HAPPY H/D HOLIDAYS, TRAY_LA_LA!

Author: Anonymous

Recipient: tray_la_la

Title: Come Now, and Let Me Dream it Truth

Pairing(s): Harry/Draco

Summary: Something strange is going on with the Fountain of Magical Brethren, and Auror Harry is put in charge of finding out what.

Rating: NC17

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Warning(s): N/A

Epilogue compliant? Nope!

Word Count: 13,000+/-

Author's Notes: Originally, your gift was to be completely different, a fic based on an idea I've had for a long time. Pretty quickly it started to feel like I was trying to fit a square peg in a round hole (pun TOTALLY intended, given the point of this fest ;)) so I took another look at your prompt. I can't promise that I worked everything in--I know I didn't--but a few things jumped out at me, and in particular your mention of wishing wells caught my imagination. I tried to work in as many of your other "wants" as possible while still keeping the flow of the story.

This is a pinch-hit, so I maybe didn't have as much time to write as some others, though I think I got mine earlier than really last-minute people. I'm not saying this as any kind of excuse, just that I hope you'll forgive any mistakes, and that I hope you enjoy it even though I wasn't your original gifter. I had a great time writing this and thanks for such a thorough prompt. Also thank you to B, B, and C for reading and advice. Any errors are mine alone.

(Come Now, and Let Me Dream it Truth)

~*~

It starts slowly. Innocuously. Unnoticed, the gentle splash swallowed by all the other noise in the atrium: Ministry employees scurrying to and fro, voices calling out. A languid, insidious creep of goodwill, a quiet spread of happiness.

A coin flips, over and over and over through the air, lands, sinks to the bottom and nestles against its brethren.

Strange things happen in the wizarding world all the time; it sort of comes with the territory. So it's a little while before anyone catches on, before a casual mention over drinks at the pub draws the attention of someone in Magical Law. They, of course, pass it over to the Aurors, who do some digging, but by then it's too late. These things will leak like a punctured cauldron, and suddenly everyone knows.

The first morning after that had been bedlam. Harry'd barely been able to shove his way through the crowds to the lift, and had travelled up to his office trying to get his breath and temper under control.

Yesterday was worse.

Early this morning, he'd put up velvet ropes and more than a few magical barriers that give a nasty shock to anyone trying to jump the somewhat-orderly queue along one side of the atrium. One out, one in. A temporary measure while they try to figure out what the hell is going on.

For the second time since it began, Harry waves his wand and vanishes the piles of galleons, sickles, and knuts, sending them to the St. Mungo's vaults before they spill over the sides of the fountain and engulf the people waiting there. Rumour has it the hospital is already considering building a new wing with their sudden financial windfall, though Harry's not sure what for.

"The thing is, right," Ron's saying to Kingsley as Harry arrives back at the Auror department, stepping out of a cloud of fluttering memos, "it's not doing anyone any actual harm, is it? I mean, so what if some witch finds a missing shoe, or someone gets a promotion they were likely going to get anyway?"

"Not doing any harm that we know of, yet," Kingsley corrects in his low, liquid voice. "Any luck, Potter?"

Harry shakes his head. Spells, jinxes, and their counters haven't worked. Wards to keep people away from the thing, just while they work out what's going on, are as effective as hitting a Hippogriff. Something, or someone, is using very advanced magic, for no reason that the Aurors can ascertain.

"Well, you're getting some help. The Minister's sending up an Unspeakable to give you a hand."

"Let me guess," Harry says, groaning inwardly. Figures. Just bloody figures. Kingsley grins.

"He's good at his job, and this needs sorting out. And what with this being Weasley's last week for a while, you'll need a temporary partner. There aren't any spare Aurors available."

“Can you convince Hermione to keep the baby in just a little longer?” Harry beseeches Ron, who laughs loudly.

“Not a chance, mate. You can try, if you like, long as I get to be there when you do. And I’ll pick up all the bits of you afterwards, make sure they get a proper burial, each in its own little box. Because I’m a good friend like that.”

“Thanks.”

“It’s only Malfoy,” Ron says a few minutes later, putting his feet up on his desk and dislodging several piles of files in the process. They thump to the floor. “He’s still a pointy-faced little ferret, but he’s kind of all right these days.”

“Yeah,” Harry says, lost in thought.

There’s not much they can do while the Ministry is open for business, and if Harry’s honest it’s not fair to keep asking Ron to stay late, not with Hermione due any moment now. They spend the morning debating theory, what could make the fountain suddenly, inexplicably start granting wishes. Ron admits that yesterday he dumped ten galleons in there, hoping for a safe delivery. Harry smiles, crossing fingers above sweaty palms that his friend gets everything he asked for.

Everyone else seems to be. It’s not instantaneous or even necessarily perfect, but the fact remains that

the thing has turned itself into some kind of aquatic fairy godmother, and Kingsley has a point with the whole yet thing.

Of course he's going to have to work with Malfoy to figure this out. Of course. It can never, ever be easy, and Harry will never admit to another living soul just why the mere sight of Malfoy makes him completely crazy these days.

A sight he gets, when they return from a quick lunch, marvelling at how much longer the queue has become, to find Malfoy waiting. Harry swallows heavily from behind Ron, then squares his shoulders.

"Malfoy."

"Potter, Weasley," Malfoy nods. Merlin, he looks good. He wears the years since the war as comfortably, easily as the black robes of the Unspeakables that set off his pale skin and hair, making the latter shine in the fake sunlight streaming through the magical windows. His face is a little softer than it once was, helped by his almost-constant--and no longer--malicious smirk. His lips twitch now, as his eyes find Harry, and Harry feels his own skin heat. He resists the urge to take irrational interest in his shoelaces.

"You got any ideas about all this?" Ron asks, taking his chair. Harry sits on his desk, leaving Malfoy to make himself comfortable in Harry's usual seat.

"A few. There are some things we can rule out, naturally. It's not Felix, because the recipients are only being lucky regarding whatever specific thing they asked for, and in any case you have to swallow that. Pouring it into water wouldn't work. Likewise, I've tested the coins and there doesn't seem to be any sort

of tracking charm on them."

"We tried that, too," Harry says, fiddling with a quill. "So we know what it isn't. We need to know what it is, and who's behind it."

"Who says anyone is?" Malfoy asks, his eyebrows raised. "That fountain is as old as the Ministry itself. It's possible it does this of its own accord, perhaps on some kind of schedule."

Oh, good grief. Harry suppresses a sneeze at the memory of the last time he had to spend hours in the Ministry library, searching in dusty, fragile books. If Ron was at all Harry's type, Harry thinks he'd kiss him for the offer to get Hermione looking into it while she can.

"You sure?"

"It'll give her something to do," Ron says. His face twists into a grimace. "She's already cleaned the house four times over--with magic and the Muggle way--and she's got me working on some bizarre Muggle arts-and-crafts project every hour I'm there. Nobody needs knitted loo-roll covers, I promise you that."

Even Malfoy seems about to laugh. "I sent a phial of the water to the laboratory for testing, no promises on when we'll get the results. We are rather busy down there."

“Doing unspeakable things?” Harry asks. He can’t resist, not for all the money in that fountain.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

Yes. Harry clears his throat and looks away.

“Er. I’ll just go Floo Hermione then. You two manage not to hex each other for five minutes?”

Hex. Right. Because that’s what Harry still wants to do to Malfoy. They’ve always despised each other; everyone knows that.

Um.

They pass the time in silence, with more than one flash of smile appearing on Malfoy’s face. He’s enjoying this, Harry thinks, shifting a little on the desk and longing for his old invisibility cloak, rarely used these days, now hanging safely in his closet at home.

Invisible would be an improvement on transparent, and Malfoy’s stare is nailing Harry to the wall.

He toys with a quill, relieved beyond words when Ron barges back in, yammering cheerfully that Hermione's already got a dozen books open on the dining table. It's not the first time she's helped out Harry and Ron on a case--a few never would've been solved without her--and it feels oddly, comfortingly as if they'll never leave the habit of solving mysteries, the three of them, behind.

That sorted, they shrug into their heavy cloaks and catch the lift downstairs, all three pausing in the atrium to watch the now even-longer queue, hundreds of faces pinched by cold and fervent hope.

"What would you wish for? Or have you already?"

Harry flinches. Malfoy's standing too close, almost whispering in his ear. The quick snap of none of your business clings to the edge of his tongue. He swallows it down, his muscles tensing again as, just for a moment, he's hit by a wash of memory with the force of a brick.

Memory...and understanding.

"Socks," he says brightly. "Warm ones."

"Socks," Malfoy repeats, voice flat. Harry nods.

“People keep giving me books. Well, Hermione does, anyway.”

Malfoy’s puzzled smile is a delight, steadying Harry’s feet on their walk to the Apparition points. Let him be the flummoxed one, for once.

Mrs. Bartleby was one of the first...er,victims of the fountain’s new-found philanthropic tendencies. She reminds Harry strongly of Mrs. Figg, down to the strong scent of sprouts in her overly-chintzy living room and her unreasonable fondness for cats.

“And he just came back!” she says, smiling toothlessly over tea Harry thinks she must’ve made with the sprout-water. “Gone for a month, and there I just happened to drop a knut in while I was up visiting my daughter at work, splendid job she does in the Department of Magical Games and Sports, you know, very important, and the next day here’s Fluffkin. As if he never left, the naughty boy!”

Personally, Harry’s fairly certain he’d run away from anyone who called him Fluffkin, too, but he chooses not to say so.

“Cats do sometimes just come back on their own, Mrs. Bartleby,” Ron says, trying to force down a mouthful of the tea without grimacing. “How can you be sure it was the fountain?”

“Ah! They do, the silly creatures, but...” And with the air of a Muggle magician pulling a rabbit from a hat, she produces a tiny scroll from a box on the coffee table, the paper tied with a silver ribbon.

“Just like all the others,” Harry says, pocketing the scroll a few moments later, the winter chill biting at his face. “Thank you for your wish, please consider it granted, etc. etc. Nothing unusual about it at all. We’ve even had them fingerprinted,” he says to Malfoy. “It’s...a Muggle thing.”

“In which I am well-versed,” Malfoy answers. ““My training was as thorough as yours, Potter, if somewhat different in parts. Everyone has received one of these?”

Ron nods. “So far. It’s bloody freezing out here. I can barely feel my fingers.”

They Apparate to a car park at one end of a high street, the shoppers too concerned with crossing off their lists to notice three men appearing out of nowhere.

“I’ll get it,” Ron offers, leading the way to a coffee shop. “Want anything?”

“Usual.”

“Black, two sugars,” Malfoy says, watching Ron push open the door, setting free a cloud of steam, before turning to Harry.

“What are your thoughts on this?”

“My...thoughts?” Harry coughs. Malfoy smirks.

“Thoughts, Potter. Those things in your head. I’m assuming you didn’t coast into the Auror department on your looks and charm. Although,” he adds, his eyes slowly travelling the length of Harry’s body and back to his face, “perhaps you did.”

“Shove off.” He’s used to this kind of teasing from nearly everyone, though admittedly not from Malfoy. But that’s just because he doesn’t see him much. Everyone saw the Prophet when it happened. Everyone knows. Malfoy Manor might be huge, but it’s not a big enough rock to live under. “All right. My instincts say an actual person’s behind this.”

“Why?”

“I’m not sure,” Harry says, trying to hammer the feeling into words in his head. “It just seems... I don’t know. The fountain--of its own accord--starts not only taking note of what the wishes it gets are, but fulfilling them? All over the country? That kind of powerful magic would send our sensors crazy.”

“All right, that’s valid.” Malfoy’s face creases in concentration. “But the question of why remains.”

Harry shrugs. “Getting into the Christmas spirit?”

A free, open laugh stains the air and Harry remembers, is completely transported back in time as thoroughly as if this ordinary stretch of Muggle street was a Pensieve, back to a year ago. The Ministry’s Christmas party was the event of the year, of course, and Harry, high on the success of a newly-solved case and more than a little Firewhiskey, had stepped outside for some fresh air.

Laughter, he heard laughter first, and there was Malfoy, the crux of a knot of people standing in the courtyard, snowflakes drifting on the ripples of a just-told joke and falling like transient stars onto the black velvet of his dress robes.

There was something in the way Malfoy commanded his audience. Easy. Confident. Relaxed.

Something in the sudden flip in Harry’s chest.

Something he blamed on the booze.

Now, he simply blames himself. “Thanks,” he says, accepting his coffee from Ron as he emerges and starting to walk aimlessly. They have more people to visit, but Apparating with hot drinks is a messy and painful business.

It’s stupid, stupid, stupid to fancy Malfoy, who may not be as big a bastard as he once was but is nevertheless still...Malfoy.

“Don’t really see the point, to be honest,” Ron says at the end of the afternoon. “And if the crowd at the Ministry’s anything to go by, there’ll be no end of people with stories to tell, if it really is granting everyone’s wishes.”

“Seems to be,” Malfoy agrees, checking a heavy, brushed-steel wristwatch. “I have an appointment; we’ll pick this up tomorrow.”

Harry and Ron return to the Ministry, conversation resuming where it left off before the crushing darkness that deposits them in the atrium. It would be wrong to say all the wishes are small ones, since a wizard they spoke to this afternoon had found himself twenty thousand galleons richer, but they’re all harmless--provided, of course, that the money wasn’t stolen first. Harry makes a mental note to get in touch with his contacts at Gringott’s, see if there’ve been any thefts the goblins haven’t reported.

“Love to Hermione,” Harry says, arms full of files to take home. “Floo me if anything happens.”

“Will do.”

The trees in the square of Grimmauld Place are stark skeletons against the sky, empty as the house Harry enters, pulling off his gloves and waiting for the fog to fade from his glasses.

The kitchen echoes; the staircases creak.

He knows what he'd wish for.

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Harry releases the sheets from clenched fists, panting. The images of a well-worn fantasy linger, imprinted on his eyelids.

He's going to be late for work. The pleasure tells him not to give a toss. Or possibly to give exactly a toss.

Ron and Malfoy are already hard at work, Malfoy once again usurping Harry's desk and poring over a sheaf of parchment. Harry glances over his shoulder, noting Hermione's unmistakable, neat handwriting.

"Why do we even care?" he asks an hour later, throwing Hermione's notes down. "So wishing wells are an actual...an actual thing in the magical world. Fine. I'm not even surprised. So it did this once before, a few hundred years ago. That doesn't help us now."

“Temper, Potter,” says Malfoy mildly. “We care because the reason should be discovered, whatever it is.”

“You can’t possibly tell me there isn’t something you’d rather be doing than this, or interviewing some old witch out in the middle of nowhere who found her grandmother’s earring.”

Malfoy arches one perfect eyebrow. “There’s plenty I’d rather be doing,” he says, smirking. Harry’s saved from comment--or covering up the sudden blush that rushes upwards--by Kingsley storming in, face thunderous.

“You all right, boss?” Ron asks. Kingsley snaps a quill and glances around, as if to check that the rest of the office is empty.

“That...woman.”

Well, that can only possibly mean one thing. The deputy Minister of Magic. “Umbridge?”

Kingsley nods at Harry, jaw tight. “She’s trying to convince the Minister to decrease budgets for the department next year. As if we don’t have enough problems.”

Ron passes Kingsley a mug of coffee. “It won’t work, will it? The Minister’s behind us. I mean, yeah, sure, we don’t have a new Dark Lord to fight or anything, but it’s not like we can just assemble a force if some

new threat shows up. Prevention's important."

Beside Harry, Malfoy's knuckles turn white against pale, and Harry wants to believe that Malfoy just doesn't like the subject of Voldemort being raised. He wants to believe that.

"I agree," Kingsley says to Ron, "and so does the Minister, but we know what Dolores can be like when she gets an idea into her mind, and she thinks Aurors are a waste of resources. No doubt we wouldn't be if we supported some of her...initiatives. That whole business with refusing to arrest goblins for being goblins did not put her on our side. I suggest we make progress on this fountain issue, and quickly, if only to show the rest of the Wizengamot that we serve a valuable purpose. The other teams will all get the same instruction on their cases."

Despite Kingsley's request, however, very little comes to light over the course of that day and the next. They study more books, visit more people who now have in their possession little furled notes tied with ribbon, but the fountain continues to unstoppably grant wishes, too quickly for them to keep up. Friday night sees Ron leave until sometime after the baby is born, whenever that's happening, and Harry returns home in a foul mood, frustrated by their lack of progress and not at all looking forward to working alone with Malfoy for the foreseeable future.

Sometimes, Malfoy looks at him and Harry'd swear he's using Legilimency, if Harry weren't intimately acquainted with the invasive sensation it brings. One of these days Malfoy's going to guess, and mock him or hex him or tell everyone who'll listen, and once again Harry will be on the receiving end of a thousand furtive glances and barely-suppressed snickers.

As if it were something sordid, he remembers bitterly, the Prophet doing its level best to make it tawdry, shameful, unworthy of their "saviour."

When in reality, he and Ginny had been split up for months, she'd introduced him to the man, and the only mistake Harry'd made was being in sight of a photographer during a really rather innocent kiss.

Well, not the only mistake, since it hadn't worked out, and of course the Prophet had made sure to cover that, too, inventing their own reasons because the simple fact that Harry hadn't fancied the bloke enough wasn't sexy.

Still, at least the paper hadn't found out what they were planning to do that night.

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"Hot date, Potter?" Malfoy asks, eyes following Harry as Harry slips into his cloak at six o'clock on Monday.

"Very," Harry says. "A threesome."

"Kinky. I never would've guessed that about you."

You have no idea. Harry blinks and shakes his head. “Dinner with Ron and Hermione.” Exactly what he needs to decompress from the day, a day in which no progress had been made except to drive Harry mad, being so close to Malfoy.

“I’d like to thank you for that visual. Would you be so kind as to Obliviate me now?”

Harry laughs. “See you tomorrow.”

Malfoy nods absently, returning to the scroll he’s been inspecting for twenty minutes, silver ribbon twisting around his fingers.

The Ministry technically closes to the public at five, and so the atrium is mostly empty when the lift doors open and Harry sees the fountain, unobstructed, piled with coins. He reaches into his money bag, fishes out a sickle by touch, and tosses it in.

The coin flips, over and over, landing with a gentle clink atop all the others.

A moment later, he’s on Ron and Hermione’s doorstep, the door opening before he has a chance to knock. An extremely pregnant Hermione smiles at him, then steps aside to let him in.

“How you feeling?” he asks her. His cloak hangs itself on the rack and he wanders down the corridor

towards the kitchen, drawn by the scent of something delicious. Her cooking skills have certainly improved since those months spent in the tent.

She follows him and lifts the lid off a pot on the stove to peer inside. “Ready to be done. Ron’ll be back in a minute; he went out for milk. I’m forgetting everything these days.”

“You’re still cleverer than both of us combined,” Harry says. She gives him a look.

“Yes, well, speaking of. I’ve been doing some more reading. It’s really a fascinating subject, you know.”

Harry takes this with a grain of salt. Hermione often has a very different definition of fascinating than most people, but he’s not about to risk saying so out loud. His knee still hurts whenever he remembers teasing a pregnant Angelina Johnson. “And?”

“And there’s something about the notes. In eighteen twenty-three, a wishing well in a wizarding community in Ireland granted wishes for about six months. Same sort of thing as this, and there were notes then, too. In that case, it seems to have been a kind of... A bit like a filing system. A way to keep track of who wished for what.”

“But these don’t have the wishes on them, just a message saying they’ve been granted.”

“That’s true.” Hermione purses her lips. “Hmmm.”

They’re both still thinking when Ron returns, milk in hand and proclaiming loudly that he will surely fade away if he doesn’t eat in the next five minutes.

Dinner is wonderful, a thick stew exactly right for the time of year. Harry lets himself push work from his mind and focus on more pleasant things, like plans for the holidays and the imminent new arrival into the Weasley clan, even if he doesn’t understand half of what Hermione says about appointments with her pre-natal Healer.

“How’s Malfoy working out?” Ron asks later, over coffee in the living room. Harry swallows so quickly he thinks he can feel a layer flay from the inside of his throat.

“Fine,” he says, coughing. “No problems.”

Except that I...

Hermione’s eyes narrow, and Harry looks away. Soon after, he makes excuses about some people having to work in the morning and Apparates home.

He knows within seconds that something is different. Slowly, ears pricking and breath held, he draws his

wand.

The package on the doorstep is small, a box tied with a silver ribbon. But how did anyone find his doorstep? He's never replotted Grimmauld Place, because while the secrecy isn't needed anymore, it does at least tend to keep reporters away, and nosy people who want a glimpse of The Boy Who Lived that for whatever reason they can't satisfy at the Ministry, the Leaky Cauldron, or Diagon Alley on most weekends.

But there it is. Cautiously, he approaches, alert to the rustling of the last, determined, paper-thin leaves on the trees overhead and the footsteps of a couple leaving their home on the other side of the square.

"Specialis Revelio," he mutters, already knowing it will do a fat lot of good. He's certain of what's in the package, just as he's certain that whoever left it is gone.

It's cool, all traces of body heat from the last person to touch it stolen by the greedy winter night. Harry lets himself into the house, down to the kitchen, and places it carefully on the table. Lamps sputter to life at a wand-flick, glimmer dully off the silver ribbon.

If he wasn't ready, the sudden escape of the snitch from the box, the moment he lifts the lid, would be a surprise, but he's expecting it. Humming, wings beating, it hovers in the air until Harry catches the little golden ball.

Only a few hours ago. The fountain--and the human accomplice he's so sure of--are working faster than

he expected.

Nestled in the bottom of the box is a note, parchment furled and tied with a bow. He unrolls it on the tabletop, holding the edges down with his hands as he stares, thinking of what Hermione said. A filing system of sorts, but, again, this only bears the message that he has received the thing he asked for.

Magic, however, is limitless. Harry concentrates.

And Muggles have their own tricks, too.

Dudley had once thrown the most colossal tantrum at Christmas for not getting something he hadn't bothered to tell Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon he wanted. They bought it for him as soon as the shops reopened, of course, and Harry watched as, over the course of the next few days, Dudley broke, ruined, or spilled everything that came in the spy kit.

In that time, though, Dudley had found great amusement in pinning Harry down by the simple expedient of sitting on him and writing surely horrid things on Harry's face in invisible ink, delighting in not telling Harry exactly what the words were.

A few years later, Harry himself bought ink that changed colours as he wrote.

He holds the paper up to the light, looking for any signs that a different message was once inscribed there.

Nothing. And the Auror office has already performed extensive tests, up to and including the fingerprinting.

The scroll pops back into shape as he releases it, pressing his hands to his eyes.

Think, he orders himself.

His hands slam back down on the wood. Could it really be that simple?

Absentmindedly vanishing the dishes in the sink, Harry holds the note under the faucet, prepared for it to turn to a soggy mess, but wholly unsurprised when it doesn't. After so long in the wizarding world, the parchment remaining completely dry is just another magic trick. Before his eyes, the words change back to the ones he spoke before leaving the Ministry for the day, his silly wish for a snitch, made only to see what would happen.

Water. Wishing wells. The fountain. Of course.

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“So it is a person,” Malfoy says, nose wrinkling in distaste at the puddle Harry’s caused with his Aguamenti charm.

Harry tosses the note on his desk. “So it would seem.”

“You have good instincts.” Malfoy smiles and Harry’s stomach twists.

“Sometimes, I guess.” I don’t know what to think about you. How to feel. “But this brings us back to why, doesn’t it? What’s he--or she--hoping to achieve with the fountain that they can’t do on their own?”

“Perhaps you were right the first time?” Malfoy asks. Harry stares blankly at him, and it’s Malfoy’s turn to roll his eyes, though he manages to do so far more elegantly than Harry thinks he must’ve looked. “Benevolence, Potter.”

“Who would do that?”

“A Gryffindor?” Malfoy asks, grin widening. Harry’s torn between laughing and sticking Malfoy with a Bat Bogey Hex.

“Seriously.”

“Seriously,” Malfoy says, standing. “Let’s go find coffee. Drinking this swill is an insult to my tastebuds.”

It’s such a...a Malfoy thing to say, snobbish and unreasonable, except he is right. Harry nods and summons his cloak.

They leave the Ministry against the tide of visitors and begin to walk to a little place Harry knows The cold brings colour to Malfoy’s cheeks, striking above fine black wool, and Harry forces himself to look away, to not watch the easy manner with which Malfoy walks, gestures, does...everything.

“Oy!”

Harry turns to look into the face of an incredibly angry woman, her dark hair tangled by the wind, lips twisted into an ugly sneer. “You Potter?” she demands. “Yeah, yer ‘im. Still got yer fancy scar, don’tcha?”

Beside him, Harry feels Malfoy tense. Harry reaches for his wand, but he’s not fast enough. The woman already has hers out, pointing at his face in the middle of the street. Malfoy, however, is faster, and the woman is forced backward, slamming into the wall a foot behind her.

“Don’t. You. Dare,” Malfoy hisses. Harry blinks, staring at Malfoy’s wand-tip, pressed ever-so-lightly into the woman’s neck. She swallows, her head turning from side to side.

“All right, all right!” she gasps. Her arm falls to her side. “What’re you grinning at?”

Harry shakes his head, still smiling so widely it almost hurts. “Nothing. Now, can we help you?”

“Want my money back, don’t I? That bleedin’ fountain of yers don’t work, does it?”

“I’m sorry,” he says. “Are you saying you wished for something that didn’t come true?”

“Course I did!” she snaps. “Ten bleedin’ galleons it took from me, and all I get is this!” A piece of parchment hits Harry in the chest and falls to the ground. Malfoy summons it, the paper hissing as it unrolls.

“We apologise, but your wish cannot be granted. We do no harm. We suggest you wait for your mother-in-law to die of natural causes,” Malfoy reads.

In his years as an Auror Harry has met some very stupid criminals, but he thinks this one might take one of Mrs. Weasley's birthday cakes. It takes an hour to escort her to the Ministry, take a full statement, and hand her over to the guards who will watch over her cell until Magical Law decide what to do with her. Harry's only interested in the note and the ramifications of what she said.

And something else, too.

"So there are some wishes it won't grant," Malfoy says the moment they sit down at a nearby pub for lunch, having abandoned the idea of coffee in favour of a sandwich and a pint.

"You were quick back there," Harry says, playing with the ring of condensation his glass leaves on the table.

"Surprised I had your back?"

Harry looks up. Malfoy is resting on his folded arms, eyes piercing into Harry's. "Yes," Harry says honestly. This conversation has to come sometime, he thinks. Might as well be now. "We don't have the best history, do we?"

"Emphasis on the history, Potter. It's in the past, for me at least. Obviously I can't speak for you."

“You think it’s that easy?” Their legs are nearly touching beneath the table, and Harry can’t breathe.

“People change, get older, mature.” Malfoy shrugs. “Realise that perhaps not everything they were raised to believe is true.”

“You were a complete arsehole.”

“Yes.” Malfoy nods. “I was. You had your moments, too.”

A blush floods Harry’s cheeks and he’s uncomfortably hot in the warm, cosy room. “Have you? Changed, I mean?”

Malfoy leans forward. “If I have, just a little bit, would it be enough?”

Harry doesn’t have an answer, but Malfoy smiles anyway.

“Let me know when you decide, Potter.”

~*~

“It did what?” Harry demands. Anger and confusion bubbling inside him are better than caffeine. He’s wide awake, despite the scant few hours of sleep he got. The sky outside the magical windows is still winter-morning dark, pale stars frosted and cold.

Malfoy’s expression is pinched around flared nostrils, thinned lips.

“We can’t be certain it was the fountain.”

“Of course it was! The Minister had the note in his hand when he was found!”

“Yes,” Malfoy says, scowling. “Don’t you find that odd, Potter? He didn’t wish himself to be poisoned, unless he lied to the Healers who managed to get him conscious again. Someone planted it because they wanted us to find it. And if that’s the case, there’s no reason it couldn’t also be a fake.”

“You’re wrong. This was the point the whole time. Get the fountain to grant wishes, use all the good stuff as a cover-up for assassinating the Minister. There’ve been thousands of people in and out of here since it started; anyone could’ve snuck past the reception desk. Lucky for him, he was found quickly.”

“All right.” Malfoy sits in Ron’s chair and leans back, steepling his hands. Harry stares fixedly at the wall.

“Say that’s true. How do you explain what happened yesterday? Clearly, in that case, the fountain refused to cause harm, meaning it must have refused to acknowledge the wish.. There’s no evidence it is even capable of ill-will.”

“Except this.”

Malfoy waits. The temperature in the room drops several degrees, and Harry throws up his hands. “I can’t explain it, all right? Maybe whoever’s behind this just couldn’t be bothered to hurt that bloke’s brother. Maybe he has magical protections in place and it just wasn’t worth the effort, or it wasn’t possible. The fact remains, Malfoy, that the Minister was fucking poisoned in the middle of the night.”

“He’s going to live,” Malfoy offers mildly.

A lightning-strike of irritation crackles over Harry’s skin. “You really haven’t changed a bit, have you? I was right. Doesn’t matter who gets hurt, who suffers. Still a Slytherin to your bloody bones. Still a...a fucking emotionless ice prince.” He’s panting now, and a small voice in the back of his head reminds him just how furious Malfoy was a few minutes ago. He silences it. “Are you ever sorry for anything? Do you ever care about anyone except yourself? We could have stopped this! If we’d managed to solve it earlier this never would’ve happened, but then--” Harry gasps for air “--the Minister would never’ve been hurt, and even if he lives he might not come back to work. Maybe that’s why you’re fucked off about this. Your old pal Umbridge might not get to take over, hmmm?”

What little blood remains in Malfoy’s face gathers at high, sharp cheekbones as he stands. “You. Know. Nothing,” he grits out. “Nothing. You and your saviour complex.”

“Oh, fuck off, would you?”

“With pleasure. Good luck solving this on your own, Potter.”

He takes all the air in the room with him when he storms out. The door rattles in its frame.

“Shit,” Harry mutters. He hadn’t meant to say all that but it’s Malfoy, who’s always been able to get his goat better than anyone, whose job it seems to be to turn Harry into a giant, seething tangle of whatthefuck on a daily basis.

There’s work to be done, always more work, people always needing something from him. Harry blocks out the vision of the pale, beautiful, angry face and heads to St. Mungo’s. The Minister’s sleeping, a dozen empty potion phials nearby, a purple-green oxygen field encasing him in a bubble.

This was the point, Harry’s sure of it. Whatever else he may have said to Malfoy, he’s right about this. Get everyone distracted by the fountain, keep the Aurors busy, and when the opportunity presents itself, make a wish and place the recipient’s note with the body so everyone knows the fountain’s responsible.

The fountain, which had apparently refused to hurt anyone but the Minister. Evidence of that is in the cells at the Ministry, waiting for her trial.

We do no harm.

And he was awful to Malfoy, who had protected him when the woman accosted them. Alone, cold, exhausted, Harry goes home, wishing he could take it all back.

~*~

Theirs has never been a particularly demonstrative friendship, but there's no hesitation when Harry opens the door. Immediately he's hugging Ron, arms tightening until Ron's shoulders begin to still.

"She's okay?" he asks, mouth dry. "And the baby?"

Ron steps back, turning red-rimmed eyes to the figure on the bed. Hermione is fast asleep, hair plastered to her forehead, face flushed. "They both are. It was all so fast, Harry."

"I know. Everyone's on their way. What happened?"

"She..." Ron shakes his head. "You know her. Things started to pick up this morning, but she didn't want to come here right away. Said there was no point sitting around a hospital when first babies don't come

for ages and she had last-minute things to get done. And then it got too much, so George drove us down. I didn't think anything else would be safe, you know? I mean...Apparating? So we got here, and all of a sudden Healers are running around everywhere..." His Adam's apple bobs in his throat. Harry puts his hand on his friend's arm.

"She's really fine now, mate."

"Yeah." Ron gulps again. "It was close, though. Hermione...she has a rare blood type, and it was only sheer luck... Apparently you can't use blood-replenishing potions on women in labour, they explained why. I can't remember. I... Merlin, Harry. If someone hadn't donated some last week she would've, the baby--"

"Ron," Harry says. "It's okay. They're okay."

Behind him, the door opens and Ron's face suddenly transforms from misery to awe as a mediwitch comes into view, a small, pink bundle in her arms.

"I believe this belongs to you, Mr. Weasley," she says, gently placing the baby in Ron's awkward arms. "Perfectly healthy, all fingers and toes accounted for."

"T-Thank you," Ron stammers. He stares down at the baby, then up at Harry. "I know you've got Teddy. Think you can handle a goddaughter as well?"

“Don’t even think about arguing,” says a faint, tired voice. Harry looks at Hermione and decides self-preservation is a wise choice.

“Okay,” he agrees, grinning.

Harry holds one tiny fist for a moments, lost, until Ron speaks again. “I got my wish,” he says, jerking his chin at a furled scroll sitting on a countertop along the wall. It’s tied with a silver ribbon.

Harry’s stomach turns over. “You wished for this. For them to be safe.”

Ron nods.

“It couldn’t have known,” Hermione says. “It’s just a coincidence.”

Maybe not, Harry thinks, but it could’ve been prepared. Just in case. Or... Ice fills his veins. “Hermione, have you eaten or drunk anything strange the past few days?” This feels too familiar. Eerily so. The hospital, the near brush with death.

“What? No, Harry. Only stuff I prepared myself, and not much of that, honestly. Before we came here I

hadn’t left the house for a few days, and no one but you, Ron, Molly, and George have been there.”

“You think someone did something to her?” Ron demands.

A host of Weasleys and assorted others file into the room, all talking at once. “I have to go,” Harry says, moving to the bed and kissing Hermione on a tired cheek. “I’ll visit again tomorrow.”

Snow is falling past the mannequin-filled windows of the hospital when he steps outside. Harry stands, eyes closing, blotting out the fairy lights twinkling up and down the street.

None of this makes any sense. The fountain definitely poisoned the Minister, or caused him to be poisoned, but it wouldn’t fulfill that woman’s wish who’d wanted her mother-in-law out of the way. And what does Hermione have to do with any of this? Why hurt her, but make sure her life could be saved? And if it hadn’t caused the problem, how did it know what the solution would be?

And if that blood hadn’t been donated... Harry shakes his head. Hermione’s fine. He doesn’t have to think about the alternative.

But he does still need to figure out the fountain. It’s come too close to doing real harm already.

A plan slowly begins to form as Harry walks down the deserted street, footprints crunching in the thin

layer of snow that's fallen since he was called to St. Mungo's.

It's ridiculous, foolish, maybe pointless, but small wishes aren't working, and it's not the first time Harry's deliberately put himself into the middle of a mystery. The problem is that Harry himself is not much of a mystery at all: the details of his life are regularly printed in the Prophet, and since the war ended he has made little effort to hide anything.

Someone could even have guessed that he wanted a Snitch. He needs something else. He needs a trap.

Malfoy's going to kill him if he ever finds out.

~*~

A wish nobody could know. That no one could guess.

There's plenty of impossible things Harry could wish for--to have his parents back would be the most obvious, but his brush with the deathly hallows has given him a glimpse down that road, and he knows too well that it curves, out of sight and into darkness.

Something he wants. Something possible, but that nobody can give him.

And, in the fountain's failure, there will hopefully be more clues Harry can follow to the person responsible. Unlike that witch who threatened him, Harry will be waiting for a visit in the night, for a note to be delivered, and he will find out who is behind this.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Potter."

"Afternoon." Harry slides his key across the counter. "I need access to my vault, please."

"Certainly, sir. Right this way." The goblin eyes him warily, all of them still do, but there seems to be an unspoken agreement to conveniently forget that Harry once broke into the place.

A few coins clink at the bottom of his money bag, but if he's going to do this, he may as well include a personal thanks to St. Mungo's for his friend and his new goddaughter. When he closes the door of his vault, the leather pouch is substantially heavier.

Coffee at a cosy little teashop passes the hours, people hurrying to and fro past the windows on holiday errands until the sun sets and beyond, until Harry's sure the atrium will be empty.

Marble echoes, his footsteps running away from him as he nears the fountain, water splashing off another fortune's worth of gold, silver, and bronze. There's no one around, though Harry double- and triple-checks just to be certain, even going so far as to cast the Hominum Revelio spell Hermione once

taught him. A few stragglers remain in some of the upper offices and down in the Department of Mysteries, but here he is alone.

Nevertheless, he doesn't speak his wish aloud, or even mouth the words. Simply thinking them is enough to leave him breathless.

The empty money bag is crushed in one clenched fist; he inhales.

All right. Time to see what happens now.

The temperature's dropped, and London is freezing over. He tells himself that the moment he spent waiting for Number Twelve to creak into view is the reason he heads straight upstairs when he gets inside, clothes falling to the hallway floor. The shower is all steaming water and cool tiles and the hard flesh Harry wraps his hand around, eyelids falling shut, disjointed images from his wish flickering in his mind like still photographs taken from a film.

That, yes. And that. And that, too. Want. Yes.

He groans louder than the ancient pipes, thick stickiness coating his fingers, the wall he leans against for long moments until his muscles return to his command. Skin damp, legs weak, he makes his way back downstairs clad in only a towel to find some food.

“Bugger,” he says aloud to the kitchen fittings. “What the fuck have I done?” The enormity hits him like a punch from Grawp. Impossible or not, his wish is out there now, and there’s no end of people who’d like nothing more than to embarrass The Boy Who Lived.

“Like I haven’t been through that already,” he argues with himself, stabbing a forkful of spaghetti. The pictures had been everywhere for weeks--and they hadn’t even been doing anything. Or at least, not as much as Harry had wanted to be doing at the time.

Sleep is a series of fitful stops and starts that leave him feeling utterly un-rested; he gives up before the alarm-charm goes off and gets dressed for work. The mass by the fountain hasn’t had time to build to full capacity yet, the atrium mostly full of other Ministry employees determined to get an early start. Harry stares at the thing until he imagines he can see the fifty galleons he poured in, glowing brighter than the others.

“Potter!” Kingsley barks the moment Harry steps out of the lift. “About time. We might have a break in the case.”

Harry glances at his face and decides not to mention that he’s at least an hour earlier than usual. “What?” he asks quickly. “What’s happened?”

Nothing to do with me. He knows that much. It’s not my wish.

“Dawlish and Patil sent word from up north. A lead in their dark-artifact smuggling investigation may have turned up the people behind the poisoning.”

“And therefore the fountain,” Harry supplies. Kingsley passes him a thick file.

“One would assume. They’ll arrive with the man they’ve arrested in a few minutes. I want you to lead the interrogation.”

“Yeah, all right.” Fuck, fuck, fuck. If he’d just waited one more day...

He grits his teeth. No thinking about that right now.

Quills and gloves and fluff spill from the pockets of his cloak as he throws it over the back of his chair. Bugger it. He’ll clean it up later. An interview room is waiting; he has just enough time to fill his mug with the vile Auror department coffee and skim the materials Kingsley gave him.

“Oy! You can’t do this! This is brutality, that’s what this is!” says a loud, brutish voice, accompanied by the sounds of things falling off desks and the crash of a chair tipping over.

“Put a sock in it,” answers Padma Patil easily, depositing her prisoner in a seat opposite Harry. Dawlish

follows, his wand outstretched.

“Found this one skulking around a pub in Edinburgh known for wizarding activity,” Padma tells Harry. “At first we thought he was just involved in our case, but some interesting stuff came up and we thought we’d better bring him here.|

“Not saying nothing to no more bleedin’ Aurors,” says the man. Harry shakes his head, casts a Muffliato spell large enough to surround himself, Padma, and Dawlish.

“What makes you think he’s part of the fountain thing?”

“I don’t know about that,” squeaks Dawlish. “Not a peep out of him about that, but he certainly seemed to think we’d caught up with him for something other than smuggling. Very worried, he was, and let slip that he didn’t know anything about the Minister being poisoned.”

“Ah.” Harry nods. “Anything else?”

“Not unless you count him mouthing off,” Padma says. “Just sore a girl got the best of him.”

Harry grins. “I wouldn’t go up against you.”

“You’ve learned.” She smiles and pats his cheek. “All yours. Holler if you need anything, we know Ron’s off. Going to drop some flowers round at St. Mungo’s for Hermione in a bit, but we won’t be headed back to Scotland until this evening. Figured we might as well stay for the party, long as we’re here.”

The party. Harry’s stomach sinks. He’s expected to attend, of course, but he can think of a thousand things he’d rather do, up to and including going up against that Hungarian Horntail again, than try to have a good time without Ron and Hermione there, and with Malfoy glaring daggers at him from across the room.

“Yeah. Cheers, you two.”

The door closes behind them; Harry waves his wand to lift the spell he cast.

“Now,” he says, checking the file again. “Mr...Moss, is it? Samuel Moss.”

“Not telling,” the man sneers. “Bollocks to this. I’m leaving.”

“I don’t think so,” Harry says flatly. “Tell me how you did it.”

“Not saying nothing. I want...wossname. Immunity!”

“You’ve been watching too many Muggle television programmes, mate,” Harry answers, wishing suddenly that Ron were here. He’s always been better at this part. He saw right through Mundungus Fletcher. “Talk, and then I’ll decide whether to ask the Wizengamot for leniency on your behalf. You know who I am. You know they’ll listen.”

Like they had when the Malfoys were on trial. Harry banishes the thought.

Moss opens and closes his mouth several times, putting Harry in mind of a big, sweaty fish, if fish could sweat.

And then he talks. As each word pours from him, Harry feels the anger building. He should’ve seen it, damn it. He should have guessed.

“And she said no one would ever know,” Moss says, coming to the end of his tale, “what with that fountain you people’ve got granting wishes all over the shop. Hey! That thing still working?”

“You won’t get near it,” Harry replies grimly. Why her, of all people?

Well, he supposes, that's obvious, but this isn't going to be pleasant. Gathering up his files, he goes to find Kingsley.

~*~

Muffled voices filter through the thick door, just about audible but not loud enough to discern the actual words or their speakers. Harry pats his pockets in hopes of finding a stray Extendable Ear, then remembers Kingsley's right behind him, along with a host of Ministry workers. Kingsley--to the delight of George and his Gringott's vault--has always permitted, even encouraged the use of such items, but perhaps not in this particular situation.

Umbridge isn't going to come quietly, Harry's sure of that much. Frankly he's amazed she was allowed to keep her job after the war, but she was never actually a Death Eater, and perhaps the Minister had decided to keep her unique, sadistic brand of evil where he could see it.

The vestible outside her office is a hive of activity, the studious sussurration of people concentrating just slightly too hard. Harry can't blame them. If he worked for this toad he'd do his best to keep his head down, not see anything, and get through the day.

Nonetheless, he and Kingsley haven't made it this far entirely unnoticed. Every few seconds, Harry senses eyes on the back of his neck, just for an instant before the prickly feeling disappears.

“Knock?” he asks.

Kingsley raises a fist and raps twice, sharply, on the door. The noises from within cease as instantly as if someone’s cast a Silencing Charm. Footsteps near, the handle turns.

Harry flinches in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

Malfoy opens the door wider, enough for both Harry and Kingsley to see beyond, to Umbridge in yet another of her fluffy pink cardigans, a bow on her head and an expression of abject rage on her face. The reason for the latter is clear when Harry’s gaze travels down to her arms, bound by Incarcerous to her chair.

But it’s nothing at all to the fury in Malfoy’s expression.

“Same thing as you, I imagine,” he says tightly. “Your poisoner, Potter.”

“It was for the good of the Ministry!” Umbridge declares, struggling against her restraints. “Everything I do, I--”

“Silencio.” Malfoy waves his wand. Her mouth continues to open and close, and Harry feels an abrupt surge of pity for any flies in the room. “She’s not denying it, as you can see. Shacklebolt,” he says with a

nod. “You should come in.”

“How did you uncover this, Malfoy?” Kingsley asks. Malfoy’s lips thin and he pauses.

“I’m afraid that’s confidential, and would require revealing department secrets. You are naturally free to appeal to my superiors if you wish, but as you seem to have reached the same conclusion, my involvement is no longer required.”

Kingsley considers this. “All right. We’ll take over from here.” A hundred china cats follow him with their eyes as he steps towards the wriggling Umbridge.

“Malfoy, wait up,” Harry says, grabbing his arm for good measure. Nostrils flare in the angular face and Harry tries to ignore the heat traveling along his fingers.

“What, Potter? I’ve done your job for you. May I go back to doing my own?”

“I just... I mean... How? Why?” You used to love Umbridge hangs, heavy, unspoken, between them.

“The Minister gave me a chance,” Malfoy answers, his voice a flat sheet of ice, untouched by cracks. “Unlike some people.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry says, boiling shame pooling in his belly. “You have no idea how much.”

“Explain it to me.”

“Er,” Harry mumbles, teeth digging into his lip. He glances over to Kingsley and Umbridge. “I have to help with this. Tonight. At the party.”

Something, a spark, something warm and brief and gone on intake of breath, flares in Malfoy’s eyes. “Tonight, then.”

It’s lucky, really, that Kingsley’s there to get Umbridge to her feet, restrain her again, and lead her past the wide-eyed people outside, because Harry’s mind isn’t exactly on the job. Even while he takes charge of the prisoner so Kingsley can convene an emergency meeting of the Wizengamot and Floo the Minister at St. Mungo’s, Harry’s wondering what the fuck he’s going to say. An apology is called for, he knows that, but if only Malfoy wasn’t so bloody confusing, this whole thing would be so much easier. It’s all Malfoy’s fault that Harry’s tied up in knots, wanting, hating himself for it.

Far too much paperwork smothers Harry’s afternoon, what with Umbridge’s full confession to transcribe and noting her utter lack of regret--other than that the Minister had survived. He has to hurry home, late, after a quick check that she’s secure in her cell. Dress robes are as awkward to get into as ever, cufflinks developing tiny, disagreeable minds of their own, and nothing short of a miracle’s going to sort out his hair.

Padma's flowers are on Hermione's bedside table at the hospital, baby Rose asleep in a little cot. Hermione puts down her book and smiles--tiredly, but they're both happy and well, and that's all that matters. She passes approval on Harry's wardrobe and listens intently while he explains the developments of the afternoon.

"About the fountain,," she says, pointing at the book in her lap.

"'Mione, you just had a baby. You don't have to keep working on it, it's not even your job."

"Shush." She waves a hand. "No, I think I know how it's working. There's a spell in here..."

"This whole thing's working on a spell?" Harry asks. They've...well, he's done all the diagnostics he can think of on it, and nothing came up. Hermione shakes her head and stifles a yawn.

"Let me finish. Yes, and no. It's like...all right, you know the sword of Gryffindor? It's always there, and you can always use it as just a sword, I suppose, but it has more magical powers, too, doesn't it? It will present itself to someone in need of it, but only if it deems the person worthy. This is a little like that."

She shows him. A spelled coin, a particular incantation spoken at the proper moment. Harry reads the many explanations and conditions faded into the crumbling paper with age. It will do no harm. It will communicate any harmless wishes made to the witch or wizard who casts the spell, but it's their

responsibility to fill them.

“It’s a tricky piece of magic, Harry. A lot of effort, you know? I think you’re right, someone wants something, otherwise why go to all this bother? Running around, giving people money, finding things they’ve lost...” Hermione says. “And it’s still granting wishes?”

“Last time I checked,” Harry says, rubbing his eyes. It’s been a long day.

The party, held on the same magically-created floor as in previous years, is abuzz with conversation by the time Harry arrives directly from St. Mungo’s. Several sets of eyes stare in his direction when he enters.

The Ministry’s worse for gossip than Hogwarts was.

People crowd the massive ballroom, some dancing in the space near where the band’s been set up. Bars at either end are crammed, despite the silver trays hovering everywhere at shoulder height, laden with champagne. As Harry watches, someone takes the last flute from one nearby and it rises up to the ceiling to zoom in the direction of the kitchens.

“Mr. Potter.”

Harry turns towards the slightly frail-sounding voice, the Minister of Magic there, supported by a carved wooden stick but looking a damned sight better than the last time Harry saw him.

“Minister,” he says. “Nice to see you up and about.”

“And I have you to thank for it!” The cane bangs twice on the floor.

“Actually, sir, Malfoy uncovered the plot at the same time we did.” And probably not accidentally, while investigating something else, Harry thinks. Even if he won’t tell us how.

“Malfoy, you say? Noted, Mr. Potter. I shall thank him for his part in this.” The Minister scans the room, grizzled head turning this way and that. Harry follows his eyes when he stops. Malfoy’s on the far side with a few other Unspeakables, a severe-looking brunette clinging to his arm.

The champagne turns to sawdust on his tongue. His courage to actually talk to Malfoy properly for once bursts like the bubbles in his glass. It’s a moment before he realises the Minister is still speaking to him.

“...on the other little matter?”

“I’m sorry, sir?”

“The fountain, Potter. If Dolores was indeed acting independently, then she is not the answer to that little riddle, correct?”

“Yes, sir,” Harry agrees absently. The woman is smiling, but Malfoy is not. “But we have some leads, and I’m making progress.” Also, you might discover some things about me in the pages of the Prophet soon that you never wanted to know.

“Sort it out, there’s a good man. Can’t have these crowds in here all the time, making the place look untidy and mucking up my floor.”

“Of course not, sir.” Now Malfoy is smiling, but to Harry it looks forced, or automatic, as if he didn’t hear what was said.

Late as he got here, Harry glances longingly at the door, wondering if he can duck out without being seen. But no, he’s swept up by a bunch of oiks from Magical Creatures, forced to listen to their yammering, thinking that these things really aren’t any fun when Ron and Hermione aren’t here.

Because that, of course, is the problem. It’s not that Malfoy’s suddenly disappeared from view.

Eventually, the champagne and the mind-numbing conversation take their toll; Harry excuses himself to the bathroom, through the doors and down a short hallway. Blissfully empty and quiet, when he’s

finished he leans against the sink, closing his eyes, deciding just to find Malfoy on Monday. Cool ceramic resists the press of his curling fingers, his ears begin to ring.

No, not ring, buzz. It's not the alcohol like he first thought. His head snaps up, seeking the source of the Muffliato, but it's too late. Darkness descends, feet shuffle, hands tighten around his arms as he tries to fight.

To no avail. He shouts for help, but no sound comes out. The hands aren't rough, they're maybe even gentle, but they're large, all four of them, and keeping him from his wand.

Confusion swirls. He's not disarmed, not hurt. A strange feeling that must be a spell--one he doesn't know--makes time feel as if it's racing and dragging all at once, minutes taking hours, days passing in seconds. Disoriented, brain fogged, Harry curses himself for being so stupid. An Auror should never let their guard down, he knows that, and then he curses Malfoy for taking over his head.

Snow. It smells like snow.

Harry inhales deeply as the hands push and pull, his feet dragging, leather on concrete. The chair is cold, the brittle cold of iron on a winter night when the clouds are heavy and ready to burst.

He could be anywhere.

And then, he's anywhere alone, still blindfolded but knowing with the senses that have finally returned from their holiday somewhere warm and sunny. He pulls the length of cloth from his eyes, freezing, though not from the temperature.

Light from the ballroom falls out onto the terrace in big, golden squares. Tables, benches, potted plants are scattered around, exactly the way Harry remembers them from a year ago. If he listens closely, he can just about hear the strains of music, filtering outside and into the small, sheltered alcove in which he's been seated, out of sight thanks to the depths of the shadows.

"Some things," Malfoy says, rounding the corner, illuminated from behind. Lamplight outlines the sharp cut of his robes, glints off his hair. Harry's breath catches. "Some are fantasies because you hope they'll come true, and some are fantasies precisely because you hope they won't. Tell me, Harry... Which one am I?"

The chair falls with a crash, iron clanging against concrete as Harry jumps to his feet.

"Malfoy," he whispers.

"Draco. Or I leave now." He says it with such quiet, solid certainty that Harry's heart thuds in his chest.

"All right." Harry tries to swallow, his throat stuck to itself. "Draco. What--? Why?"

Draco folds his arms.

Oh, no. No, no. “You.”

A smile, faint but clear in the dim light, flickers across Draco’s face. “Me. And as you learned this afternoon, I had nothing to do with the Minister being poisoned.”

“But... You know.” Never has Harry wanted to fade away more than he does right now, but Draco smiles wider.

“You thought I hadn’t changed,” he says, taking a single step closer. Harry can smell his cologne, spice mixing with the promise of snow. “Perhaps I haven’t, much. But the knowledge of the fountain came into my hands, and, as you so rightly pointed out, I am still a Slytherin. I saw an opportunity to achieve several objectives.”

“What objectives?” Harry asks, barely audible. His feet won’t move, his hands won’t obey his commands to reach for his wand.

Draco shrugs, sharp shoulders lifting, falling, making Harry stare. “Amends to make. St. Mungo’s to thank for the lives they saved during and after the war, lives I endangered. People to convince. You. I knew Weasley would be going on leave, that no Aurors would be available to partner you. I thought,

perhaps...”

And then I was a complete arsehole. Draco appears to read the words in Harry’s expression.

“Yes. I wondered if I was wrong. If I had imagined the looks you started to give me after the party last year. Saw something I merely wanted to see. I tried to decide what to do next--whether to reverse the spell on the fountain, admit to you what I’d done. And then--” another step closer “--you made a wish for something much better than a Snitch. I nearly came to find you the moment you did.”

At his sides, Harry’s fingers tremble. “You saw my wish, and you...” Oh, Merlin. He can’t even think about that. Not yet. “What about Hermione?”

Slowly, deliberately, Draco rolls up his left sleeve, revealing luminous skin, a tiny puncture wound, a messy, uneven, yellowing bruise. “Mine. I did nothing to harm her, Harry. Or her child. Granger and I share the same blood type, and I merely took what turned out to be a necessary precaution. And before you say it, no, the irony is not lost on me.”

A memory returns, a hazy recollection of being in the maze during the tournament in fourth year, when the world flipped upside down. He donated his blood to Hermione. After what he used to call her.

And to right himself, all Harry had to do was step forward.

“I’ve answered your questions,” Draco says softly. “You haven’t answered mine yet.” He’s close, now, almost close enough to touch.

“Yours?” Harry tries to remember, but he can see skin and smell cologne and he is standing so close.

“Anyone could come out here and find us.”

“They could,” Harry says hoarsely, pulse quickening. An almost imperceptible wand-flick catches his eye and the shadowy alcove grows warm, comfortably so. Cool, strong fingers reach out to twist around his own, tugging Harry along as Draco steps back, back until he’s against the nearest wall.

Adrenaline spikes, slides through Harry’s veins. In his mind he stands in front of the fountain, galleons glowing underwater.

His fantasy. The night turns airless.

Silk whispers and Harry doesn’t have to look down to know, but he does anyway to see the silver and green stripes of Draco’s old school tie.

Step forwards. Draco raises an eyebrow: pale, challenging, expectant. Harry nods, or maybe it's just a shiver but he means to nod, and at a whispered spell the tie hovers briefly in the space between them, just long enough for Harry to put his wrists together.

It's soft, warmed by sitting close to Draco's skin, perfect in the way it binds Harry, his hands now still, the rest of him shaking. An approving hum vibrates from Draco's chest, yanking Harry's gaze back up to piercing eyes above a parted mouth.

They both know what he wished for, what they want, what comes next. There's no doubt, only confidence on Draco's face and for the span of a breath Harry is lost, disbelieving, amazed at the lengths Draco has gone to. For him.

"What are you waiting for?" Draco licks his lips, twists them into a slight smirk. "On your knees, Harry."

He folds as if made of paper. braced for the sting that never comes because Draco must know some kind of cushioning spell that makes Harry feel as if he's kneeling on feathers. Slim hands drop, down to Draco's waist, and he parts his robes, revealing the trousers beneath.

Harry gasps, nerves and want a snap in the hush.

"Harry," Draco whispers, fingers moving to cup Harry's jaw, tilt his chin so their eyes meet. A moment passes, two, the contact humming over Harry's skin. Still looking up into smoldering grey, Harry lifts his hands, electricity arcing down his spine at the sight of the tie holding them together.

The zipper is loud, a sound that can't be anything else. They're still alone, but Harry glances in the direction of the party with a start.

And doesn't stop. Merlin, Draco is warm beneath fine fabrics, his hips jerking at the first brush of fingertips over the hard length covered by black shorts. Fists clench in Harry's hair and he can't, just can't work fast enough to free Draco's cock, thick, hot, a bead of fluid already gathered at its tip, almost, almost close enough to taste.

Almost.

"Suck me, Harry," Draco orders. A strangled sound escapes Harry's throat. "Just like you imagined. How many times did you picture this? Take it."

Harry wraps his hands around the base, mesmerised by striped silk, Draco's stifled whimper a direct line to his own untouched cock. He leans in, takes the head into his mouth, tongue swirling, licking, seeking the tender spot on the underside, flicking, more, more. Sweet fuck, he's always loved doing this, ever since he figured himself out and had his first taste of the weight and length on his tongue, but it's never been Draco before.

Harry's moan is muffled, needy. Draco's grip tightens. "Deeper," he says roughly. "You said you wanted to swallow me. On your knees, at my mercy, my cock so deep in your mouth you couldn't breathe. Do you know what reading that did to me, Harry? Do you?" His hands begin to pull, perfect pain tingling along Harry's scalp, pushing further in as Harry opens wider, sucks harder.

Wet, filthy noises fill the alcove. Electric desire crackles over Harry's bones. The sticky, salty leak is steadier now and he drinks it down, greedy, desperate. Fuck his fantasy, he wants never to stop, wants to make Draco fall apart right here, like this.

"That's it," Draco rasps as the head of his cock touches Harry's throat. "I knew you could--" His hips buck and abruptly Harry is empty, aching with need and frustration. He's hauled to his feet, chest to Draco's panting chest, and then he's being spun to face the wall and oh, Gods, yes. Bound wrists bent to his chest, hands running over his arse.

"Draco," he moans.

"Going to come inside you. Going to make you feel it."

"Draco," Harry says again, forehead against the bricks, eyes looking down at the tie. Everything. Everything he wanted.

"Yes," Draco says. Breath washes over Harry's ear. "I've had to spend the past day living with your words, trying not to fuck you the minute I saw you. And you would've liked that, wouldn't you, Harry? I can have you anywhere. Anytime." A palm covers Harry's cock, possessive, squeezing enough through cloth to make Harry whimper.

Air hits skin; Harry's trousers and shorts pool around his ankles, robes pushed up, gathered around his waist. Draco nips sharply at Harry's neck, soothing the skin with a lick as he mutters a spell.

"You like to be bitten. Yes. Like to be marked, don't you?"

Oh. Slick fingers part his cheeks and Harry leans into the bricks, trying to stop the heady spin of want enough to catch his breath, but Draco's fingertips are brushing gently over his entrance, flesh, probing, sliding one finger inside.

"Tell me what's next," Draco growls. "Say it."

Harry opens his mouth but he can't talk, can't think of anything but the single finger, twisting, curling, winding around the need building inside of him. He shuts his eyes, trying, and the contact is suddenly gone.

"Tell me."

"I want..." Harry clenches his fists together. "Now you use your fingers. Three of them." His cock throbs at his own words. "Stretch me."

“And then?”

“Then you fuck me,” Harry whispers.

“Slow?” Draco asks, circling his fingertip again. “Or fast?”

Fuck. “Hard. Fast. Deep.”

Two fingers push swiftly into him; Harry bites his lip. “Demanding, aren’t you?” Draco adds the third finger. “Fuck, Harry. You’re ready for me now. Why is that? Have you been letting other men fuck you? Have other men been--” thrust “--taking--” thrust “--what’s mine?”

“N-No,” Harry gasps, shaking his head. “Toys.”

Draco hisses. “One day, you’re going to show me that. You’re going to let me watch you fuck yourself. But now--” the fingers go, almost instantly replaced by Draco’s slick, hard cock “--it’s my turn.”

“Please,” Harry says, and he’s begging but he doesn’t give a fuck, not when Draco is entering him, slowly, surely, the tight burn nothing to the fire in Harry’s veins, blazing stronger with every fraction of an inch that Draco pushes deeper. Draco holds his hips, strong enough to bruise, mouth closing on the back of

Harry’s neck as he groans with effort and restraint.

And then he’s inside, fully, filling Harry with heat and he’s beginning to move and Harry cries out, already on the edge, wishing his hands weren’t trapped because he needs to touch himself, to fall off the knife-edge of pleasure slicing through him.

“More?”

“Yes,” Harry moans. Lights pop behind his eyes.

“Harder?”

“Yes.”

A door opens, letting the clamor of the party out into the night. Thrilled fear coils in Harry’s belly as Draco’s hand covers his mouth, not stopping, keeping him silent as he fulfils his promise. Voices chatter out of sight, a buzz in Harry’s ears because Draco’s cock is hitting that spot inside him that turns everything white, hot, excruciatingly pleasurable and he can’t stand it.

And he’s going to... Oh, fuck. He’s going to...

“Come on,” Draco says, more breath than whisper. Harry can feel Draco stiffening impossibly further inside him. “Can you be quiet enough? Or do you want them to hear you?”

He thrusts again and something twists within Harry, a spring on the brink of uncoiling does, a glowing whip of feeling lashes down his back. Harry’s mouth opens in a silent scream as Draco’s hips jerk, erratic, coming hard with his teeth sunk into Harry’s skin and Harry’s untouched cock pulses, blinding him, long streams painting the bricks.

For a long moment Harry can’t move, think, breathe. Draco’s hand leaves his mouth and slides slowly down Harry’s back. He withdraws, gently, and leans into Harry’s shoulder.

“Turn around,” Draco says, still too quiet for the talking group to catch. Harry forces himself to obey, closing his eyes. The tie is removed from his wrists, a cleaning spell is cast. They redress themselves, then Harry fumbles in the pockets of his robe for his wand.

Only when the Muffliato is working does he open his eyes again, unsure of what he’ll see on Draco’s face. Is this it? Do they go their separate ways now? Pretend it never happened?

“Why me?” Draco asks, gaze burning into Harry’s.

“I...” Harry trails off, not quite knowing how or where to begin. “You challenge me,” he says finally. “I’m

The Boy Who Lived, and you don't fall to your knees for me." It makes no sense that now's the time he blushes. After...everything. "It makes me want to get on mine."

A smile--not a smirk, this time, but a real smile--spreads on Draco's lips. His hands cup Harry's face, a gesture Harry thinks Draco must like, and he's not complaining, not at all. "In public?"

Harry's blush deepens.

"Kinky," Draco whispers, a centimetre from his mouth. "I was right."

Carefully, Draco leans in and kisses him, nudging Harry's lips open with his tongue. It's long, relaxed, perhaps the strangest first kiss Harry's ever had, since they normally come before anything else, but it's perfect when he wraps his arms around Draco's back, pulling him closer. They both smell like sex and they're messy and sticky and Harry thinks he could stay exactly here all night, his tongue sliding over Draco's, warm fingers pressing his cheekbones.

"I have something to give you," Draco says, stepping back and licking swollen lips. Something inside Harry, some hidden tension, snaps, releasing a languid calm.

"I thought you just did," he says, grinning. Draco laughs.

“Funny, very funny.” His expression turns slightly guarded, a furled scroll sitting in his palm. “Read it.”

The words covering the page are familiar, exactly what Harry spoke in his head last night. As he watches, they change to a different message, one he’s seen before, many times over recent weeks. All he’d have to do is put it in water to make it change back.

“Consider your wish granted,” Draco says, reaching for Harry’s hand. “And now I have a few of my own.”

“A few?” Harry raises an eyebrow.

“I’m greedy,” Draco says, shrugging, smiling. “And Slytherin. I figure I’m catching you at a weak moment.” His fingers link with Harry’s. “Dinner, tomorrow night.”

“What else?” Warm happiness envelopes Harry like a jumper. He lifts their hands and kisses Draco’s knuckles, embarrassed by the sappiness of the gesture but not enough to not do it. Contact is good. Having been mostly wrong about Draco is better.

Draco runs his lips feather-light over Harry’s jaw. Desire jolts in Harry’s chest again. “Breakfast, tomorrow morning.”

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For almost everyone, it stops as suddenly as it started. It takes a few days before people accept that the fountain's returned to simply being a fountain, but the increasingly empty atrium is no surprise to Harry. He watched Draco disable it himself, on their way from the party to Grimmauld Place.

He hums as he walks through it and to the Apparition points. The lights bounce off his watch as if it were a galleon, pointing out that he's running late.

The crushing darkness is as unpleasant as ever but mercifully brief, depositing Harry in a secluded spot near the base of the enormous tree in Trafalgar Square, strung with shining bulbs and glittering baubles.

"Merry Christmas Eve," Draco says as Harry nears, ready for their fourth date in as many nights.

"Hi," Harry says, staring at his mouth. Draco gets the hint, leaning into kiss him amongst the crowds.

"Ready for tomorrow?"

Harry nods. Not everyone in his life is going to approve of this, he knows, but telling them all at once will at least get it out of the way, and Hermione's already beginning to guess something's up. Her gaze has been a little too knowing every time he's dropped by to visit. "When I tell them what you did for

Hermione and the baby, I think... ”

Draco groans, causing several people in the vicinity to look away from the magnificent tree in their direction. “This is going to do wonders for my reputation.”

“Yes.” Harry kisses him again. “Let’s eat. I’m starving.”

They walk towards the restaurant, a little place Harry loves down a side street not far away. Draco takes Harry’s hand in his own gloved one, and Harry thinks there’s nothing left in the world to wish for.

Don't forget to go back to H/D Holidays on LJ and leave feedback!