffindor Beater David Durdine whacks a bludger at the Quaffle mid-air- And the Quaffle is wild!" Dean yelled. The stands erupted into noise.

"-Chasers from both teams converge- Gryffindor Seeker Harry Potter races by, broom tail smacking the Quaffle- there's almost a six-player visit to the Hospital wing- Gryffindor has the Quaffle now- and it looks like Harry is about to catch the- Holy!- Draco Malfoy has shot up from beneath Harry and captured the snitch! Slytherin wins!"

Draco stared at the greenish-gold snitch in his hand as he glided to a halt. He was somewhat stunned. He'd actually caught the snitch.

Harry drifted to a stop beside him. "Congratulations, Draco. You should be proud."

Draco extended his hand towards Harry, feeling oddly downhearted. "My father would have said, 'It's about time.'"

"But he still would've bragged that his son beat Harry Potter, and with an enchanted snitch." Harry plucked the snitch from Draco's hand, exchanging it with the school one. "You beat me, Malfoy, fair and square, and it was a tough, honest competition. It was also the best Quidditch game I've ever played."

"It was fun, wasn't it?" A slow grin crept across Draco's lips. Pride started to build in his chest. "Do you mind terribly if I rub my win in your face for awhile?"

"Not at all," said Harry. "In fact, I'll even pretend to be upset about it."

"That's quite nice of you."

"I thought so."

Draco smiled sincerely at the other teen. "Good game, Harry."

"You, too, Draco," Harry said.

And they flew off in opposite directions.

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Chapter: 13

Chapter Thirteen: Azkaban

Draco became the Prince of Slytherin for beating Harry in Quidditch. The novelty of it wore off after five days. It was impossible to get anything done with people wanting to recant the game every time they cornered Draco. Draco was exceedingly grateful when winter holidays began and almost everyone left for home.

He was not grateful, however, to be awoken at dawn on the first day of school break.

"Potter, you must have a death wish," Draco mumbled into his pillow.

"Perhaps." The bed shook as Harry bounced on the edge.

"Gah! Cut that out!" Draco pushed himself to a sitting position and glared at the raven-haired annoyance.

Harry snickered at him. "Nice hair."

"Sod off." Draco forced himself not to try and smooth down his bed-head. "What do you want?"

"We're going on a field trip," Harry told him, rising from the bed.

"A field trip?" Draco repeated.

"Yes. Hurry up and get dressed," Harry said as he started for the open dormitory door. "I'll wait for you in the common room."

"Wait! Where are we going?" Draco asked.

"Azkaban."

The portkey deposited Draco, Harry, and Headmaster Dumbledore outside of the wizarding prison, Azkaban. The prison was a gothic monstrosity; a crumbling castle shrouded in shadow. Draco felt chilled. This was where his father had died.
Draco glanced over at Harry. Harry stood close to Dumbledore, his face a waxy grey color. The scar stood out in stark relief on his forehead.

"Ready, boys?" asked Dumbledore.

Harry swallowed thickly and nodded. Draco watched as the expression of terror on Harry's face disappeared behind the familiar blank mask.

"Mr. Malfoy?" Dumbledore looked questioningly at Draco.

"I'm fine," Draco said dismissively, though his insides were tied in knots. The purpose behind the field trip to Azkaban was to experience first-hand the power of the Dementors. Dumbledore predicted that the creatures would be on the side of Voldemort when he made his presence known to the world. Dumbledore felt Draco needed to experience their effect on wizards in order to protect himself. Harry came with for the same reason, even though he'd been in contact with Dementors in the past.

Dumbledore led the way into Azkaban. The chill permeating Draco grew more intense with every step. The inside of the prison was as foreboding as the outside, with crumbling stone halls and dim lighting.

Dumbledore spoke to someone at the front desk and they were promptly escorted down a long hallway. At the end of the hall was an open doorway and, beyond that, a barred gate bisecting the empty room. Behind a protective window set into the sidewall sat a wizard, whose job was to open and close the gate.

The visitors' escort spoke through the glass to the bearded wizard. "Call up a Dementor to the gate, if you would, Virgil."

A tall, black-robed Dementor glided into view almost immediately. The hooded figure stopped on the other side of the gate and made a hissing sound.

A strangled cry drew Draco's attention from the Dementor. Harry was sweating profusely. His lips were pulled back in a snarl, exposing his tightly clenched teeth. His eyes had rolled back so only the whites were showing.

Dumbledore quickly escorted Harry from the room. The prison official followed, leaving Draco alone in the room with the Dementor. The wizard behind the glass smirked maliciously. Slowly,

Draco slid his focus back to the Dementor behind the gate. Fear slithered down his spine as he waited for the Dementor to act.

The memory of Posey Parkinson relating Lucius Malfoy's death suddenly sprang to the forefront of Draco's mind. The emotions that Draco had felt the first time hadn't lessened when repeated. However, if Dementors were supposed to show their victim the most terrible experiences and this was Draco's... well, it was actually a positive sort of torture. It proved that Draco had lived a very good life up until his father's demise. He'd have to rub that fact in Harry's face once he was sure Harry was all right.

Draco forced his feet to move. The memory was still painful, despite the positive outlook. He knew he was crying, though silently, as his heart was bruised again. No matter what anyone else's opinion had been of Lucius Malfoy, Draco had loved his father very much.

Dumbledore was waiting alone in the hallway when Draco exited the room. The elder wizard peered curiously over his spectacles at him. "Everything all right, Mr. Malfoy?"

"Everything's fine," Draco said as the Dementor's effects immediately began to fade. "Where's Harry?"

"I sent him along back to Hogwarts without us." Dumbledore started for the exit, with Draco at his side. "I believe you shall find him on the Quidditch field upon our return."

Harry was, as predicted, soaring on his Firebolt above the Quidditch field, when Draco had gone looking for him. Bundled in winter robes, Draco watched Harry circle in the air for several minutes before joining him.
It was chilly. The cold winter air burned Draco's cheeks as he kept beside Harry. They flew silently together until Draco felt icicles hanging from his ears. He was about to suggest heading inside when Harry spoke.

"I expected to hear Voldemort killing my parents," Harry said. "That's what usually happened when a Dementor was near me."

"I take it this time was different?" Draco said, prompting the conversation. After his own experience with the Dementor, he felt sort of bad for dressing up as one and trying to scare Harry in third year. He'd only thought Harry was afraid of them, like Weasley was afraid of spiders.

"I hadn't forgotten, but didn't really think about the fact that far worse things have happened since third year." The wall that Harry kept between himself and the rest of the world, only recently allowing laughter to escape, crumbled completely. The purity of the pain reflected on Harry's face was exquisitely beautiful in a macabre way, and Draco's breath caught.

"Cedric Diggory's death wasn't the worst thing that happened the last night of the Tri-Wizard Tournament," said Harry, his voice like sandpaper rubbing against glass. "That night, I also brought Voldemort back to life."

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Chapter: 14

Chapter Fourteen: The *Patronus* Spell

Ensconced in opposite corners of the plush sofa in the Slytherin common room, the fire in the fireplace casting flickering shadows on them, Draco heard the whole sordid story about what happened to Harry at the Tri-Wizard Tournament, from Diggory's death, to Voldemort's rise, to Harry surviving all three Unforgivable Curses. Draco had known that the Dark Lord had returned from his father, but not about any of the events of that night. Draco now knew why Harry behaved as he did. He knew what the blank mask hid.

"Draco, what am I going to do?" Harry asked, a frown of worry and fear wrinkling his brow. "I was paralyzed by the Dementor. There's no way I would've been able to cast the *patronus* spell, and I can guarantee Dementors will be with Voldemort the next time we meet."

"Then it's a good thing that I'll be with you, to watch your back," Draco said, as if it was a given fact.

"Really?" Harry's haunted green eyes widened in surprise behind his glasses. "You would protect me?"

"Yes."

The answer came automatically to Draco's lips, without thought or hesitation. Draco blinked twice rapidly at hearing his own reply, and sank back further into the corner of the sofa as the truth of the matter fully hit him. He really would protect Harry-Bloody-Potter from danger. The thought of Harry being cursed or injured twisted Draco's stomach in knots. It was a disturbing realization, and he said quickly, "I still hate you, though."

"Yes, of course," said Harry in a completely disbelieving tone of voice. The blinding smile also didn't help.

Draco sneered half-heartedly, folding his arms defensively. "Stop smiling like a ruddy git and teach me this anti-Dementor spell, before I change my mind and leave you to your fate."

Harry's smile only widened. "Whatever you say, Malfoy. You'll need your wand."

Draco decided to ignore Harry's idiotic grinning and he pulled his wand from the pocket of his robes. "I haven't used this in awhile, it seems," he commented, smoothing a hand over his wand (ten-inches, black pine, Gryphon's tooth. The irony did not escape him). Knowing that the secret to magic was wanting the results without question or hesitation had aided Draco in all of his courses, and he only needed his wand in Defense Against the Dark Arts, when the Professor didn't fully explain what the results of a particular spell were supposed to be. Draco's natural talent was in potions, not spellcasting, but extreme self-confidence when it came to performing wizardry also helped him cast without a wand.

"You'll need to use your wand until we learn the form of your patronus," Harry explained. "Your patronus will be something that you know will always protect you, no matter what. As you already know, mine is my father in his animagus form, Prongs."

Draco refused to wince at the memory of the third year failed trick on Harry and being scared half to death by the sudden appearance of the huge ghostly stag.

"The spell words are '*expecto patronum*'," Harry said, rising from the couch. He yawned. "I'm going to go take a nap. I'll check on your progress later. Don't worry if you don't succeed today. It's hard and takes a lot out of you when casting it, at first."

Harry had been correct. The *patronus* spell was very difficult, especially with Draco getting angry with himself for not being able to cast it right away. After three days, he was only able to produce a measly pale mist that dissipated within moments. It was maddening as heck, and Draco took out his frustrations on Harry during their lessons, which had continued daily in spite of it being winter break. Harry demonstrated many self-healing spells over the days.

Christmas came and passed without sentimental fanfare. The Malfoys didn't celebrate that particular holiday, and Draco received only one gift: a small spider medallion that was also a portkey to the Hogwarts train station if held a certain way. It was from Harry, "In case of an emergency." It was nice, unexpected, and practical; a very Gryffindor-type of gift. Draco felt obligated to give a gift in return, and he transfigured a chocolate frog into a chocolate spider that evaded capture for over an hour. Draco had a good laugh watching Harry chase the chocolate around the Great Hall. Apparently, Harry's seeker-reflexes did not extend to catching charmed sweets.

Draco worked on a new potion, putting aside his wand for a few days after Christmas. He successfully created a molyjuice potion, a derivative of the polyjuice potion, which only changed a person's voice and took less time to brew. Professor Snape helped him once more to write up a report to submit to the Ministry. Draco was feeling quite pleased with himself after the owl was sent off, and he retrieved his wand and attempted to cast *expecto patronum* again.

The spell worked almost perfectly. He now knew the form of his patronus.

Draco spent the remainder of the day in bed with his head under the pillow.

His patronus was a fifteen-year-old Harry Potter.

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Chapter: 15

Chapter Fifteen: Bonds

Draco flat-out lied when asked if he'd managed to cast the *patronus* spell, even though he had the spell mastered by the end of winter break. The reality that his patronus was Harry Potter disturbed Draco greatly. So much, in fact, that he was distracted during their lessons and ended up in the Hospital Wing overnight. Harry, of course, felt guilty about it, even though it was Draco's own fault.

The last Saturday before break ended, Draco sought out the Head of his House. Professor Snape was one of the few people he knew he could talk to about anything without condemnation.

Snape was in the potions classroom, preparing for Monday's classes. Draco cleared his throat as he walked into the classroom. "Professor, do you have a moment?"

Snape smiled, a surprising sight unless you were Draco. "Of course. What may I do for you, Mr. Malfoy?"

Draco stopped near the front row of tables and shifted uncomfortably on his feet. "Do you know the *patronus* spell?"

"I have cast it before," Snape replied with a nod.

"If you don't mind my asking, sir," Draco said hesitatingly, "what is your patronus?"

A look of understanding appeared on Snape's face. "I take it you are having trouble mastering the spell-"

Draco shook his head, interrupting. "No, I can cast it, but... I think it's wrong."

"Wrong? How so?"

"It's just wrong." Draco clasped the medallion hanging around his neck and tucked it beneath the collar of his robe. "Potter said my patronus would be something I know would always protect me, no matter what. It should my father, right? Or my mum?"

"Not necessarily," Snape said, taking out his wand. "It could be something that represents a potion, like this. *Expecto patronum*."

Snape flicked his wand as he cast the *patronus* spell. A ghostly green cauldron formed in the air. It floated above head, tilted, and spilled its misty contents onto the dungeon floor. The spell dissipated after a few moments.

Snape glanced expectantly at Draco. Draco looked pained as he whispered, "*Expecto patronum*."

Knowing the secret to magic, Draco needn't say the spell words any louder, nor use his wand. In the space between the Slytherin and the Potions Master, Draco's patronus formed solidly out of the green mist.

Snape stared. "I see."

"I don't understand, Professor," Draco said forlornly. "Why is Harry Potter my patronus? I hate the ruddy git."

"Ah, but do you respect his wizardry and character?" said Snape.

Draco shrugged. "I guess."

"Draco," Snape began, addressing his favorite student more personally. "Whether you believe it or not, you and Mr. Potter have formed a bond that is stronger than mentor-student, stronger than friendship, and even stronger than lovers. You two balance each other perfectly; his strengths are your weaknesses and visa versa. Together, you two have the potential of becoming the most powerful wizarding partners the world has ever seen."

Draco was stunned at his teacher's words. "But I don't even like Potter much."

"That is why your relationship is so great," Snape said. "Unlike friends or loved ones, you are unafraid to hurt Potter's feelings and readily point out his faults, as he does yours."

"What if that changes, though?" asked Draco. "What if I end up hating him so much that I can't stand to be around him any longer?"

"The results would be the same as if you fell in love with him." Snape pulled a face, but continued honestly. "Trust and communication are the keys. If you still have both, no matter which way your personal relationship turns you will continue to work perfectly together."

"And if either one of those keys is missing?"

"The potential for disaster is unequivocal," Snape replied ominously. He tapped the side of his nose. "However, if the two of you can put aside your differences and work together at this young age, I have little doubt that you two will continue to do so far into the future."

Draco found Harry and Dumbledore playing Wizard's Chess in the Great Hall later that Saturday evening. After his conversation with Snape, Draco had taken a long walk through Hogwarts' halls, thinking about what the professor had told him and about his relationship with Harry. It was hard to believe he and Harry would possibly become the most powerful wizards in the world. Draco had known he would be one of the greats - he was a Malfoy, after all - but he didn't suspect he might become another Dumbledore or Salazar of old.
The idea was both exhilarating and frightening at once. With such power came even more responsibility. Would Draco be called on, time and again, to fight wizards such as Voldemort (provided they finally destroyed him) in the future? Would what Draco wanted most, to create new potions, be continuously put aside because of a sense of duty?

And what about Harry? While Draco had the choice to learn, Harry was forced to do so because it was expected; he was the Boy Who Lived, the savior of the wizarding world. Would the pressure to be the best break Harry? He'd almost lost it already, if not for Draco's calling him on it. Snape was correct in saying that they balanced one another. They kept each other grounded in the now, countering the desire to dwell on past pains and misfortunes. They'd helped each other out of their independent depression and taught each other how to laugh again.

Draco had been riding on a moving staircase when he realized he was grateful that Harry wanted to be a part of his life, and that he *liked* being an influence on Harry in return. He still hated the prat, but in a way, he suspected, that someone hated a brother.

Draco took a seat beside Harry at the Gryffindor table and glanced over the chess board. "Pawn to B8, Potter."

"What?" Harry looked at him, then looked back at the board. "Oh. Oh! Pawn to B8." The pawn on the board moved to the correct spot, blocking Dumbledore's check. Harry grinned at the blond. "Thank you, Malfoy."

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Malfoy," Dumbledore said dryly. He surveyed the chess board. "For that, I think a pop quiz is in order."

"But we're still on holiday," Draco protested.

"Then, if you cannot cast the *patronus* spell yet, it will not cost you," Dumbledore said. He looked at Harry. "Mr. Potter, I would like to see you cast the *patronus*, as well."

"Certainly, Professor," said Harry. "*Expecto patronum.*"

The stag, Prongs, appeared a short distance away, between the Hufflepuff and Gryffindor tables. The misty animal reared his head and pawed at the floor.

Harry looked at Draco. "Have you had any luck?"

Draco smirked. "Try not to get a swelled head, Potter. *Expecto patronum*."

Beside the stag, fifteen-year-old Harry Potter formed from the spell's mist. Draco's patronus pushed up his ghostly glasses, smiled, and began to pet Prongs.

"Excellent," Dumbledore said, pleased.

"Blimey," Harry breathed, green eyes wide. "That's me!"

"Yes, it is," Draco said. He watched as the two patronus' dissipated. "Apparently, I'm a raving nutter and think that *you* will always protect me."

Harry blinked several times, coming out of his shock. He grinned lopsidedly at Draco. "You're right. You are a nutter."

Draco scowled. Harry laughed.

Albus Dumbledore smiled.

tbc
Author's Note: A few of you asked again, so I shall repeat: I am torturing you happily with the every other day-ish posting of this story. It is complete, with editing done. I just like drawing out the a-n-t-i-c-i-p-a-t-i-o-nnnnn. snerk

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Chapter: 16

Chapter Sixteen: Hogsmeade

"You know, I've been playing Wizard's Chess for five years and I think I'm getting worse at the game," Harry said, scowling at the chess pieces shaking their tiny fists at him.

"You should have let me help you again," Draco commented, idly transfiguring a thread into as many objects as he could without his wand.

"That would be cheating, Malfoy."

"That would be winning, Potter."

"Professor," Harry addressed Dumbledore seated across the table. "What's your opinion?"

"It could be considered cheating by some," Dumbledore said. Harry gave Draco a smug look. Dumbledore, however, wasn't finished speaking. "But it is never wrong to ask for assistance."

Draco snickered as Harry flushed in embarrassment. Draco turned the lump of coal back into a thread and asked the Headmaster, "Would you care to have another game?"

"I would be delighted, Mr. Malfoy," Dumbledore began.

"Professor Dumbledore-."

"However, it appears that I may have pressing matters to attend to." Dumbledore turned towards Professor McGonagall as she rapidly approached the trio in the Great Hall. "Yes, Minerva?"

"If I may have a word, Professor Dumbledore," McGonagall requested, indicating for privacy.

"Certainly." Dumbledore rose, wished Draco and Harry a pleasant evening, and left the Great Hall with McGonagall.

Harry, in a quite gauche manner, climbed over the table and took Dumbledore's seat. "I'll play you?" Harry offered hopefully.

"I'll win," warned Draco.

Harry shrugged. "That's okay. Better to play and lose than to be bored out of my bloody skull again."

A corner of Draco's mouth curved up. "Ready for holidays to end, are you?"

"I hate to admit it, but yes," Harry replied. He sighed dramatically. "You've been holed up in the potions classroom most of the hols, leaving me all by myself after our lessons. I've driven the others mad trying to keep entertained and Professor Dumbledore is the only one who doesn't avoid me now."

"Poor Potter," Draco said mockingly. "Friendless and forgotten."

"Just move, Malfoy," Harry said, gesturing at the chessboard, a red tinge coloring his cheeks.

Draco directed his white pawn to move forward and the game got underway. Harry was a pretty poor player, but it was mostly because he used the game as a prop for socializing rather than lacking in skill. He must have been really lonely, because he didn't shut up through the entire game. Draco only half-listened, making appropriate noises when required.

"Oi, Draco," Harry said suddenly, changing course mid-topic, "you want to go to Hogsmeade tomorrow?"

"Hogsmeade?"

"Yeah." Harry studied the chessboard. "I want to stock up on some sweets and ink. With O.W.L.s on the way, Hermione is going to have me and Ron revising our arms off."

"I thought Dumbledore wasn't allowing anyone to go to Hogsmeade," Draco commented.

Harry glanced up, eyes sparkling with mischief behind his glasses. "That doesn't mean we can't go anyway."

Draco put his hand to his chest with a fake gasp. "The Goody-Goody Gryffindor is suggesting we sneak off?"

Harry's response was a roguish grin. Draco returned it. "What time do we leave?"

Draco met Harry outside of the Slytherin dorm shortly after breakfast the following morning. Harry was practically bursting with excitement. "Ready?"
"I'm not wearing my winter robes to clean the dormitory."

Harry was unaffected by Draco's sarcastic tone. "Then, let's be off."

Hogwarts was still quiet on the cold morning. The other students weren't due to return from winter holidays until later in the afternoon. Outside, the snow had been partially cleared away from the paths to and from the school. The two boys headed out of the courtyard and towards the main gate, but suddenly Harry veered off the path and into the ankle-high snow.

"Aren't we talking the train?" Draco asked, a bit perturbed at the idea of getting the hem of his robe wet. He stopped at the edge of the path, looking questioningly at Harry.

"Nope." Harry didn't stop plodding through the snow. "Too out in the open. We're not supposed to leave the grounds, remember?"

"Then how do you plan to get us there?" Draco made a disgusted face at the snow and started after Harry, walking in his footprints. "Wouldn't walking be just as in the open?"

"Not the way we're going."

Draco looked past Harry. Ahead of them was the Whomping Willow and the Forbidden Forest. "Potter, tell me we're not going through the Forbidden Forest."

"We're not going through the Forbidden Forest," parroted Harry. He shot a grin over his shoulder at Draco. "We're going under it."

"Under it?" Draco said skeptically. The cold must have damaged Harry's brain.

The Whomping Willow stirred, sensing their presence. Draco eyed the tree with trepidation as Harry continued towards it.

"Yes, under it," Harry said. "Are you having trouble hearing today or something?"

Draco scowled at the back of Harry's head. "If you would explain yourself better, I wouldn't have to keep questioning you."

The Whomping Willow began swiping its branches at them as they got closer. Undaunted, Harry headed right for the stout tree.

Draco stopped walking. "Potter, unless you know a spell that I don't, you're going to be flattened."

"No. No spell." Harry turned to face Draco, ignoring the violent tree behind him. "Do you trust me, Draco?"

"Yes." The reply was immediate and, Draco realized with a blink of surprise, completely true. If Harry told him to go give the magic tree a hug right now, Draco would do it without further question. At the same time, he would also be worrying about Harry's reaction to Draco's death.

Harry smiled wickedly, and the tattoo spider crawling across his eye was not reassuring in any way. "You're mad, Malfoy. Don't you know how dangerous it is to trust me? People have gotten hurt or died, you know, by doing so."

Draco walked up to Harry, invading his personal space, and looked him squarely in the eyes. "Then, I supposed Diggory and I will be bragging to my father about how we both beat you at Quidditch."

Harry stared at Draco a moment, eyes misting behind his glasses. He finally responded gruffly, "I don't know whether to punch you or kiss you."

Draco removed his left glove and cupped Harry's cold-reddened cheek. "Harry-," he began tenderly, as the tattoo spider crawled from Harry onto Draco's hand. Harry dipped his head slightly, looking intently at Draco as he continued. "-if you try either of them, it'll be you saying hello to Diggory."

Harry sputtered in laughter as Draco lightly slapped his cheek. "Come on, Potter-pouf. I'd like to get to Hogsmeade before I become an icicle."

Before Draco could step back, Harry caught him in a hard embrace. Harry pressed a loud, smacking kiss to the crown of Draco's head, similar to the ones he gave Ron and Hermione months ago.

"Argh! Gerroff!" Draco protested, squirming to get away.

Laughing again, Harry released Draco, turned, and ducked under the flailing branches of the Whomping Willow. Draco smoothed his hair, put his glove back on, and watched with an irritated scowl as Harry picked up a long broken branch lying on the ground beside the massive roots of the tree. Using the branch, Harry poked at a knot on the dark, knobby trunk. The tree went still.

Harry deposited the broken branch back from where he got it, waved at Draco, and disappeared inside the tree. Draco shook his head, disbelieving how sly Harry could be, for a Gryffindor.

Draco ventured closer, warily watching the willow. It didn't move, and Draco ducked into a hidden tunnel. Harry stood waiting for Draco, holding his wand aloft, a *lumos* spell providing light.

"This tunnel will take us right to the Shrieking Shack in Hogsmeade," Harry told Draco, before they got underway. "There's another secret passage that goes from the castle to Honeydukes, but Filch was cleaning that hallway."

"The Shrieking Shack? But that place is haunted," Draco said.

"Actually, it's not and never has been," Harry said. "Do you remember Professor Lupin?"

"The werewolf?"

"Yeah. Lupin used to go to school at Hogwarts." Harry went on to explain the arrangements made for Lupin's safety during the full moon. "Snape's wolfsbane potion now controls Lupin's change, so the shack is pretty much abandoned."

"You know, I should make a derogatory comment about associating with werewolves, but who am I to talk? I'm associating with you," Draco said with a smirk.

"You're quite a riot, Draco," Harry said dryly, leading the way into the Shrieking Shack from the passage. "I'm laughing so much, I can hardly breathe."

Hogsmeade was bustling. Robed wizards and witches hurried between shops that lined the streets. The shops themselves looked warm and inviting on the cold winter day. The boys' feet

carried them directly to Honeydukes to stock up on sweets.

"School supplies next or Zonko's?" Harry asked when they emerged from Honeydukes. He popped an ice-mice into his mouth as they started up the street.

"School supplies, while we still have galleons," Draco replied with a half-grin. "I also need to stop at the potions supply shop. I used up Snape's birch powder and need to replace it. Plus, Blaise has been eyeing my lizards' toenails, so I might as well get him a jar before he nicks mine."

"You and Blaise still getting on well, then?" Harry inquired.

Draco scowled. "Is it so surprising?"

"Draco, you're a right pain in the arse ninety-percent of the time. Only a saint can put up with you," Harry teased. "Or a martyr."

"Too funny, Potter," Draco said flatly.

"Do you thi-oof." Harry ran smack into a wizard coming out of McGinn's Robe Shoppe, dropping his bag from Honeydukes and spilling its contents.

"Oh, dear me, my apologies," the grey-haired wizard said, crouching to help Harry gather up the candy. Draco stood and watched uninterestedly.

"Thanks," Harry said to the wizard. "I'm sorry, too."

"No worries, son," he said. He handed Harry the re-packed sack when they straightened. The wizard seemed briefly surprised when he looked at Harry, eyes flicking to Harry's forehead, before his expression settled into a jovial mask. "Have a pleasant day."

Draco's eyes narrowed as he followed the wizard's retreat, until the older man disappeared into the crowd. Draco turned to Harry. "He knew who you were."

"Most do, Draco," Harry said, as they continued on their way. He pushed his hair off his forehead, fully revealing his lightning bolt scar. "This sort of gives me away."

"Yeah, but don't they usually fawn over you?"

"Not really, anymore," Harry dug into his sweets sack, "thanks to Rita Skeeter and, coincidentally, *you*."

"Ah. Those articles from last year," Draco said, understanding. He grinned maliciously. "That was great fun."

Harry snorted. "For you, perhaps."

"Of course, for me," Draco said matter-of-fact. They entered the bookshop, the soft bell above the shop door tinkling, announcing their presence. Separating, they browsed in their own preferred book sections, skimming through new titles and selecting books to purchase.

Draco met up with Harry in the aisle with the Quidditch books. Harry was sitting casually on the floor, absorbed in what he was reading. A short pile of books was on the floor in front of him, with two bottles of ink perched on top.

"Ready, mate?" Draco asked, walking up to him.

Harry glanced up, closed the book he was reading, and added to his pile. "Yeah, I'm set." He stood, picked up his selection, and the two boys headed to the counter to pay.

"A Quidditch fan, I see," the shopkeeper behind the counter commented as he wrapped Harry's books. "Hoping to become a professional player?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. Perhaps."

Draco, paid purchases in hand, looked questioningly at Harry. "I thought for sure that was your dream profession, Harry."

"You spoiled me, Malfoy," Harry said, taking his wrapped purchases. He gave Draco a lopsided grin. "Playing against anyone else pales in comparison to playing midnight Quidditch with you."

Draco felt his cheeks heat, as Harry started for the door, blushing even more at the amused smile the shopkeeper wore. Draco ducked his chin and hurried after Harry.

"Potions shop next?" questioned Harry when they got outside.

"Yes," Draco replied, refusing to acknowledge that Harry had embarrassed him... or that he was pleased by the compliment.

"You'll have to lead," Harry said. "I've never been-"

"Mr. Potter." The wizard Harry had literally run into earlier came up to them, smiling widely. "I was hoping I'd see you again."

"How can I help you?" Harry asked politely. He tensed when the wizard laid a hand on Harry's shoulder.

The wizard's smile turned malevolent. "You already have."

Draco saw a small object in the wizard's other hand at the same time that Harry latched on to

Draco's arm. Draco felt a strong pull behind his navel. A portkey!

The three disappeared with a *pop*.

tbc
Author's Note: This winds up being a romance fic in the end, as people have quiered about that despite the HD mark in the summary. If slash is really not your cuppa, stop reading at the end of chapter 21 and make up your own conclusion. I don't mind (though the remainder is PG-fare).

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Chapter: 17

Chapter Seventeen: Voldemort

The portkey brought them to a cemetery. Rows of tombstones and statues thrust through the snow blanketing the ground, standing sentry over graves. A harsh glare was cast by the overhead sun reflecting on the pristine white snow, making it hard to see.

Beside Draco, Harry sucked in a sharp breath. The hand clutching Draco's arm trembled wildly. Harry's purchases tumbled to the snowy ground, dropped from nerveless fingers.

Draco waited not a second longer. "*Petrificus totalus!*"

The old wizard that had brought them to the cemetery fell to the ground, his body as stiff as a board. Draco dropped his own packages, shook off Harry's grip from his arm, hurried over to the prone wizard, and attempted to pry the portkey from his closed hand.

Harry made a strangled sound in the back of his throat at the same time Draco's head shot up. A heavy cloud of despair weighed suddenly upon Draco's mind and unbidden images of Posey Parkinson telling him of Lucius' death came to the forefront of his thoughts.

Dementors!

Four hooded, black-robed wraiths glided out from behind monolithic grave markers, circling towards Draco and Harry. Two more figures emerged: an imposing hooded wizard and a timid-looking one with a silver hand. Both of them held wands.

Draco straightened quickly, pulling his wand from his robe pocket. Without pause, he reached

into Harry's robe, pulled out the Gryffindor's wand and shoved it into his hand. They didn't really need the wands, but Draco's gut told him that fact should remain a secret for now. Besides which, Harry looked like he could use all the help he could get.

"Cast the *patronus* spell!" Draco ordered. He faced the rapidly approaching Dementors and followed his own order. "*Expecto patronum!*"

Draco's ghostly green patronus formed in front of the two boys. Draco glanced at Harry. Harry was sweating profusely despite the winter cold, his features twisted in pain. Draco cursed silently. Harry would be no help.

Thankfully, Draco's patronus was strong enough to chase away the Dementors. The ghostly green Harry Potter charged after the scattering Dementors, leaving Draco and Harry alone with the two other wizards standing a short distance from them.

"Very good, young Malfoy," the hooded wizard said with a hiss to his words. "Your magic has grown strong. Stronger than your late father's, I would wager."

"Voldemort," the name dripped acidly from Draco's tongue, as he realized who the wizard was standing across from them. His fingers tightened around his wand. "You killed my father."

"And now I am going to kill you," Voldemort stated matter-of-factly. "Wormtail."

The wizard beside Voldemort, Wormtail, raised his wand. "*Avada kedavra!*"

"*NO!*"

Harry's shout echoed in the sky as he grabbed Draco and spun. Draco stared in shock at Harry as the spell struck.

Harry's eyes, Draco noted, were the same green as the killing curse.

"Harry," Draco whispered in disbelief as Harry went limp. Draco scrambled to catch Harry, a sound of distress ripping from his throat. He didn't care that his and Harry's wands flew into Voldemort's hand.

"Potter," Draco said roughly, lowering the motionless body to the snowy ground. He yanked off his gloves, shoved Harry's red and gold scarf aside, and pressed his fingers to Harry's neck. There was no pulse. "No," Draco gasped in a reedy tone, pressing his ear to Harry's chest. It was still and silent. "Oh, Merlin. No"

Draco's throat burned as he raised his head and looked at his fallen companion. Harry's open eyes stared sightlessly into the sky.

Something inside Draco fractured into a million sharp pieces, tearing at him. His eyes blurred,

but it couldn't be from tears, because Malfoys didn't cry. Besides, it was Potter. Only Potter.

Oh, Harry. *No.*

This wasn't supposed to happen. Harry and Draco were supposed to beat Voldemort together. They'd planned it that way. They'd worked so hard to become proficient wizards. They balanced each other, even Snape said so and Snape never lied to Draco. Draco needed Harry. How could he possibly defeat Voldemort alone?

The answer came to him like a voice out of the dark, sounding remarkably like his father. Harry's death *was* a way for them to work together. Draco just had to spin it to his advantage, and if it there was something Malfoys excelled at, it was spin.

White hot rage slammed into him, then, overriding his grief. His chin shot up, his icy gaze pinning Voldemort and Wormtail where they stood. Rising slowly to his feet, Draco squared his shoulders and prepared to put a stop to Voldemort, once and for all.

"Idiot Potter." Voldemort chuckled malevolently. "Dying in Malfoy's stead was such a foolish thing to do."

"He won't be dead for long," Draco sneered. "Once I get my wand from you, I'm bringing Harry back to life."

"Bring Harry Potter back to life?" Voldemort laughed. "Stupid boy. There is no counter-spell to the killing curse."

"Ha! Shows what you know," taunted Draco. "Harry's mum discovered the counter-spell and wrote it in her journals. All I need is to say the spell word, *revivicus*, and Potter will be alive once more."

"Do you really believe the spell would work?" Voldemort scoffed.

"It has before," Draco stated defiantly. "It's a difficult spell, but I have cast is successfully. The key to magic is to want the results and I very much want Potter alive again."

Voldemort was silent. Draco shifted his focus to Wormtail and uttered softly, "*Imperio*," under his breath. The spell worked. Wormtail stiffened. Draco mentally ordered him to remain still.

Draco tensed when Voldemort raised his wand, preparing to counter any spell cast. There was the chance his plan wouldn't work, if Voldemort wasn't the type to care that there was knowledge he didn't know. But instead of aiming at Draco, Voldemort pointed his wand at Harry and exclaimed, "*Revivicus!*"

A scant second later, Voldemort collapsed bonelessly to the ground.

Draco looked up into the sky and smiled. "You're avenged, Father. Now, tell Potter to get his nancyboy arse back down here so that I can beat some sense into him."

A Draco's feet, Harry moaned painfully. Draco glanced down, then back up at the sky. His smile grew wider. "Thanks."

"Ungh, what happened?" Harry groaned, closing his eyes and raising a hand to his head.

Draco crouched and brushed some snow from Harry's cheek. The tattoo spider took the opportunity to flee from Draco to Harry. "You died, you great gormless git."

Harry's eyes blinked open and he stared at Draco in surprise. "I died?"

Draco nodded. "Took the curse meant for me, you did. How bloody Gryffindor of you."

"Then why am I alive? Not that I'm not grateful, but why?"

"I tricked Voldemort into casting the *revivicus* spell." Draco gestured towards the fallen wizard.

Harry turned his head to look. "Huh. How'd you do that? Voldemort can- could sense lies."

"I didn't lie. I told him the truth." Draco grinned wickedly. "Only, I might have neglected to tell him about it being a life-for-a-life spell."

"Why, Draco, how Slytherin of you." Harry looked back at Draco and smiled gratefully. "Thanks."

"You owe me, Potter," Draco said, watching as the tattoo spider crawled over Harry's scar. Draco's brow furrowed as he brushed Harry's hair off his forehead to get a better look.

"What is it?" Harry asked.

"You have another scar." Draco studied the lightening bolt that conjoined with the first one on Harry's forehead, one scar crossing over the other. "I guess this means you're officially the Boy Who Lived Twice."

Harry moaned plaintively. "Hooray."

Draco lightly thumped Harry on the forehead and straightened. He glanced at the petrified wizard that had brought them to the cemetery, at Voldemort, and lastly at Wormtail, who was still standing where Draco had ordered him.

Harry climbed to his feet and gasped. "Pettigrew!"

"Who?" Draco questioned, pondering on how they'd return to Hogwarts.

"Peter Pettigrew. Wormtail. The wizard who killed my parents and framed Sirius!" Harry frowned at Wormtail. "What's wrong with him?"

"I cast the imperious curse on him," Draco replied. He saw Wormtail had his wand yet, which was rather dumb of Draco to have forgotten. "*Accio wand*."

Wormtail's wand flew into Draco's outstretched hand. He repeated the summoning spell on the other three wands in Voldemort's possession. Pocketing three of the four, Draco handed Harry his wand.

Harry accepted the wand, stalked over to Wormtail, and promptly punched him. The wizard went down like a ton of bricks. "Bastard," Harry spat. His scarf was transfigured into a rope and he bound Wormtail with it. He then cast a sleep spell over Wormtail, which Draco thought was a bit of an overkill, but he didn't comment.

While Harry was occupied, Draco had pried the portkey from the third wizard's hand. It seemed to be only a one-way portkey, making Draco sigh discouragingly. "Hey, Potter, any clue where we are?"

"The same cemetery Voldemort brought me to last spring," Harry answered. He stomped over to Voldemort and kicked the corpse. "The same one you killed Cedric in, you bloody bastard." He kicked the corpse several more times.

Draco rolled his eyes at Harry's behavior. "How do you suppose we get back to Hogwarts?"

Harry stopped his tantrum and glanced over at Draco. "Aren't you wearing your Christmas gift from me?"

"Oh." Draco tugged the chain around his neck, pulling the medallion from under his robe. "I forgot."

Harry shook his head in amusement as he walked over to the Slytherin. "Draco, Draco, Draco. What would you do without me?"

"Let's not find out, eh?" Draco said seriously. "Today was close enough in my book and I really didn't like it."

Harry blushed, pleased, dropped his chin and smiled shyly. "I'm glad you want to keep me around."

"Don't let it go to your head, Potter," Draco said. "My motives are purely selfish. After all, who else would provide an actual challenge in Quidditch?"

Harry laughed like he believed Draco, even though they both knew it wasn't the real truth.

tbc
Author's Note (as I like repeating things, grin): It says in the very first chapter at the top that there will be 23 chapters total. So if you stop at chapter 21, you're only missing out on two chapters. Of course, then you'll never have all your questions answered...

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Chapter: 18

Chapter Eighteen: Confrontation at the Hogwarts-Hogsmeade Station

The sun was beginning to lower in the sky already, as it set early in wintertime. As the shadows lengthened, the temperature dropped, sending a chill down Draco's spine.

"So, what happens now, Potter?" Draco said. He looked between Harry, Wormtail, Voldemort, and the old wizard prone on the ground and decided that they'd have to leave the nameless wizard behind.

"What do you mean?" asked Harry, triple-checking Wormtail's ropes.

"We've spent all this time training to rid the world of this git," Draco kicked Voldemort's corpse, "and we succeeded. But now what? Do our lessons stop? Do we go back to being normal, boring wizarding students?"

Harry straightened and scratched his head, causing his snow-dampened hair to stick up. "I'm not rightly sure. I wouldn't mind being normal and boring for a change."

"Potter, you're always a bore." Draco saw Harry shiver and noticed his robes were still wet from lying in the snow. Draco sighed exasperatedly. "You're also an idiot."

Harry looked puzzled. "What did I do now?"

Draco tromped through the snow, over to Harry. "You really are an idiot," he muttered, unwinding his green and silver scarf from around his neck. He dropped it around Harry's neck, casting both a drying and warming spell on Harry's robes, as he tied the scarf. "You're the only one who could survive the killing curse twice, only to catch your death from a cold."

Harry smiled brilliantly. "Not when I have you to take care of me."

"Take care of you?" Draco snorted. "This is self-preservation. I would be lynched if I let the hero of the wizarding world die, when I could have prevented it."

"Right. Of course. How could I think it was because of anything else?" Harry's smile grew wider and brighter.

Draco scowled at him. "Stop looking at me like I'd hung the moon, you overgrown lummox, and let's go already. You might not have noticed, but it's bloody cold outside."

Harry nodded, still grinning, and cast a spell on Wormtail. "*Mobilicorpus!*" The sleeping Death Eater stood and jerkily followed Harry and Draco over to Voldemort's corpse.

Harry latched onto Wormtail's wrist with one hand and Draco's upper arm with the other hand. Their purchases had been shrunk and stuffed into Harry's robe pockets. Draco cast *mobilicorpus* on Voldemort, too, causing a macabre spectacle as the corpse stood. Draco grimaced as he seized Voldemort's hand. He quickly pressed the correct spots on the spider medallion and the four wizards disappeared with a *pop*.

The portkey deposited them on the platform at the Hogwarts-Hogsmeade train station - right in the middle of students unloading from the train, back from winter holidays.

Draco, Harry, and the two ensorcelled wizards fell in a tangled heap with a few students. Others gathered around as they extricated themselves.

"I'm going to floo Headmaster Dumbledore inside the station house," Harry told Draco, as he straightened his glasses. "Watch Pettigrew. If he wakes up, put him back to sleep. He needs to stay alive in order to clear my godfather's name."

Draco nodded and Harry hurried off. Draco ended the moving spell on the adult wizards so they stayed on the platform where they'd fallen. He glowered at the students standing around him. "Don't you have carriages to catch?"

Some moved off, gossiping like mad, but most stayed put. Pansy, Crabbe, and Goyle elbowed their way into the circle, along with a few other older Slytherins.

"Hmm, what do we have here?" sneered Zane McCoy, the seventh year Slytherin Quidditch Captain. "Draco Malfoy and two dead bodies. This does not bode well for Potter's boyfriend."

"Sod off, McCoy," Draco said, standing guard over Voldemort and Wormtail. He realized suddenly that he could be in serious trouble if the student Death Eater loyalists figured out that it was their Dark Lord dead at his feet.

Wormtail stirred, catching everyone's attention. Draco cursed silently and quickly recast the sleeping charm on Wormtail.

"Hey, I know him," said Goyle, pointing at Wormtail. "I recognize that silver hand. He's mmph-"

Pansy clamped a hand over Goyle's mouth. She smiled with deadly sweetness. "I think several of us know who he is, and it's our duty to escort him home."

Merlin's beard, Draco thought, as seven wands were pulled. Forget guarding Voldemort, he was already dead. Draco would be, too, if he lost Wormtail. Harry's future happiness depended on Pettigrew and, although Draco still mostly hated Harry, he would not allow that happiness to be taken away.

Zane pointed his wand threateningly at Draco. "It's time to see how ickle Drakkie looks covered in hexes."

"Let's not," Draco stated cooly. "*Expelliarmus!*"

Zane's wand flew from his hand, landing on the platform some distance away.

"*Expelliarmus!*" Draco was able to cast the spell once more on Pansy, before the Death Eater children retaliated.

Five hexes came at him at once. Draco kept his mouth parted and let them all hit, falling to the platform and wincing in pain. It didn't last long. "*Finite incantatum*."

Gasps, shouts, and loud gossip surrounded Draco as he scrambled to his feet, the hexes all gone. "*Stupefy!*" he cast on May Puebla. "*Engorgio!*" he cast on Goyle's wand hand. "*Expelliarmus!*" he cast on Crabbe, before another two hexes hit Draco.

Draco threw the curses off quickly and darted a look around as he disarmed another attacker. Draco knew there were at least a dozen other non-Slytherin children of Death Eaters somewhere on the platform. Zane and Pansy had retrieved their wands and were pushing their way back into the middle of the circle. The other students didn't stop them, or draw wands to help Draco. He'd wager they would if it was Harry being attacked.

Draco opened his mouth to cast another spell, when Goyle let out a bullish yell and charged. Surprised, Draco's well-trained instincts took over and he flipped Goyle, using the large Slytherin's own momentum against him.

Almost immediately, thick arms wrapped around Draco's in a vice from behind. Draco threw his head back, cracking his skull against the face of the person holding him. He saw stars at the same time the other student howled and released him. Harry always predicted the move and jerked his head out of the way. This was the first time Draco felt the effects of using his head as a weapon, and it threw him off balance. It didn't help that Goyle succeeded in tackling him.

Draco's abused skull cracked against the platform and he bit back a yelp of pain. Goyle had his

hands around Draco's bare neck, the swollen one giving him an advantage. He squeezed.

Out of the corner of his eye, Draco saw Zane and Pansy approach Wormtail. "No!" Draco tried to yell, but it came out as a croak, as Goyle continued to strangle him.

Draco boxed Goyle's ears as hard as he could and cast *sonorous* on himself. "POTTER!" his voice boomed, causing all to jump.

Goyle reared back, covering his injured ears. Draco fisted his hand in Goyle's robe, sat up, and head-butted him. More stars exploded in Draco's vision, but he was still able to hex Pansy. "*Furnunculus!*"

Pansy screeched as boils suddenly covered her body. Zane and the other two Slytherins had their wands aimed at Draco.

"*Stupefy! Stupefy! Stupefy!*"

The three boys were stunned, Harry Potter coming to the rescue.

Draco slumped in relief, casting the *quietus* charm on himself, returning his voice to normal.

He relaxed too soon. Goyle recovered from the head-butt and his fist hit Draco's face like a locomotive. There was a reason Goyle had been one of the goons protecting Draco before his father's death, and Draco felt it in the cracking of his cheek.

A shout of rage echoed in the air and Goyle was suddenly flying. He crashed into the surrounding students, bowling them over.

A wild-looking Harry appeared in front of Draco. The green and silver scarf around his neck was partially unwound, his hair was in disarray, and his cheeks flushed. He crouched, pulled off his gloves and shoved them in his pocket, and lightly touched Draco's injured cheek. "*Numbus*."

Draco's cheek tingled a moment before the pain faded and all he felt was Harry's warm, calloused fingertips on his face.

"All right there, Malfoy?" Harry asked a bit roughly.

"What took you so long?"

Harry snorted, straightened, and offered Draco a hand up. Abruptly, he rounded on the crowd of students and began a furious rant.

"I cannot believe you people! What the bleedin' hell is wrong with you? Why didn't you help Malfoy? Seven against one is a bit unfair, and I highly doubt he deserved it..."

Salazar help him, Harry was being righteous on Draco's behalf. Draco was never going to live this down. He went to collect the seven downed Slytherins' wands as Harry went on.

"...All of you have wands and know how to use them. You go to a wizarding school, for Merlin's sake! Some of you even learned to cast hexes before coming here..."

The circle of students shifted uncomfortably. Heads bowed. The silence was shamed. A single wand poked out between two robed shoulders.

"...I am ashamed of the Gryffindors most of all. We're supposed to be protectors..."

Draco saw the flash of a spell being cast at Harry, within seconds after he'd noticed the wand. He rushed forward, darting in front of Harry, and the spell hit Draco full on.

Draco was *really* never going to live this down.

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Chapter: 19

Chapter Nineteen: Witnessing a True Magical Partnership

The cruciatus curse was not one of Draco's favorite curses. Seeing someone writhe in sheer agony as a hundred thousand magical needles pierced muscle and bone, their bodies contorting in a rictus of unimaginable torture, was not amusing. Feeling the curse first hand was not fun, either.

Draco's body seized in pain when the spell hit. He had been under the cruciatus curse before; Harry had made it a subject of their lessons for an entire week in early December, under Dumbledore's supervision. Still, it was a curse Draco would never get used to feeling, and it took every ounce of willpower in order to cast the counter-spell.

Every spell had a counter-spell, as Harry had taught, sitting in a cupboard under the steps what seemed like eons ago, rather than merely months. The cruciatus curse was no exception.

"*Orgasio*," Draco grit out between clenched teeth. Pleasure so intense it actually bordered on pain flooded him, causing his eyes to roll back. The restricted books called the orgasmius spell "a

touch of paradise." The description paled in comparison to the spell's effects.

Somehow, Draco managed to stay on his feet the few seconds the orgasmius spell was active. Too much pleasure had the same deleterious effects of too much pain, which was why the spell was relatively unknown. Harry had found it in one of the many books he'd read over the summer and was the one who had made the connection that it could be used to counter the cruciatus curse. Smart boy, that Potter fellow. Draco would have to thank him for his discovery, because it really worked.

Draco dropped his chin when the orgasmius spell's effects ended. Around him, the students were exceptionally silent. Slowly, he lifted his head, pale eyes like chips of ice. Harry was standing in front of him. His expression changed from one of worry into a cold, hard mask. Tension spiked on the platform. The air crackled abovehead.

Draco turned slowly on his heel, until he faced where he'd seen the spellcaster's wand. It was, of course, no longer there, and the large crowd of students was almost the perfect place for the unknown spellcaster to hide. *Almost* the perfect place.

Because no one could hide from Draco and Harry when they worked together.

Neither seeker raised their voice, but their words sounded like shots in the charged silence. For the first time, half the student population of Hogwarts were witness to a true magical partnership and saw why Draco and Harry were afforded special privileges.

"*Prior incantato crucio.*"

"*Tetherum incanterous*."

"*Lumos tetherum*."

The wandless spells were cast by Draco and Harry one after another, with barely a beat between them. A soft green puff of spell-light rose from the crowd of students, hovered in the air above a certain student, and that student began to glow.

Gasps were heard all around. The glowing student raised her wand.

"*Expelliarmus*."

"*Accio wand.*"

"*Petrificus totalus*."

"*Acciocorpus*."

The glowing student's wand had shot in the air and was called to Draco's hand. Harry's

body-binding spell caused the glowing student to fall and Draco's calling spell zipped her to his side. She was a Ravenclaw sixth year, another Death Eater child.

Harry began body-binding the seven downed Slytherins who first attacked Draco and Draco *acciocorpused* them in a heap with the Ravenclaw. Draco added her wand to the multitude of wands in his pocket.

Less than a minute had passed.

Harry shoved his glasses up his nose, tossed the dangling end of the green and silver scarf over his shoulder, and glared dangerously at the awed and frightened circle of students surrounding them. "My name is Harry Potter," he stated cooly. "You might have heard of me. I'm the Boy Who Lived."

"Twice," Draco added for only Harry to hear. He smirked at the dark look he received.

"My companion," Harry went on, gesturing to Draco, "is Draco Malfoy. You might not have heard of him, but you will. He is the One Who Outsmarted Voldemort."

The gathered students gasped at the name and began talking rapidly, one over the other. Harry cleared his throat loudly, walked over to Voldemort's body, and said the spellword to make Voldemort stand. The students fell immediately quiet again.

"This," continued Harry, pulling down the corpse's hood, "is Voldemort. You've most certainly have heard of him. He is Finally Very Dead."

In that instant, everything went still. Not a breath was taken. Not a single heart beat. The students were frozen in shock, staring wide-eyed at Voldemort.

Then, as one, they screamed and scattered.

It was in the midst of the chaos that Dumbledore and several other professors appeared. The illegal flying carpet they had been on rolled itself up and disappeared. The professors immediately tried to return order and bring about some semblance of calmness. Dumbledore let the teachers handle the students and, instead, made his way directly to the center of the maelstrom.

"Mr. Potter, Mr. Malfoy," said Dumbledore, glancing at the pile of body-binded students. "It seems you boys have created a bit of excitement amongst the students."

"It's Potter's fault," Draco piped quickly, as he checked on Wormtail. The silver-handed wizard was snugly tied and still sleeping.

"Sorry, sir," Harry apologized with chagrin.

Dumbledore examined the still-standing, ensorcelled corpse of Voldemort. "Hmm. This is quite an interesting development. I cannot wait to hear the full story on what happened."

"Draco will have to tell it, because I was dead most of the time."

Dumbledore was clearly startled. "I beg your pardon?"

Harry pushed his hair off his forehead, exposing the double scars. He smiled toothily. "Pettigrew cast *avada kedavra* at Draco, but I kind of stepped in the way."

"Ah." Dumbledore glanced sidelong a Draco. "I see."

Draco straightened from checking Wormtail, the spider medallion swinging loose around the blond's neck. He tucked Harry's gift beneath the collar of his winter robe. He winced as his fingers bumped his bruised neck, which made the back of his head start to throb.

Harry noticed and frowned in concern. "You all right?"

"It's nothing that Madam Pomfrey can't fix," Draco replied, gently probing the back of his skull. The injury from smacking his head against Crabbe's face and the hard train station platform was extremely tender.

"Then, I suggest we return to Hogwarts," said Dumbledore, clapping his hands. The flying carpet appeared beneath their feet, surprisingly large enough to include the bespelled Death Eater children.

Within moments, they were coasting smoothly towards the castle on the hill.

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Author's Note: I was asked "Can you Get a longer chapter in two days?" and am not sure what it means. Can I post more than one chapter in a day? Yes, but I'm not going to, because I'm mean like that and am sticking to my every-other-day posting. Can I write more than a chapter in a day? Usually, not. DMHS took me about three months to write. My other big story, Draco Malfoy & the Tome of Entrapment, took fifteen months, but that's because there were huge amounts of rewrites (of which you can find the deleted scenes at my lj in my memories section). Can I post a longer chapter of DMHS? No, the chapters are already set specifically. I won't squish parts together that don't belong. It ruins the beats of the story that way. Besides which, there are only four chapters left. It will be tough to suffer out the days until the end, but hopefully it will be worth it.

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Chapter: 20

Chapter Twenty: Correcting Assumptions

"Three hundred points!"

The moment they had emerged from Dumbledore's office, Draco exploded. His voice echoed in the empty corridor. "Three hundred points!"

"I got three hundred points taken off, too," Harry said. It did not mollify Draco.

"Three hundred points!" Draco repeated furiously. His headache pounded in reciprocal anger. "We save the wizarding world from Voldemort and get three hundred points taken off our Houses!"

"Well, we did go to Hogsmeade without permission."

Draco glared murderously at Harry. "Potter-"

"I know," said Harry, "'sod off.'"

Draco nodded succinctly. "Yes. Do that."

"Harry!" Ron and Hermione came rushing up the hallway behind Harry. "Where have you been?" Hermione scolded. "We were just going to tell Dumbledore that you were missing." She noticed Draco, standing on the other side of Harry. "Oh, hello, Malfoy. What happened to your face?"

Draco ignored the two newcomers and held out his hand to Harry. "My purchases."

Harry dipped a hand in his pocket and passed the spell-shrunk purchases to Draco. "Don't forget to visit Pomfrey. Your cheek doesn't look too pretty."

"You're lucky I don't send *you* for a visit with Pomfrey," Draco snapped. "Three hundred points!" He spun on his heel and stalked down the hallway.

"What crawled up Malfoy's robes?" Draco heard Ron ask Harry. "And why are you wearing a Slytherin scarf?"

The rest of the conversation faded from hearing as Draco rounded a corner, heading towards the Slytherin dungeons. "Bloody Gryffindor," Draco muttered, still peeved by the number of points subtracted from his House. "'I thought Dumbledore wasn't allowing anyone to go to Hogsmeade.'

'That doesn't mean we can't go anyway.'"

The Slytherin common room was crowded with students, catching up from the winter holidays and gossiping about what happened on the train platform. A tense silence descended within moments of Draco's entry. Several sets of eyes narrowed in disgust and a smattering of wands emerged.

Draco paused in the doorway, his expression cold. "I'm only going to say this once," he began in a low, hard tone. "Seven Slytherins and one Ravenclaw have been expelled for attacking me at the train station. If anyone else attacks me, they will also be expelled, not to mention what I will do whilest defending myself."

Draco looked directly at those that he knew were Death Eater children. "Voldemort is dead. Potter and I killed him," he stated. "If anyone dares to even *look* at Potter crossly because of this, you will be sorry." Draco smiled icily. "I hope we have an understanding."

Chin up imperiously, he walked across the common room towards the dormitories. The students parted before him, leaving a clear path. The Slytherins who'd had their wands out did nothing.

In the fifth year dorm, Crabbe's and Goyle's belongings were already gone. Draco cast a disgusted eye at their former beds. "Prats," he grumbled, moving to his own sleeping area.

The door to the dormitory opened and Blaise poked his head inside. "May I come in, Your Highness?"

"Cute," Draco said flatly. He gestured for Blaise to enter, before turning his attention to his shrunken purchases, which he'd placed on the bed. "*Enlargio*." The three books and a small bag of sweets he'd bought returned to normal size.

Blaise shut the door behind him and took a seat in Draco's desk chair, beside the bed. "Pretty speech you gave out there," he said. "I'm sorry I missed what happened at the station. From what I've heard, it was a brilliant show. Nice face, by the way."

Draco grunted noncommittally as he removed his boots. Bending over caused his head to throb harder than it had been. Perhaps he should have gone to the Hospital Wing first.

"So, you and the googly-eyed Gryffindor killed You-Know-Who," Blaise said. "Care to explain how you pulled that off?"

"Luck," Draco answered. He straightened and gripped the bedpost as dizziness struck. The adrenaline rush from what had happened with Voldemort, at the train station, and recounting the events to the Ministry officials had suddenly worn off, leaving Draco feeling every ache and pain as well as the fear he'd repressed.

He closed his eyes and rested his forehead against the hardwood bedpost, breathing shallowly as

he fought down nausea. Harry had been killed right in front of him. Alone, he had faced one of the most powerful wizards in the world and survived. He had avenged his father. Harry had been dead.

Harry had been dead.

"Blimey, Malfoy, you are a mess." Blaise stood and headed for the door. "I have a healing potion in my room. I'll be right back."

The door closed behind Blaise and Draco opened his eyes. He forced himself to stand, not giving in to his injuries or post-traumatic tears. He was a Malfoy and Malfoys were never weak. Malfoys did not cry.

Draco's winter robes puddled on the floor, followed by his underrobes. Dressed in only his underwear with the medallion hanging around his neck, he caught his reflection in the mirror hanging on the wall. He was paler than normal, his neck mottled with bruises from Goyle trying to choke him. Draco's cheek was colorful and swollen, too. He touched the back of his head and winced in pain when his fingers brushed over an egg-shaped lump. He was surprised none of the adults had sent him to the Hospital Wing in spite of his protests that he was fine.

The door opened and closed, but Draco did not look away from the mirror. "You were right, Zabini, I am a mess. Potter's worth it, though, I'm dreadfully sorry to admit. I don't quite know what I'd do without the mincing ponce in my life."

Curiously, Blaise didn't reply. Draco turned and found the room was empty. "Zabini?" he queried. He could have sworn he'd heard the door.

The air seemed to shimmer in front of Draco and a crimson-faced Harry appeared. He was wearing a crookedly fastened robe, as if he'd hurriedly threw it on, and was holding Draco's green and silver scarf in his hand. His hair, naturally, was sticking up every which way.

"How'd you get in here?" Draco asked, embarrassed by what Harry had undoubtedly heard.

"Invisibility cloak," Harry replied, slightly lifting the barely visible material in his other hand. His eyes swept over Draco and he colored even darker red. He dropped his chin and stammered, "I-I wanted to-to returned your, um, scarf, before I forgot."

"You could have given it to me at dinner," Draco said, crossing to his trunk to retrieve fresh robes. He bent to open the lid and immediately regretted it. Black spots jumped in front of his eyes and he was walloped by dizziness. Apparently, bending over wasn't something he should do.

Draco's head-dive into the trunk was prevented by strong arms that wrapped around his middle. His knees seemed to have disappeared, however, and he ended up on the floor with his legs in a pretzel under him, leaning heavily against a solid chest.

Harry cursed in Draco's ear. "Draco, why didn't you go to the Hospital Wing?"

"'M fine." Draco struggled weakly against Harry's hold, with little success. "Besides, Zabini's fetching a healing potion."

"Your common sense must have leaked out your ear," said Harry. "Mine, too, since I let you talk with the Ministry officials instead of forcing you to the infirmary."

"I'm not a child, Potter."

"I can definitely see that," Harry mumbled.

Draco was loathed to feel his cheeks heat and see the telltale pink of a blush sweep down his winter-pale bare chest.

Naturally, Blaise chose that moment to return. He also wasn't alone.

"Gentlemen," Snape intoned.

Draco learned that day that he could blush all the way down to his toes.

"Do you want us to come back later?" Blaise asked cheekily.

"Shut it, Zabini," Draco said, struggling more against Harry's hold. Harry didn't release him.

"Hold still," Harry ordered softly. He addressed Blaise. "Zabini, do you have that healing potion?"

"Yeah." Blaise passed the corked vial into Harry's outstretched hand.

Harry flicked the cork free with his thumb and held the vial in front of Draco. "Drink this."

"I'm going to kill you when I feel better, Potter," Draco muttered, before taking the vial and drinking down its contents.

"Think you can make it to the bed?" asked Harry.

Draco didn't bother to answer, because Harry was already rising, his arms firmly around Draco's torso. Draco got his feet under him, checked his balance, and pried himself from Harry's grip. "I'm fine now, Potter. Go away."

Harry looked at Draco like he wanted to protest, then glanced at Blaise and Snape and changed his mind. "Right. Okay. See you later."

"Before you leave, Mr. Potter," said Snape, as Harry scooped his cloak off of the floor. "Fifteen points from Gryffindor for being in the Slytherin dorm."

Harry looked pained and Draco snickered. "How many points can be lost before even the Great Harry Potter is spurned by his fellow Gryffindors?"

"I think I'm already past that point," Harry said with a defeated sigh. He went out the open door and disappeared from sight under the cloak.

"Mr. Zabini, if you could excuse us," Snape said.

Blaise nodded. "See you at dinner, Malfoy," he said before leaving, shutting the door behind him.

Draco walked slowly around to the side of his bed and sat down. He could feel the effects of the healing potion doing its job, thankfully.

"Here." Snape was suddenly in front of him, holding a robe.

"Thanks." Draco took the robe and pulled it on.

Snape moved the desk chair Blaise had abandoned earlier closer to the bed and sat. The Potions Master didn't mince words. "Is there something you wish to tell me about you and Potter?"

"What? No!" Draco exclaimed, protesting what Snape was implying. "He showed up to return my scarf and prevented me from taking a header, that's all."

There was no way to tell if Snape believed Draco or not. Draco became defensive. "Potter's a prat. I hate him," Draco said quickly. "He's my wizarding partner and nothing more."

"Very well," said Snape.

"It's Potter's fault," Draco went on. "He's the ruddy pouf. I think he got it in his head that I like him because of my patronus. The git's been acting odd since he saw it yesterday, talking to me like I'm the Weasel, being overly protective, *kissing* me." Snape's brows rose. Draco hurriedly added, "On the head! Potter kissed me like he does to Granger and Weasley, on the head. Stupid Gryffindor."

"Yes, well, I'm sure you can handle Potter with little trouble," Snape said. He leaned forward, reached out, and tilted Draco's chin. Sharp eyes roved over Draco's healing cheek and neck before releasing him. "It appears that you will live. Have some chocolate, and if you don't feel well after dinner, come see me."

"Yes, Professor," Draco said.

Snape stood and straightened his robes. "Do not be surprised if there's a celebratory feast instead

of a normal dinner tonight," he warned. He headed for the door, adding over his shoulder, "Try not to let fame go to your head. One Harry Potter at this school is quite enough."

The door closed firmly behind Snape, leaving Draco alone in the fifth year dormitory. His gaze caught on the scarf lying on the floor where Harry had dropped it. The scarf that had last been draped around Harry's neck, put there by Draco's own hands.

Snape's insinuation jumped to the forefront of Draco's thoughts.

The notoriously neat Slytherin left the scarf on the floor.

Professor McGonagall was waiting for Draco outside the Great Hall before dinner. Harry stood with her. "Mr. Malfoy," McGonagall said. "Professor Dumbledore requests that you and Mr. Potter say a few words to the students in regard to You-Know-Who. Follow me."
She led Draco and Harry to the open side door of the Great Hall and told them to wait until Dumbledore called for them. She went inside the rapidly filling Hall and took her seat at the head table, leaving the two boys alone.

"You're looking better," Harry commented. He suddenly colored faintly and smiled shyly.

Draco's responding glare was sharp and fierce, causing Harry to rear back as if hit. "Listen, Potter," he spat. "We are not friends. We will never be friends. You are my wizarding partner, but that does not mean I like you in any way, shape, or form. So get whatever fanciful thoughts out of your head that my patronus means anything other than trust, or twist today's events into some sort of declaration of affection. I hate you, Potter. Do you understand? I *hate* you."

Harry looked shell-shocked. Draco turned his back to him, focusing on Dumbledore at the head table. His fingernails bit into the palms of his clenched hands.

It was done. Snape's earlier insinuation was now moot. Any impression Harry had that Draco remotely liked him was squashed. Draco didn't feel bad about it, either. He didn't. Not at all. Really.

Ah, hell.

Draco turned to Harry, not really to apologize, but to say... something. Explain, perhaps. Or lie about having a headache and taking it out on Harry. His mouth closed with a clack when he saw Harry's face.

The blank mask had returned.

Draco went still, staring right into Harry's flat eyes. He hadn't remembered how frightening the total lack of emotion was and how cold Harry looked. Harry's mask had gradually disappeared over the past few months, with it being completely gone as of this morning, but now... Draco had stuffed up amazingly.

"Potter-"

"Dumbledore beckons," Harry said without inflection, brushing past Draco to enter the Great Hall.

Draco cursed himself for hurting Harry. After a brief moment, he cursed Harry, too, for being so sensitive. He then cursed Harry for making him feel guilty. He cursed Harry again just for the hell of it.

Bloody Gryffindor.

Draco entered the Great Hall, chin high and emotions firmly under control. He and Harry addressed the attentive students as requested, saying little more than, "Voldemort is dead, we killed him."

Then, they went their separate ways.
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Chapter: 21

Chapter Twenty-One: Lying To Himself

The nightmares began almost immediately and they didn't all happen while Draco was asleep. First, there was the nightmare that was his current relationship with Harry. Harry wasn't talking to him, and the cold, blank mask was in place every time they met. Harry had stopped showing up for midnight Quidditch, which Draco thought was cowardly as well as spiteful. Harry also had stopped their lessons, making the time they had to spend together on Tuesdays and Thursdays into a silent revising hour. Draco tried once to make amends, but the stubborn sod rebuffed him and his pride wouldn't let him try again.

Not that he cared about Harry's attitude anyway.

Another nightmare was Dennis Creevy, who followed in his brother's footsteps by forming the Draco Malfoy Fan Club. Every time Draco turned around, Creevy or another student from the club was there, taking his picture or asking asinine questions, and generally driving him barmy.

A lot of the pictures Creevy took ended up in the magazines and papers, as did Colin Creevy's photos of Harry. Dumbledore didn't allow the press on school grounds, but that didn't stop the reporters from writing sensational stories about Draco, Harry, and Voldemort - who hadn't been believed to be alive again until Harry's *Current Events in the Wizarding World* updated itself. (The corpse was also undeniable proof.) Rita Skeeter was the worst of the reporters, and Draco ignored Ron Weasley's jibes of just desserts.

On top of all that, Draco was having flashbacks of the confrontation with Voldemort. The dreams while he was asleep were taken care of by a dreamless sleeping potion. But during the day, Harry was killed again and again in Draco's mind. It was a never-ending, waking nightmare. Draco was continuously haunted by sightless green eyes.

Stupid, bloody Gryffindor.

"Damn it!" Draco swept the potions ingredients off the table in a fit of anger and flinched at the sound of breaking glass. His derivative of the wolfsbane potion, which would prevent animagus' from transforming, was not gelling in spite of weeks of work. He crumpled his parchment of notes, threw it in his cauldron, and set it and the mauve liquid inside the cauldron on fire.

Blaise's emerged from the storeroom, arms laden with potions ingredients, just as the contents of the cauldron exploded. Light purple gunk rained down in the potions classroom, mostly on Draco's head. "Everything all right, Malfoy?"

"Right as rain," Draco said flatly.

Blaise set his jars down on Snape's desk and joined his friend in cleaning up the broken jars on the floor, saving what ingredients they could. A quick spell took care of the rest of the mess.

"What's going on, Draco?" Blaise said, leaning on the table as Draco pulled out a fresh piece of parchment.

"I stuffed up the potion and have to start again," Draco replied.

"Looks to me like you threw a tantrum."

Draco glared at Blaise. "I was not throwing a tantrum."

"Then what would you call it," Blaise queried, "'expressing your pique'?"

"Oh, go away and leave me alone," Draco scowled.

Blaise chuckled and headed over to Snape's desk to retrieve his potions ingredients. "Hey, are you going to the Quidditch game tomorrow?"

"No."

"It should be a dinger of a match," Blaise tempted. "I hear Potter's been awful at practice."

Draco clenched his jaw, the muscle ticking in his cheek. "Please refrain from saying that name around me."

"Are you *still* fighting with Potter?" Blaise rolled his eyes. "Blimey, Draco, it's been a month since you ran off at the mouth."

"Are you saying I'm at fault?" Draco said icily.

"Yes," Blaise answered. "You're the git who told Potter that you hated him."

"I do hate him."

Blaise laughed. "Oh, come off it, Malfoy. Take some Veritaserum and stop lying to yourself. You hate Creevy and I don't see you getting all in a lather when I say *his* name."

"I am not in a lather over Potter!"

Blaise just smiled smugly in response.

"I don't have to listen to this. Goodbye." Draco gathered up his personal supplies and stomped out of the classroom. Blaise's laughter followed him into the hall, further peeving him.

"I am *not* in a lather over Potter," he grumbled to himself, as he made his way down the corridor towards the Slytherin dorms. "I don't care about that prat, at all. He's nothing. Absolutel-aaah!"

The sudden flash of a camera startled Draco, temporarily blinding him. When he could see, he pinned Dennis Creevy with a murderous glare. "Creevy!"

The second year stepped out of the alcove he'd been hidden in. "Hello," said Dennis. "Could I trouble you for an interview?"

"No!" exclaimed Draco.

Undaunted, Creevy lifted his camera. "Another picture, then?"

"*Engorio!*" Creevy's ears were suddenly the size of a small elephant's. Draco grabbed one and yelled in it, "Leave me alone!"

Draco released Creevy and walked away, leaving the shaken boy quivering on the floor.

In the Slytherin dorm, Draco slammed the door to the fifth years' room and threw his supplies on his bed. He yanked open his trunk, grabbled the sample vial of the Veritaseram he'd created - the

closest thing he had to the truth telling potion Veritaserum - and drank a small amount. He tossed the recapped vial on the bed, turned to the mirror hanging on the wall, and glowered at his reflection. He'd show Blaise.

"I hate Harry Potter."

His reflection turned pink.

Draco inhaled sharply. "I don't like Potter at all," he said quickly.

His image stayed pink, his own body chemistry revealing his lie.

Draco took a step closer to the mirror, a slight edge of panic in his voice. "I think Potter is a stupid git."

His reflection turned back to normal. "That's more like it," Draco said with a satisfied nod. "The potion must be faulty, since I want nothing to do with Potter."

Instant pink.

"No, no, no!" Draco grabbed the edges of the mirror. "I have no feelings for Potter, other than disgust!" Still pink. "I don't care that he's not speaking to me!" Pink. "I don't miss our lessons-" Pink. "-I don't miss midnight Quidditch-" Pink. "-I don't miss anything about the messy-haired, dorky poufter!"

Pink.

"I dye my hair!"

His reflection turned normal. The potion wasn't faulty.

Draco's chest was heaving, his pale eyes wild, and the mirror shook under his tense grip. "Harry makes me batty. Completely and totally nutters." His reflection stayed clear. "I don't understand him at all." Still clear. "I know exactly how I feel about him."

Still clear.

Draco spun on his heel and stalked out of the Slytherin dorm. He strode with unwavering purpose through the corridors of Hogwarts. Students jumped out of his way the moment they saw his determined expression.

The Gryffindor tower entrance was guarded by the Fat Lady. She didn't slow Draco down. "*Repetica password*." The password appeared on the Fat Lady's fan. Draco repeated it aloud and the portrait swung open.

Gasps and exclamations followed Draco through the red and gold common room and up the stairs. Draco ignored them, heading directly for Harry's dorm. He'd been there once over the winter holidays and was taking the chance that Potter would be inside on a Friday afternoon.

Harry was there, along with Weasley, Longbottom, and Thomas. They all jumped when the door slammed open and Draco stormed inside.

The open expression on Harry's face disappeared beneath the despised mask. He met Draco halfway into the room. "What do *you* want?"

Draco grabbed Harry by the chin and dragged the overly large Gryffindor to Draco's level. "You," he answered with a snarl, and proceeded to show Harry exactly how he meant.
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Chapter: 22

Chapter Twenty-Two: At the Heart of Every Slytherin

The Great Hall was starting to fill with students seeking breakfast before the Saturday morning Hufflepuff/Gryffindor Quidditch match. The day was cloudy and cold, and warming spells would be cast on the spectator stands in order for everyone to enjoy the mid-February game.

Draco had been in the Hall for hours already. He had been unable to sleep, despite the dreamless sleeping potion. It wasn't surprising, considering the drastic turn his life had taken yesterday.

Elbow propped on the Slytherin table, his head resting on his hand, Draco watched the enchanted ceiling clouds as he continued to Not Think About It. He had cast a spell earlier and, currently, a cloud-shaped Draco was playing Quidditch with a cloud-shaped Harry. Cloud-Harry had just captured the cloud-snitch. Cloud-Draco took offense, turned into a cloud-dragon, and ate cloud-Harry, broom, snitch, and all.

A riot of noise drew Draco's attention. The Gryffindor Trio and their entourage had arrived, a boisterous gaggle of laughter and limbs that moved like a land squid and probably had less brains than one. Draco sneered in their general direction and looked back up at the ceiling.

The cloud-dragon was lit up from the inside, revealing a silhouette of cloud-Harry. The silhouette began to whack the cloud-dragon's ribs with his broom. With every hit, a music note-shaped puff

of smoke would come out of the cloud-dragon's nose.

More students arrived. Draco cast a quick look around and saw that some had noticed the ensorcellment. He refused to look at Harry, who was staring intently across the tables at him.

The cloud-dragon got sick of his internal visitor and coughed him up like a Harryball. Cloud-Harry brushed off his robes and straightened his glasses, as the cloud-dragon spun in a whirlwind, turning back into cloud-Draco.

Almost all the students' attention was on the ceiling. They pointed and laughed and nudged their friends, as cloud-Harry pulled a cloud-flower from behind his back and offered it to cloud-Draco. Cloud-Draco looked surprised and started to accept it, only to have the cloud-flower suddenly eat him whole. More laughter as the cloud-flower turned on cloud-Harry and ate him, too.

Draco glanced across the Hall to see Harry's reaction to the little cloud theater - and not because he was Thinking About It - but Harry's seat was empty. Draco searched around nervously. He wanted to know exactly where Harry was when they were in the same room, especially after yesterday.

Suddenly, large arms draped around Draco's neck, startling him. He tensed when a familiar voice spoke near his ear. "Are you coming to the game?"

"No," Draco said shortly. On the ceiling, the cloud-flower had sprouted two more cloud-flowers, one with a Harry face and one with a Draco face. The cloud-flowers were currently being chased by a cloud-Professor Sprout with pruning sheers.

"You should." Harry released Draco and straddled the bench seat beside him. "And maybe afterwards we could play. I've missed our games."

Draco bit his tongue, not pointing out whose fault that was. "I'll think about it."

"Good," Harry said, scooting closer. "In the meantime..."

Draco's protest of what Harry wanted to do in the meantime was cut off rather quickly, as Harry kissed Draco. It didn't take long for Draco to change his mind about Harry's meantime activity, either, and kiss back. And to think, yesterday morning they weren't talking to one another. Not that they were talking right now...

An insistent tap on the shoulder brought Draco back to realtime, and he looked up to see Snape standing there with a slightly pained expression on his face. "Five points from Gryffindor, Mr. Potter, for your little public display. There are people trying to eat, you know," Snape said, before walking away.

Harry groaned and dropped his head on Draco's shoulder. "I think our House has zero points in total, thanks to me."

Draco didn't really care. He was too busy being mortified by the stares and whispers of the entire student body in the Great Hall. Even the cloud-people were staring at him.

"Potter."

"Yeah?"

"I hate you."

Harry lifted his head, looked at Draco, glanced around, and looked at Draco again. A corner of his mouth curled up. "Red's not really your color."

"Hate, hate, *hate* you."

Harry smiled a million-candle smile. "Liar." He stood and had the audacity to ruffle Draco's hair. "See you at the game."

Blaise materialized beside Draco before he could commit homicide with a grapefruit spoon. The idea was still appealing, when his smirking classmate said, "I gather you and Potter aren't fighting any longer."

"This is all your fault," Draco scowled Blaise, fighting not to hide his blushing face.

"My fault?"

"Yes. I was perfectly content with not speaking to Potter before you butted your nose in," Draco said.

Blaise's smirk grew. "Apparently, you don't mind speaking in French-"

"Don't finish that sentence if you value your life."

"You really are a piece of work, Draco," Blaise laughed. "I don't even want to know how you went from fisticuffs to lips-a-lust."

Draco buried his heated face in his hands and might have whimpered plaintively, if Malfoys did that sort of thing.

Blaise clapped him on the shoulder. "Cheer up, mate. It's not the end of the world."

"Yes, it is. My father's probably trying to find a way back to life so he can shake some sense into me."

"You're being awfully melodramatic."

"It's *Harry Potter*."

Blaise rolled his eyes. "I don't see what's so special about him, other than he's capable of turning you into a gibbering monkey."

Draco dropped his hands and lifted his head. Across the Great Hall, Harry sat at the Gryffindor table, cheek propped on his fist, listening to an animated Ron Weasley discussing Quidditch using silverware as players. Harry's hair was, as usual, sticking up every-which-way, and he had a smear of jam at the corner of his mouth.

A ghost of a smile crossed Draco's lips. "He makes the quiet more comfortable." He looked at Blaise and added, "When we're not fighting, that is."

"Well, just be careful," Blaise said. "You learned the warning back in first year, too: when a Slytherin falls, he falls once and he falls hard."

"'At the heart of every Slytherin is a love that's deep and pure,'" Draco quoted softly. His gaze drifted to Harry again. Harry glanced in his direction, smiled a stupid smile, and went back to his conversation with Ron.

Draco turned to Blaise. "Would you mind terribly, killing me now?"

"Nah." Blaise smirked evilly. "It'll be fun to watch you suffer."
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Chapter: 23

Chapter Twenty-Three: No Longer Fighting It

Draco sat in the Slytherin section of the Quidditch stands, wondering what he was doing. And he didn't just mean being at the game that he'd said he wouldn't be attending.

Harry flew past, shooting Draco a quick grin as he did, and Draco smiled faintly in return. No one would be able to tell he was fighting with himself about his feelings for Harry and that he wished his father was alive to tell him that everything would be all right. But if Lucius had not died, Draco wouldn't be in any sort of relationship with Harry. It had taken changed

circumstances and a lot of time for him and Harry to even somewhat like each other. The progression of their relationship from rivals to close partners to something more had happened slowly, and Draco wasn't certain he was ready for love, with all the hearts and flowers and nauseating sentimentality that went hand-in-hand with it.

It was his own fault, though. He had been the one to initiate the change in his and Harry's relationship. In front of Harry's friends, no less. Dean Thomas had been giggling like a loon, Longbottom had stared with his usual dumbfounded expression, and the Weasel had been purple with anger, when Draco had pulled away from Harry after kissing him. Draco hadn't the time to be concerned at the audience, because Harry had fisted his hand in Draco's hair and returned the kiss with an intensity that had scattered Draco's worried thoughts to the wind. He hadn't panicked or questioned his sanity until much later that night, when he had been alone with his kiss-swollen lips and Harry-shaped fingerprint bruises.

Draco didn't know what the heck he was doing. He was barely sixteen and hadn't ever been in a relationship that went beyond the mores of friendship. Plus, he had been devastated when Harry had died a month ago and Draco had barely liked him then, so how would he survive with the other 'L'-word involved? No, Draco may have stopped lying to himself, but he was still fighting falling in love.

"Is this seat taken?"

Draco turned from watching Harry to see Dumbledore standing nearby. "Not at all, Headmaster," he answered, moving his Firebolt off the bench.

Dumbledore lifted his colorful robes and sat beside Draco. He smiled jovially. "I understand that there's been a new development in your relationship with Mr. Potter."

Draco made a non-committal sound and pretended to focus on the game. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Dumbledore's amused expression.

"I shall take that as a yes," Dumbledore said. "I also shall not pry, however, if you have any questions or concerns..." He left the statement dangling.

"Actually, I do have a question." Draco turned to Dumbledore. "What are Potter and I going to do now that Voldemort is dead? And for that matter, why was it so easy to kill him? I thought he was supposed to be one of the best wizards in the world?"

"He was, Draco. He was," Dumbledore said. "Those that had gone to fight Voldemort directly sadly ended up being killed within moments of facing him, like Harry." Dumbledore nodded towards the Gryffindor seeker, who hovered in the air above the field, nearby. "Duels with Voldemort were never drawn out. He was simply too powerful. It took your intelligence and cunning, and a bit of luck that Voldemort chose to attempt a spell he'd never heard of, to defeat him.

"As for what Mr. Potter and yourself are going to do next, I would hope that you both would continue striving to be the finest wizarding partners this world has ever seen." Dumbledore leaned closer, sharing a confidence, his eyes twinkling. "Have no fear, Draco. A romance is no different than what you two already have, only with kissing."

Draco felt a blush crawl up his neck to stain his cheeks. Maybe if he begged again, Blaise would kill him.

"Ah, it looks like Harry has caught the snitch." Dumbledore clapped politely before rising and bidding Draco farewell. "Have a pleasant day, Mr. Malfoy."

"Thank you, sir," Draco said.

The spell-heated stands were slow to clear and Draco's section was still fairly full as yet when Harry flew overhead, still wearing his Quidditch uniform.

"Hey, Malfoy," Harry called to him, "are we playing?"

Draco glanced at his fellow Slytherins, who were staring and whispering not very quietly about him and Harry. He'd have to put up with this sort of thing all the time if he chose to pursue Harry. Was Harry worth it?

Harry lay prone on his Firebolt, like a large cat draped on a tree branch. He grinned challengingly at Draco. "Or are you too out of practice to take me on?"

"Ha!" Draco was standing on the bench, his own Firebolt in hand, in an instant. "You wish." The question about Harry's worth was rhetorical anyway.

Draco took flight, meeting Harry in the middle of the Quidditch field. Other students and professors were still in the stands around them and would be witness to a game of midnight Quidditch played during the afternoon. Harry and Draco ignored them as Harry took the enchanted snitch from his pocket and activated it. It shot straight up into the air and out of sight.

"Hey, Potter?"

"Hmm?"

"Are we going to pick up our lessons again, too?" Draco searched the sky for the snitch. "Dumbledore implied that he hopes we do."

"I'd like that," Harry said. "I'm sorry I stopped them."

"It's your prerogative; you're the teacher." Draco looked over at Harry. "You know, I asked once what you got out of teaching me and you never answered."

"Life." Harry gazed off in the distance, the tattoo spider crawling over the double lightning bolt scar on his forehead. "Teaching you gave me a reason to keep living, if only to see you surpass me." He looked over at Draco. "I was going to go after Voldemort by myself at the end of last summer. I think Dumbledore figured that out and that's why he sent you to me instead of to your mother."

"Ah. Smart man, that Dumbledore, for a complete nutter," Draco said. He caught sight of a fleck of greenish gold on the far side of the field. "I suppose this is where I tell you that I'm glad he sent me to you and all that rubbish, but I think I'll catch the snitch instead."

Harry's laughter followed Draco as he shot after the snitch. Draco smiled genuinely at the sound.

Harry caught up to Draco in a flash. "By the way, Malfoy," he said conversationally. "I never actually believed that you dyed your hair."

With that, Harry smiled one of his famous smiles, flipped around, and went after the snitch as it suddenly changed direction.

Draco Malfoy gave up fighting it. Harry Potter had the heart of a Slytherin, after all - his.

End

I hope you have enjoyed this alternate fifth year story. There is no sequel planned, so you'll just have to use your imagination as to what happens next. If you have any further questions, please email me and I'll be happy to answer you. I hope you'll take a chance on my other stories. Thank you for reading.
-Saber ShadowKitten