Title: How Do You Mend a Broken Heart?

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Summary: In order to keep custody of his children, Draco needs to find a spouse that will shore up the Malfoy family's tattered reputation. But what starts off as a means to an end gets more complicated when Draco's target reawakens feelings in him that he hasn't had in a long while, and Draco starts to feel alive for the first time since his wife's death.

Author's Note Empress Prompt—Parenting, Nurturing, New Love, New Life.

Thank you to my betas—M, N, O, and fellow team members, with an extra-special note of gratitude to M.

How Do You Mend a Broken Heart?

Draco studied the inside of the Gringotts vault. A beam of light illuminated a platform in the middle of the vault on which a rock was set. The rock was worthless, but that wasn't the point. The point was that it wasn't his rock.

The part-time job of testing and creating new security measures for Gringotts required cleverness and a

surprising amount of ruthlessness. It wouldn't pay the bills, like his job of managing the Malfoy investments and estates did, but it was always a challenge.

His opponent, the one who tested Draco's traps and created traps for Draco, was the honourable sort. He always created a way to escape without loss of life and limb, if Draco could figure out what it was. Draco was never quite so honourable, himself.

He cast Lumos and turned his gaze on the ceiling, walls, and floor of the vault. One time spikes had shot out of the walls. A mixture of quick reactions, luck, and a thick robe had enabled him to escape with only minor punctures, easily healed. Although Draco saw no evidence that something similar might happen this time, he cast an Impervious on himself just in case.

Time was ticking by. Although he knew a trap was laid for him, he couldn't uncover it. Deciding that the trap must be triggered when he touched the rock, Draco cautiously crept forward.

Though he studied the platform, casting reveal spells, one after another, he didn't learn anything. He stepped onto the platform. Nothing happened. The only option left was to pick up the rock and see what he was up against.

His fingers curled around the rock and the world disappeared. The platform was still there, but no vault surrounded him—no floor, no ceiling, no walls. Nothing but a gaping darkness.

Lumos! Draco shouted, giving it as much power as he could.

The light didn't help, instead emphasizing the emptiness surrounding him. He cast a Supersensory spell on himself, to no avail. He shot out sparks in all directions and they went endlessly into the depths of the blackness before dying out. Levitating himself through the void was not an option.

Draco lay on his belly and reached out with his hands, then turned around and stretched out his feet. He felt nothing. It was as if a chasm surrounded the platform.

It was impossible to use magic to turn the vault into unfathomable space. He knew that the floor still had to be there. The door to the vault still had to be to his right. All he needed to do was to trust in his belief and walk to it.

Closing his eyes, he lowered his foot and then drew it back. He couldn't do it. Maybe if he could see a hint of light from the door. Something for him to follow. Something to lead him out. To give him hope that he wouldn't die in this emptiness.

Cursing, Draco sat down on the platform and waited for the time allotted for the challenge to run out and for the Goblins to open the vault.

* * *

"You could marry me."

Draco shook his head at Pansy, who was lounging on the sofa and picking at the petits fours the Malfoy Manor elves had provided.

They were in the library instead of the drawing room. He'd opened the mail that morning in the drawing room and the house-elves were still trying to repair the damage he'd wrought. If the house-elves hadn't flung open the doors, if he hadn't caught sight of the terrified expressions on the faces of his children, the letter he received from the Greengrasses might have caused him to bring down the Manor. The letter had claimed he was an unfit parent and had declared their intention to remove the children from his custody as soon as the courts would allow it.

It was probably a good thing that his parents had left a week earlier on a world tour. While he might have appreciated their moral support, at least he wouldn't have to worry about his father planning a wide-scale massacre of Greengrasses.

While outwardly calm now, inside Draco was still shaking. He pretended to himself that it was from fury.

"Despite the fact that you've swept me off my feet with that impassioned speech of eternal devotion," Draco told Pansy, "it wouldn't work. Even as besotted as your fiancé is with you, he might object to you marrying someone else."

Pansy focused her gaze on the sweets in front of her. "Rick's not all that besotted anymore. I doubt he'd notice I'd left."

Draco moved from his chair to join her on the couch. He took her hand in his. "If Savfair has hurt you, I assure you that you have my full support. There's a spot near the rose garden where we can dispose of the body and it will never be discovered."

She smiled and shook her head.

"It's not nearly that bad, Draco. He's just busy making that potion of his."

"I'm sure he is," Draco said, patting Pansy's hand while quietly thinking of what he would do to Savfair if he ever found out differently.

"Even if you weren't currently attached to that boring sod," Draco continued, "it wouldn't do for us to marry. The Parkinsons, while not nearly as notorious as the Malfoys, were also Death Eaters. If I'm going to keep custody of my children, I need someone who fought against Voldemort, one whose motives are good and pure, who has an unblemished reputation. It shouldn't be hard to find such a person. All I have to do is look for a rainbow and follow it to where it's coming out of their arse."

"Hmm," said Pansy. "Loony Lovegood might be crazy enough to marry you."

"While her hair colour is decent, I don't think the Greengrasses or the Wizengamot will be convinced of her suitability as a stepmother to my children with a nickname like Loony."

Draco stood and began pacing. After a moment he stopped, a look of triumph on his face. "I could marry Hermione Granger! She's one of the heroes of the war."

Pansy smirked. "You mean Hermione Granger Weasley? The one who has been happily married to Ron Weasley for years? The one who would love for you to ask her simply so that she could slap your face?"

"She's a physical thing, isn't she?" Draco asked. "Do you think she brings that to the bedroom?"

Pansy made a face. "If you want to marry someone who'd just as soon slap you, then marry Ginny Weasley. She's available again. From what I hear, she's very available."

"Oh, please. You know I'm allergic to red hair and freckles. I'd sooner marry Potter."

Draco stilled and his eyes widened. "I could marry Potter."

"Draco," Pansy said, a note of alarm in her voice.

"He's available. A hero complete with requisite rainbow."

"He hates you."

"It's been decades. I'm sure the feeling by now has faded to intense dislike."

"He's straight."

"Perhaps not as straight as you might think. I've heard rumors. Besides, I'm straight, too."

"Ha!"

"I am!"

"Draco, darling, just because Astoria never said anything about your yearly jaunts to the continent, it doesn't mean she didn't know."

The blood disappeared from Draco's face. "She knew?" he asked, stricken.

Pansy rose from the couch and went to Draco, wrapping her arms around him. "Yes, but she understood. She loved you, Draco. She loved you as much as you loved her."

"That's impossible," Draco answered.

Before he could say more, the door creaked open and his twelve-year old daughter, Cassiopeia, entered, carrying her baby sister.

"Cassiopeia, it's late. You should be in bed."

"Talitha was crying and wanted you."

Draco looked at his youngest daughter. Her eyes showed no sign of tears, her face still wore the impression of sheets, and her white-blonde curls were all askew. She gave him a sleepy smile and reached out to him with her arms spread wide.

With a huff of exasperation he didn't feel, he took her into his arms where she immediately burrowed her head into his shoulder. "You're weak," Malfoy told Talitha sternly, while brushing her curls from her face. "In my day, I could cry until the halls were flooded by my tears, yet no one came rushing to comfort me."

"Yes," Cassiopeia said. Relieved of her excuse for being out of bed, she sat down on the sofa next to Pansy. "I've seen how Grandmother deals so very harshly with you. Does she still arrange for the house-elves to leave inferior chocolates on your pillow each night?"

Draco sniffed haughtily. "We should've drowned you in the fish pond at birth. The lot of you."

"Good evening, Aunt Pansy," Cassiopeia said, then snatched up a petit four and popped it into her mouth.

"How's my favorite goddaughter?"

"Don't encourage her, Pansy." Draco sat down in his chair and hummed a low tune while he rubbed Talitha's back. As he listened to his daughter extract a promise from Pansy for them to go to lunch together the following week, and felt the warm, soft breath at his neck, he knew that he would do whatever it took to keep his children with him.

Even if that meant marrying Potter.

* * *

Stifling an evil chuckle, Draco exited Gringotts. The trap he'd prepared for his opponent was cunning. Beyond cunning was the hidden spell he'd placed on the rock. At first, nothing would seem to happen. As time passed, the person who'd first touched the rock would notice a slight itch in his hand. A day later, his hand would stop itching, but an itch would develop on the sole of his foot. Unless the counter-spell was performed, for one week the victim would be plagued by itchiness.

Such a spell was unprofessional, devious, and rather juvenile. Draco was thrilled to have invented it.

He was about to Apparate home when he noticed Potter walking down Diagon Alley headed in his direction. He had devised the perfect plan of how to catch Potter's eye and the opportunity was too good to miss. Potter had always suspected that Draco was up to no good. Draco would be able to use that to catch his interest now.

When Potter neared, Draco said loudly "Out of my way," to two witches who were several feet away from him. They gave him curious looks, which he ignored. He then strode directly to Knockturn Alley. He'd gone several yards when he gave a surreptitious glance over his shoulder to see if Potter was following him.

He wasn't.

Hurriedly backtracking, Draco returned to Diagon Alley in time to see Potter enter Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. Maybe Potter hadn't noticed him going into Knockturn Alley. Maybe, despite trying to be obvious, he was naturally too stealthy.

A moment later, Draco entered the shop. George Weasley wasn't in sight and the person manning the counter was a young blonde female. She and Potter were conversing in low, affectionate tones and for a

moment Draco grew concerned that he might have a rival for Potter's affection. No one, not even The Daily Prophet had uncovered hard evidence of a new love interest since his divorce. Draco had assumed the field was wide open for him. His fears were allayed when he heard the girl call Potter 'Uncle Harry'.

Turning his back to them, Draco pretended a fascination in the wares while trying to listen to their conversation. He could hear only bits and pieces, but it seemed as if Potter was politely, but firmly, telling her that he wouldn't reconsider taking a trip. He was far too involved in his current investigation to take a leave of absence. When Potter stepped away from the counter, Draco hastily snatched a package off the shelf that he was sure would get Potter's attention, and then swung around.

They bumped into one another. The package in Draco's hands fell.

Potter caught it before it reached the ground.

"Here you go," Potter said, before he stiffened, realizing that it was Draco he'd bumped into.

"Is that all you have to say?" Draco asked.

"Sorry?" Potter said, before walking past Draco and exiting the store. Draco thought he heard Potter mutter, "Git," under his breath as he left.

Sighing, Draco looked at the package of Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder in his hands. Getting Potter curious about him and what he might be up to wasn't going to work. He was going to have to try something else.

* * *

At the Tragically Orphaned and Discarded Squib Society Gala, Draco watched Potter standing alone near the wall, drink in hand. To a casual observer, it might look as if he were intent on getting drunk, but Draco knew differently. He doubted that anyone else had noticed Potter's wand movements to turn his white wine into water.

Draco wondered why Potter was there. It didn't look like he was enjoying the music or having a good time. Potter was even standing in the gloomiest spot in the gaily lit ballroom. Draco looked closer. That spot had been purposely filled with shadows.

Two female sycophants dressed in robes that walked the boundary of indecency (the far side of the boundary) had been talking to Potter earlier, but Potter must have been his usual charming self, for they'd soon left to pursue other, perhaps more congenial, prey. In no time at all, he spotted both women dancing with some extremely pleased looking fellows.

Again, Potter's gaze swept the room. From the set of his shoulders, whoever he was looking for was not in attendance. Probably that ex-wife of his and her boyfriend-du-jour. If Potter was pining for her, it might make Draco's goal more difficult.

Steeling himself, Draco plastered his most charming smile onto his face and went to greet Potter.

"Good evening, Potter," Draco said. "How are you enjoying the music?"

Potter looked at him and then over at the orchestra as if, until that moment, he hadn't realised that there was music.

"Yes," Draco laughed, as if Potter had made some witty comeback instead of standing there like the dolt he was. "They are perfectly dreadful, aren't they?"

"What are you doing here, Malfoy?" Potter said.

"It is a charity event and the Malfoys do donate to charity."

"It's not that. You haven't been socializing much for the last year or two since your wife..."

Potter stopped talking abruptly and shifted his stance. Evidently he'd heard the persistent rumors of how, when Astoria had died, Draco had attacked the staff at St. Mungo's and they'd had to hit him with a Stupefy in order for them to take her body away. Go a bit crazy and curse a few incompetent healers and no one ever let you forget it.

It wasn't exactly a suitable topic of discussion at a party, however.

Potter stood there awkwardly, staring down at his glass.

"Oh, Potter. Sometimes your inability to carry on a conversation astounds even me, and I wonder that you can string enough words together to make a sentence. What's next? Are you going to slice my chest open with an illegal spell with your next query? I assure you it wouldn't hurt nearly as much."

"I apologise," Potter said, raising his gaze. "I didn't mean for it to come out like that."

"Are you sorry? Truly?"

"Of course."

"Then prove it. This party is a terrific bore and the charity has proved how thrifty they are by spending mere Sickles on the refreshments. Make up for your horrific gaffe by buying me dinner."

"Dinner?"

"Why thank you, Potter. I thought you'd never ask."

Potter rolled his eyes, but nodded. "Fine, dinner it is."

* * *

Draco took a small bite of his salmon then looked across the table at Potter, who was attacking his steak with particular blood-thirstiness.

"You're looking almost fetching tonight," Draco said, realizing as he spoke the words that they were true.

Potter's hair, a few grey hairs glinting in the candlelight, was tousled in a way that gave him a rakish look. The dress robes he'd worn to the charity event were well cut, emphasizing both his broad shoulders and lean waist. He was actually fairly attractive for a forty-year old.

Or at least he had been until a few seconds ago.

Right now, his face was turning red and his eyes were watering as he tried to cough up a piece of steak that had gone down the wrong way.

Potter gulped down half his water in between spates of coughing, all the while staring at Draco.

"Dear God," Potter said, when he could finally breathe properly. "Malfoy, are you chatting me up?"

Must not alert the prey, Draco thought. Potter wasn't the type to flee in terror, but he was likely to fight stubbornly against something if he thought he was being pushed into it.

"I always thought you were mental, Potter," Draco said, feigning nonchalance. "Obviously, you still are."

Potter noticeably relaxed. "For a moment there, I could've sworn..." He let his voice trail off and he smiled sheepishly.

Draco smiled back. "It's a mad idea. After all, we have nothing in common."

Potter hummed his agreement and sliced into his steak again. "True. Though we both did fight in the war." He forked the piece of steak he'd cut into his mouth and began chewing.

"On opposite sides," Draco pointed out.

Potter shrugged and then swallowed. "Yes, but you were there. You know what we went through. You're also one of the few people who knows what Voldemort was truly like."

"That's not much of a basis for a relationship. Unless..." Draco said slowly, "...it's not a relationship we're after."

"Hmm?" Potter said, busy eating.

Draco politely waited until Potter had swallowed his food before continuing. "We wouldn't need to have much in common if you just wanted to fuck me."

He was glad he'd waited when Potter's mouth dropped open.

"The only thing we'd need to have in common is a desire for a quick and dirty fuck. You bending me over the nearest horizontal surface. Spreading my legs apart. Sliding into me."

Shooting a glance at his companion, he saw that Potter's eyes were wide as he stared at him and a red flush coloured his cheeks.

"I mean," Draco continued, "It's not like much conversation would be likely to occur. At least not much besides the old standards of 'Faster', 'Harder', and so forth."

When Potter continued staring at Draco, his breathing now that little bit quicker, Draco knew there had been a kernel of truth in all those vague insinuations he'd heard over the years about Potter's sexuality.

Draco leaned closer and gazed into Potter's eyes. "If you're interested in a non-relationship, there's a Muggle hotel not far from here."

Potter let out a squeak, and then cleared his throat. "I don't do one night stands, Malfoy."

"You don't? What a pity."

For a moment, it looked like Potter thought it was a pity, too, for he nodded.

"I'm afraid in that case," Draco continued, "a relationship it will have to be, then."

"What?"

"When I went out tonight, I never dreamed that you would come in and sweep me off my feet, invite me for dinner—"

"Hey, I didn't—"

"-and ask for me to give a relationship with you a try. And to think, I almost didn't accept Pansy and Savfair's tickets for the event."

"Wait a minute - Savfair, as in Rick Savfair?" Potter asked sharply. "You know him?"

"Naturally. He's Pansy's fiancé and she is my best friend. We often socialize together." Draco gave Potter his most winning smile. "If it works out between us, we'll owe them an outrageously expensive wedding present."

Potter looked at Draco for a several moments before finally nodding. "Fancy stemware is always nice."

* * *

When Astoria had first become pregnant with the twins, both she and Draco had read up on the subject of child-rearing. They'd read books like The Witch's Guide to Starting Your Own Little Coven , When Your Cauldron Bubbles Over and The St. Mungo's Guide to Pregnancy for Witches, Wizards, and other Magical

Beings.

At one point, Draco had found a small book titled How to Determine if Your Infant is a Squib shoved in next to their pile of books and quickly rid the world of it before Astoria could see it. Afterwards, he'd had a short talk with his father, threatening to leave Malfoy Manor forever if there was a repeat of the incident.

Before burning the book, he'd flipped through the pages. He didn't think that throwing a baby into water to see if it floated was how baptism ceremonies had started.

By the time Lyra and Columba had been born, Draco and Astoria had read almost all the books on the market. Unfortunately, the twins hadn't read any of them.

It had taken a while for Draco and Astoria to adjust to being parents. But, as the children had aged, they'd grown more confident in their abilities.

Too confident, Draco thought, as he looked around the chaos that had become Madam Malkin's store. Taking all the children shopping for new robes at the same time had been utter madness.

Columba wanted one of everything in her size in the store. Lyra refused to be fitted at all, declaring that they simply use Columba's measurements as they were the same size. She then sat on a chair in the corner and read a book, for she always had one stowed away in her robe pocket.

Scorpius chose the essentials and then shrugged when asked to make any other decisions. Cassiopeia fretted about every single one, as if making the wrong choice would bring catastrophe down on her head.

Alhena and Rana decided at first that they, too, wanted school robes, even though it would be years before they'd be attending. After they were measured for them, they spotted a group of brightly shaded robes and changed their minds. They were currently arguing over who got the purple robe that had puffskeins purring on it and who had to settle for the pink robe with blue Hippogriffs flying about.

Talitha wanted her nap and was the loudest of all about her wishes. By this time, Draco wanted a nap, too.

Into the midst of this bedlam wandered Potter. Draco wondered if this was proof that like attracted like because surely the chaos in the store could only be matched by that mess of hair on Potter's head.

"Draco, I thought I saw you in here," Potter said.

"I'm surprised you didn't hear us in here. I'm surprised people who live in Bulgaria can't hear us."

"I've been thinking," Potter said, hands in the pockets of his robe and avoiding Draco's gaze. "Thinking about our date."

When they parted after the dinner they'd shared, they'd made plans for a date for the following Friday. From reading Potter's body language, Draco was pretty sure that he knew what was coming. Potter was about to squirm out of their date. Direct action was required.

"Hold her for a minute," Draco said, handing Talitha to Potter.

Potter's eyes widened in alarm, but before he could protest, Talitha was in his arms. She drew back for a moment, studying him before letting out a cry that was louder than before.

"What's wrong with her?' Potter asked as Talitha screamed.

"She's possessed by evil spirits," Draco told him

"What?"

"Oh, for Merlin's sake, Potter - walk with her while I deal with my children and Madam Malkin." Potter looked befuddled, so Draco made shooing motions with his hands. "You do know how to walk, don't you, Potter?"

Potter glared, and then turned his back to Draco. Draco wondered if he would've stalked out if he hadn't had his arms full of Draco's youngest.

In the first ten minutes, Draco limited Columba's purchases and got Lyra to submit to a cursory set of measurements. He had Columba okay Scorpius' and Cassiopeia's choices while he negotiated between Alhena and Rana. Alhena won the purple robe, but he'd found a robe that had dragons breathing fire that thrilled Rana.

The ten minutes after that were spent tallying up the purchases and organizing their delivery to the Manor. It was only when the transaction was concluded that he realised that he could no longer hear Talitha.

For a second he believed Potter had Apparated away, despite holding Draco's child, but then he turned and saw them. Potter was still walking, singing the Hogwarts song quietly. Talitha, who'd exhausted herself crying, was asleep, her head lolling on Potter's shoulder.

Draco made his way to where Potter was singing tunelessly.

"Good work, Potter. The proximity to your hair has obviously frightened the evil spirits away." Turning around, he motioned his children closer. "Come here. I want you to meet someone."

From the way Potter acted when he realised he was about to be introduced to Draco's children, you'd never have suspected that he'd bravely battled Voldemort as a teenager. Instead, the expression on his face was akin to when he'd martyred himself and gone to his death.

"Children, this is Mr. Harry Potter."

"The git?" asked Alhena.

"The prat?" Rana said at the same time.

"Those two," Draco said, pointing to Alhena and Rana, "I've never seen before in my life."

"That's my sister you're holding," Cassiopeia stated loudly, as if concerned that Potter was going to abscond with her sibling.

"Um... I know. Your father told me to hold her. I didn't want to."

"You didn't want to?" Cassiopeia repeated. "Why not? Don't you like children?"

Harry looked at Draco pleadingly, so he came to the rescue.

"Harry, let me introduce you. My oldest, Lyra and Columba, are twins, but you can tell them apart because Columba is always wearing far too much makeup for her age."

"Father!" Columba said, her cheeks turning red underneath the blush she wore.

"Pleased to meet you," Harry said, juggling Talitha and managing to extract a hand so that they could shake.

"You know Scorpius."

"Yes," Harry said, sounding relieved to be on slightly familiar ground. "How are you?"

"Fine, Mr. Potter. Looking forward to going back to school. How's Albus?"

"I spoke with him last night. He's enjoying visiting his mother."

"This is Cassiopeia," continued Draco. "Next to her are Alhena and Rana, who obviously need to learn a little discretion."

Potter dutifully shook all their hands, though Cassiopeia paused before doing so, eying his palm with suspicion.

"Lastly, there's Talitha, with whom you are already well acquainted."

Harry visibly relaxed, having gone through the ordeal and survived.

"Father?" Alhena said. "You told us that if we were good..."

"And were all of you good?"

"Yes," his children lied.

"Very well. Hands out."

All did as he said. He dropped three Galleons into each palm.

"Pair off as usual - Lyra with Alhena, Columba with Rana, and Scorpius with Cassiopeia."

"Not again," Scorpius muttered, earning a scowl from his sister.

"Same rules as last time. You have thirty minutes to spend your ill-gotten gains before meeting outside Flourish and Blotts. If you're late, we'll assume you're dead and mourn you accordingly. Now, off with you!"

Draco watched the children scamper away. With a twinge of dread, he saw Scorpius and Cassiopeia deep in discussion as they headed for Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. George Weasley used to give them a twenty-percent discount on all their purchases, until the day they turned the formal dining room into a swamp and Draco had gone to the store to vent his rage.

Now George Weasley gave them a fifty-percent discount.

He made a mental note to put the house-elves on full alert then moved closer to Potter and held out his arms. "I'll take Talitha off your hands now."

"That's okay, I've got her," Potter said. "You're not leaving yet, are you?"

"No, but—"

"Then I'll hold her a little longer." He smiled at Talitha. "We wouldn't want to wake her."

"Fine."

Together they walked out of Madam Malkins and strolled slowly down Diagon Alley. Draco felt strangely empty-handed.

They passed by Gringotts and Draco wondered if his psychopathic opponent was busy plotting his destruction in some fiendish way. When his parents, worried that he was burying himself at the estate, had encouraged him to apply for this job, they hadn't realised he'd be pitted against a lunatic.

"What are you thinking about?" Potter asked, interrupting Draco's thoughts.

Draco smiled and lied, "You, of course. You look comfortable holding Talitha."

"I am. I miss having little ones. It would've been nice to have more."

"Why didn't you, then?"

"While I thought the Weasleys with all their children were the ideal family, Ginny didn't agree. Too many memories of going without. She also wanted to be out doing things, accomplishing goals, while I preferred that she stay home. Ginny made it extraordinarily clear to me that she didn't intend to become her mother."

"Do I detect a sore spot?"

Potter shrugged. "When I was dating Ginny, after the war, I used to tease Molly and say it was because she was already taken. Maybe I wasn't teasing as much as I thought I was."

"Your ex-wife is making a name for herself. Being chosen as the coach for England's Quidditch team is quite a coup."

"It is. My children are with her right now, attending the Quidditch World Cup in Norway. Ron, Hermione and their family are there, too."

"Leaving you alone."

"I have an ongoing investigation that I couldn't leave."

"No resentment that your ex-wife is doing so well without you?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm happy for her. Really. She's good at what she does. I... when we married, I didn't see her for who she was, but who I wanted her to be."

"In that case, let me make it perfectly clear - I have no intention of turning into Molly Weasley for you."

Potter smiled. "Are you sure? You wouldn't look bad in an apron."

"You have a dirty mind."

"What?" Potter asked, genuinely confused.

"I know you're imagining me wearing an apron—an apron and nothing else."

Potter stared at Draco. "I wasn't... but I am now."

As they continued to stroll down Diagon Alley, Draco hid a smile. Potter had evidently forgotten entirely

about cancelling their date.

* * *

The date was a disappointment.

They'd met outside the restaurant that Potter had chosen. He'd owled him with the time and place and Draco, upon seeing that Potter had actually made a decent choice, agreed to it.

Because Draco wanted to get the courtship moving, when he'd greeted Potter, he'd leaned forward to kiss him. Potter had backed away so fast that he'd bumped into a couple who were exiting. After that reaction, Draco was surprised Potter hadn't asked the maitre d' to seat them at different tables.

While the food had been enjoyable, Potter kept glancing around, tapping his fingers on the linen tablecloth impatiently, and constantly looking at his watch. When Potter wasn't fidgeting, he was scratching idly at his arm. Whatever he had, Draco hoped it wasn't catching.

All of Potter's restless movements grew more and more irritating until it got to the point that every time Potter fidgeted, Draco gritted his teeth and had to remind himself that he was doing this for his children.

They were finishing up their crème brûlée when Potter sat up suddenly. At nearly the same time, Draco felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned to see Pansy with her fiancé in tow.

"Darling," Pansy said, when Draco stood and carefully air-kissed her powdered cheek. She eyed Potter,

who'd also stood. "Harry, how very nice to see you."

"Pansy," he said in greeting, then looked behind her at the tall, dark-haired man who accompanied her. "I don't believe I've had the pleasure of meeting you."

"Forgive me," Pansy said lightly. "Harry, this is Rick Savfair, my fiancé. He's from America and specializes in genetics. Rick, this is Harry Potter. You may have heard of him."

Rick laughed and shook Harry's hand. "I sure have. I remember reading in the newspapers about the war you folks had. Nice to meet you."

"The pleasure is mine." Harry turned to Pansy. "Perhaps you two would like to join us?

Pansy shook her head. "We wouldn't dream of interrupting your date. But we'll see you tomorrow, right?"

At Harry's blank look, both he and Pansy looked at Draco.

"There's a small gathering at Blaise's place," Draco explained to Harry. I was going to ask if you'd care to join us."

"I'd love to." He turned back to Pansy. "Until tomorrow, then. It was nice meeting you, Rick. Perhaps tomorrow night we can get a chance to talk."

Pansy and Rick followed their waiter, who'd been waiting patiently, to their table and Draco and Harry sat back down. Harry's gaze swung to watch Pansy and Rick seat themselves and open their menus.

As Draco paid the check, he decided that the date had gone from bad to worse. Potter was never going

to marry him. He was obviously much more interested in Pansy.

Draco was going to have to find some other hero to marry and give him the respectability he needed to keep his family.

* * *

"What time did you want to meet to go to Blaise's tomorrow?" Potter asked.

They were standing outside Potter's front door, Draco having done his gentlemanly duty of escorting his date back home. Potter had declined to invite him inside which confirmed, in Draco's opinion, Potter's disinterest.

"We're not meeting. Face it, Potter, it's not working. We're not working. You had a horrible time—"

"Wait! You can't. I need to—" Potter stopped himself and took a deep breath. "I mean I didn't have a horrible time and I'd like to go with you to Blaise's."

"Then that makes one of us. I thought that maybe... well, never mind what I thought. It went about as well as any idea I've ever had in my life. We should quit now before we end up hexing each other."

"It was fine. Really," Potter insisted weakly.

"No need to lie to spare my feelings. It's not like I'm heartbroken by your lack of interest."

"I am interested in you."

Draco was turning away, when Potter grabbed him and spun him back. Latching onto the collar of Draco's robe, Potter leaned forward and kissed him.

The kiss was sloppy, pretty much what Draco had always expected what a kiss from Potter would be like. Then Potter's mouth lifted and he drew slightly back. Their eyes met. Slowly, Potter moved forward and this time his lips brushed Draco's, tentatively. He tilted his head, angling their mouths for a better fit, then deepened the kiss.

The kiss was warm, wet, and with a hungry need behind it. Draco felt Potter's tongue swipe against his lips so he opened his mouth. Potter let out a sound as he pushed inside.

This was no exploration of a kiss but an invasion and Draco felt himself overwhelmed. Potter's hands released Draco's robe, no longer needing to hold him there, and slid to Draco's shoulders, clutching them.

Draco gasped as Potter slid his mouth down, stubble scraping over Draco's jaw as he nibbled his way to the soft skin of Draco's throat.

"Give me another chance," Potter murmured. "Take me to Blaise's party."

"Uhhh," Draco answered. He'd always had a thing for men who took charge.

Potter ran his tongue down Draco's throat to his collarbone and Draco trembled in reaction.

Something hot pressed into Draco's thigh. Harry Potter, the bane of his youth, was hard. Harry was hard

for him. Unable to stop himself, Draco rocked up, rubbing against Harry's hipbone.

"Tell me you'll see me again," Harry said into Draco's ear. "Tell me."

Draco bit his lip to stifle a moan and nodded.

Harry smiled at him, then took a step back. His hands dropped from Draco's shoulders. "I'll see you tomorrow," he said, then went into his house, shutting Draco out.

Shaky, his body still aroused, Draco was gathering his composure in order to Apparate when the door opened again and Harry peeked his head out.

"Um... what time did you want to meet?"

"I'll pick you up here at eight," Draco replied.

"Fine. Oh, and Draco...thanks for dinner."

Draco smiled as he Apparated away. Harry did want him. His plan was going to work, after all.

* * *

"Draco! So glad you could make it."

Draco had been going to Blaise's get-togethers for years but he'd never before been greeted so enthusiastically. The reason for the change was, more than likely, the identity of his scruffy-haired date.

"Potter," Blaise said, capturing Harry's extended hand in both of his. "I'd heard you were seeing Draco here, but thought it was a foul rumour. Everyone knows that you can do much better than him. Me, for instance."

"Better?" Draco said, stepping forward. "I don't think so. Everyone knows that you've recently been hit with a castration curse."

"No I haven't."

Draco smiled, showing his teeth. "Give me a few minutes."

Blaise released Harry's hand and backed away, holding his palms up in a gesture of surrender. "He's all yours." He gave Harry a sly grin and stage whispered, "Owl me when he bollocks it up."

Putting an arm around Harry's shoulder, Draco steered him toward the bar that a house-elf was manning. "We need to get you a drink. Something strong enough to give you courage, but weak enough to leave you with a clear head."

"Why would I need courage?"

"Because you've entered a nest of Slytherin snakes. Older and more deadly than in the past."

"You forget," Harry said, "I'm a Parselmouth. I'll survive."

Draco glanced about the room. They weren't all Slytherins, but they were all eyeing Harry with interest. Not snakes, but tigers when fresh meat was tossed into their cage. Harry might survive, but Draco wasn't sure he would if he had to fend them all off.

* * *

Draco narrowed his eyes suspiciously as Marcus Flint shuffled over to where Harry was still deep in conversation with Ernie Macmillan. He'd never suspected Marcus of being anything but straight.

Ernie was definitely straight. The entire reason he came to these gatherings was because he was in love with Pansy. For the past ten years, she and Ernie would get together, be blissfully happy for several months before they'd fight and one of them would storm out. A few months later, they'd be back together again.

Pansy's engagement to Rick Savfair had broken the pattern, a fact Ernie wasn't too pleased about. He was probably going on about how wrong Pansy's fiancé was for her. Draco had heard his speech on the subject several times already.

Marcus said something to Ernie that Draco didn't catch. Whatever it was, it caused Ernie to scurry off and startled Harry. Draco moved closer, wanting to overhear whatever Marcus had to say.

"Evening, Potter," Marcus mumbled.

"Evening." Harry looked about the room for an escape route, but there was none. He was stuck having a

conversation with Flint. "Um... have you been playing Quidditch much recently?"

Marcus shook his head. "Used to play with a group of fellows I work with. They kicked me off the team. Said I was too violent."

"That's too bad," Harry said, shifting slightly away.

"Bunch of pansies, if you ask me. You'd think Hit Wizards would be able to deal with a little blood, wouldn't you?"

Draco watched as Harry nodded and shifted further away.

"Not what I wanted to talk to you about, though. There's something I've been meaning to ask you. Something personal-like."

Harry had shifted so much that he was now against the wall. Draco decided it was time to go rescue him.

"Marcus!" Draco said, clapping him on the back hard, though he didn't appear to feel it. "Killed anyone lately?"

"You know I'm not supposed to talk about my job, Malfoy."

"I apologise. Also, I'm sorry, but I need to see Harry for a moment."

Harry gave Draco a grateful look.

"No, wait," Marcus said. "I want to ask him something." He frowned at Draco. "Something private."

"Then ask away," Draco said. "Harry and I are so close that anything you wish to say to him, you can say to both of us."

"Okay, if that's the way you want it. Potter, I was wondering if you'd mind giving me your wife's address. Ex-wife's, that is. Thought I'd stop in and see her."

"You want Ginny's address?"

"Yeah. Been thinking about her for a while," Marcus said. "I think the two of us would hit it off."

Harry stared at Marcus in horrified fascination "I really don't—" Harry began.

"Of course we'll give you her address," Draco said. "We'll owl it to you tomorrow."

Marcus smiled. "Thanks. I'll owe you one."

"Just remember to invite us to the wedding," Draco said brightly before pulling Harry away.

"Ginny's going to kill you," Harry said, barely suppressing laughter as they exited the room into a long marble corridor.

"I'm only trying to improve your ex-wife's love life."

"She'll probably hire Flint to do the job, too."

"He'll owe me so I'm sure he'll make it quick and painless."

Draco halted, opened a door, then pulled Harry into a room that was filled with a warm mist and large, cream coloured divans.

"What's this?"

"Blaise's mother room. She's in Greece right now, but she has the house-elves keep this room misted. It contains a potion that she believes helps her remain healthy and youthful."

"Shouldn't we get back to the party?" Harry asked.

"Not yet. I haven't spoken to you all evening. First you spend half an hour talking to Macmillan about who knows what, then I find you with Marcus." Draco moved closer so that their robes brushed. "This is supposed to be a date. An evening for us to get to know one another better."

Harry licked his lips nervously. "What do you want to know?"

"First, I'd like to know what you look like without your glasses." Draco reached up and pulled Harry's glasses away from his face and placed them on a nearby table.

"Well?" Harry asked.

"Strangely vulnerable looking."

"I meant what else do you want to know?"

Draco cupped Harry's face and stroked his lips with his thumb. "I also want to know if you taste as good as you did the other night."

"I don't think this is the right place," Harry said. He glanced at the door. "Someone could walk in at any minute."

"Let them," Draco said, before bending his head.

At first Harry was unyielding. Certainly not the demanding person he'd been the night before. Draco was close to giving up when Harry came alive in his arms.

It was only kissing, Draco reminded himself as his mouth moved on Harry's. Two sets of lips meeting, nothing more. It certainly shouldn't have caused his heart to pound and his breath to grow ragged as his body urged him closer, wanting as much of Harry as he could get. He felt reckless as he kissed Harry deeply, wetly, his tongue thrusting into Harry's hot, welcoming mouth.

Perhaps there was something in the mist that swirled about them. Perhaps the mist was the reason Blaise's mother had managed to marry so often despite the murky circumstances of her previous spouses' deaths.

Perhaps Draco should ask for the potion recipe.

Draco felt Harry's hands at his waist move lower to his hips. When Harry pulled him forward, closer, pressing their bodies tightly together, Draco broke the kiss to pull in a desperately needed breath.

"God, yes, Harry," Draco murmured, before moving his lips to Harry's cheek, then mouthing his way to an ear. "I can't wait for you to fuck me."

Harry stilled in Draco's arms. Draco was about to ask what was wrong when the door to the room

opened.

"See! I told you Draco and Potter were here," Blaise said brightly to Pansy and Savfair who'd followed him in. He grinned at Draco and Harry. "Oh, please continue. Don't mind us. We'll sit here quietly and watch, I mean wait, until you're done."

"You're going to have to get your thrills elsewhere, Blaise," Draco said, taking a step away from Harry but wrapping an arm around his waist possessively.

Blaise pouted. "You never were any fun, Draco."

"Maybe we should go back to the party now," Harry said.

Draco sighed. "If you insist."

They were almost to the door when Draco paused, and headed back into the room. A few seconds later, he handed Harry his glasses.

"I wouldn't want you going in blind," Draco told him.

When Harry smiled at him gratefully, Draco felt a wave of shame and the answering smile felt wrong on his face. Harry didn't know what he was getting into. Draco was letting him go into it blind.

"Anything wrong?" Harry asked.

"No. Not at all," Draco lied.

* * *

Draco sipped from his glass and pretended he was listening to Theodore, who was telling him some outrageous and complicated tale about survivors of a plane crash and a polar bear. Instead of paying attention to the story, Draco was watching Harry. Harry was still talking to Savfair, as he had been since they'd rejoined the party, though Savfair was doing most of the talking. Scratching idly at his neck with one hand and holding a barely touched glass in the other, Harry was listening intently to what Savfair was saying.

Because Draco was watching Harry, he didn't see trouble heading in his direction until it was right in front of him, pushing Theodore out of the way.

"I know what you're doing, Draco," Daphne Greengrass said. "Quite clever, really."

"You mean attending Blaise's gathering? Personally, I've always wondered if it was in my best interest to do so, especially since he's started inviting the riff-raff."

"That's not what I meant, and you know it."

"I'm afraid I have no idea what you're prattling on about, then."

"This thing with Potter," Daphne said. "It's not going to work."

Draco felt a presence on his right. He looked over and saw that his conversation with Daphne had drawn

Harry, Pansy, and Savfair to his side.

"What's not going to work?" Harry asked Daphne.

"You don't know, do you?" Daphne smiled viciously at Draco, and then turned toward Harry. "Draco's—Eek!"

Red wine splattered down the front of Daphne's dress while Pansy contrived to look apologetic.

"I'm terribly sorry. I can't hold my liquor, literally it seems. Oh, Daphne dear, we must get you out of that dress before the stain sets. I know how you need to get your Galleons worth from your outfits. Blaise, your house-elves can clean it, right?"

"They've dealt with worse stains than that. Follow me, ladies."

It was fortunate that Daphne had never mastered wordless or wandless magic because, otherwise, the glare she was giving Pansy would've killed her. However, she walked off after Blaise without resorting to violence. Pansy trailed after them, repeating her blatantly insincere apologies.

Draco tugged on Harry's arm. "I think it's time we left."

"What does Daphne know, that I don't?"

"I'll tell you after I get you home, but only if we leave now," Draco said.

Harry hesitated, looking over toward where Savfair hovered by the doorway which Pansy, Daphne, and Blaise had disappeared through.

"If you're waiting for Blaise to return, then you should know that he likes to kiss his departing guests good-bye."

Harry turned to stare at Draco.

"With tongue," Draco added.

"Fine," Harry said. "But when we get home, you're telling me what's going on."

Draco nodded, already trying to think up an appropriate lie to tell Harry.

* * *

Harry plopped down on his couch and looked up at Draco. "I'm ready to hear your explanation now."

It had been simply a matter of minutes since they'd left Blaise's and Draco still wasn't sure what to say. He tried to stall for time by walking around Potter's parlour and looking at the various photos and knick-knacks.

"I'm surprised you got the house in the divorce," Draco said.

"Ginny and I agreed it would be for the best. Especially seeing how she's travelling so much."

Draco glanced around. "I've often considered moving out of the Manor. Living with my father hasn't been easy. It was especially difficult when Astoria and I were first married. Although he was excruciatingly polite to her, he never bothered to exert any of his charm until the twins were born."

"Lucius has charm?" Harry asked, then shook his head. "Never mind that. I'm waiting for you to tell me what Daphne was talking about."

"And I'd like to know what you and Ernie spent half the evening talking about."

"He was complaining about Savfair."

"Poor Ernie. I do hope you didn't take anything he said seriously."

"Why? What do you know about Savfair?"

"Savfair is a horrendous social climber. I've warned Pansy that he's definitely not our sort, but she refuses to see it. He's had her introduce him to all the Pureblood families she knows, which is a most of the Purebloods in Britain. He claims to be a Pureblood himself, but he's lying."

Harry sat up straighter, fully interested. "How do you know?"

"Years spent observing you when we were younger. There's a slight hesitation when using certain spells. One day he spilled some tea and started dabbing it with a cloth instead of spelling it away. I suspect that he's either a half-blood or Muggle-born. My money's on the latter."

"He claims to have his degree in genetics. Has he talked to you about that?" Harry probed.

Draco waved Harry's question away. "Pansy started to explain Savfair's theories to me one day, something to do with potions and genes. The Muggle science portion of it didn't seem to make sense and was confusing. It gave me a headache, so I asked her to stop. She said it wouldn't apply to me any way, so she never bothered again."

"Why wouldn't it apply to you?"

"Frankly, I didn't care enough to ask."

Harry absorbed that information.

"If that's all the questions you have," Draco said, "then perhaps we should move on to the more interesting portion of the evening."

"Not so fast," Harry said, holding up a hand. "You never answered my question about Daphne.

"I didn't? I could've sworn—"

Harry shook his head.

Draco sighed. "You do realise that Daphne is my sister-in-law, right?" Draco asked, sitting on the couch next to Harry. He'd thought of something to tell him. It contained enough truth in it to make it believable and yet still conceal Draco's true motives.

"Your wife was her younger sister?"

Draco nodded. "They were close when they were young. Sisters who were best friends. Astoria's passing

was hard on me, but it was also hard on Daphne. Harder than most of us suspected."

"Go on," Harry said.

"Daphne's not ready to move on in life, to get past the tragedy of her sister's death. She thinks that I'm not, either. It's my theory that she believes that I'm using you in an attempt to get over Astoria's death. She doubts that it will work, unable to fathom that someone can move past their grief and start anew."

"And have you?" Harry asked. "Are you over her?"

Draco was silent for almost a minute, giving that question the consideration it deserved.

"No," he said softly. "I'm not over her." He raised his gaze to Harry's. "But, for the first time in a long time, I want to be."

They stared at one another for several moments, before Harry looked away.

"I'm sorry," Harry said. "I can't do this anymore. I have to tell you—"

Draco shifted and pressed a finger to Harry's lips, stopping him. "Please, Harry, give me a chance. Give us a chance."

He shifted again, replacing the finger with his mouth. Harry groaned and there was no hesitation this time in his response.

* * *

"England won!"

Draco stilled upon hearing Weasley's shout coming from the fireplace.

"Damn," Harry muttered next to Draco's ear, before straightening up from where he had Draco pressed back into a corner of the couch.

"Not now, Ron," Harry said tightly, putting himself between the fireplace and Draco.

"Didn't you hear me, Harry? England won! We beat Italy!"

"Ron," Harry said through gritted teeth. "Not now. I have company."

"Oh! Sorry. Didn't see her there. I'll talk to you later when you don't have some hot little blonde on the couch."

Draco peered around Harry's shoulder. "While I am undoubtedly hot, I resent being called 'little'. Simply because I am not some overgrown oaf like you—"

"Merlin's balls, Harry! That's Draco Malfoy!"

"I know, Ron" Harry said, sounding tired.

"You were-were-were with Malfoy! Malfoy!"

"Actually, we weren't, but we might've if you hadn't Floo called when you did," Draco said. "Your timing is as appalling as everything else about you."

It was difficult to tell, a Floo call being set in flames and all, but it appeared as if Weasley's entire head was as red as his hair.

"Harry!" Ron shrieked.

"I'll talk to you later, Ron," Harry stated. "I'll explain everything, but you'll have to trust me on this."

"That's Malfoy, Harry!"

"Good-bye, Ron," Harry said, before putting the screen in front of the fireplace.

From the other side, they heard a squawk of protest, then nothing.

"What's his problem?" Draco asked, returning to an upright position on the couch. "It's not like you being attracted to men is a secret."

"It's not? I mean, it's not."

"You'd think even Weasley would remember something like that. If I didn't know better, I'd think Weasley was hit on the head when he was young. It would actually explain sixth year. Fourth year, too. And second year, now that I think about it. Maybe fifth year, as well."

Harry was quiet for a moment, so quiet that Draco became curious as to what he was thinking.

"Harry?"

"How did you know?"

"Know what?" Draco had no idea what Harry was talking about.

"About Ron. Most of the time he's fine. He does such a great job as an Auror, most people don't suspect that he was wounded during the war."

"Weasley was wounded?"

Harry nodded. "During the final battle. He was hit on the head. His family and friends don't mention it. Ever. But sometimes... he forgets things."

"So—he forgot about you liking men?"

"Amongst other things. It's terribly tragic." Harry bit his lip, clearly still emotional about Weasley's condition.

"I'm sorry, then, for speaking ill of him," Draco said, pretending sincerity.

"Thank you, Draco, for understanding."

Draco nodded. "You'll find that I am the very soul of human kindness to those poor unfortunates injured

during the war."

He'd prove it to Harry, too. When he next talked to Weasley, he'd show Harry just how helpful and accommodating he could be.

"I think it's time for you to go," Harry said, standing up.

Draco rose to his feet, as well. "May I see you tomorrow evening?"

Harry shook his head. "Ginny's scheduled to bring the children back tomorrow night."

"Then have lunch with me at the Manor." Draco suggested.

"Lunch at the Manor? At Malfoy Manor?"

Draco bit back a snarky comment. "It will be us and the children, as my parents are on a trip."

"I don't know. I—"

"Say yes," Draco urged, his voice low and husky. He leaned forward so that his mouth brushed Harry's ear. "Say yes."

"Yes," Harry whispered on a half-breath.

Draco smiled and stepped back. "I'll see you at noon," he said, then Apparated away before Harry could change his mind.

* * *

Draco grabbed the rock and then looked around the Gringotts vault. There was no fire, no endless void, no group of trolls surrounding him. Nothing had changed.

Immediately, Draco became suspicious. This was too easy. Warily, he headed for the door, only to discover that the door was gone.

Revealing spells didn't work. Neither did every blasting spell that Draco could think of. Deciding that the door had been moved, Draco threw spells at every inch of the walls, then aimed some at the ceiling and floor for good measure.

He wanted out. He had to get out. In frustration, he hit and kicked at the walls.

No opening appeared. Finally, Draco slumped against the wall to catch his breath. Glancing at his watch, he hoped the goblins were on time to let him out because Harry was due at the Manor in a few hours.

Straightening up, Draco raised his wand and began to shoot Reductor Curses at the walls once more.

* * *

Lunch went as well as could be expected.

Draco called his children together beforehand to warn them that they would have a guest for lunch and he expected them to display the grace and manners befitting Malfoys. Inviting someone over was unusual for him—except for Pansy and occasionally Greg Goyle, Draco rarely had visitors.

His four eldest questioned him about it, once their younger siblings had scampered off. They'd sensed that this person was special. Draco decided that it might be best to prepare them so that their shock at the identity of their guest would be over by the time Harry arrived.

Looking back, he recognized that had been a mistake. If he'd let it be a surprise, they would've swallowed their reactions to maintain a semblance of good manners. As it was, they felt free to let loose fully with their thoughts and feelings.

"Mr. Potter?" Scorpius screeched. "Albus' dad? That Mr. Potter?"

"Yes," Draco said "He and I are seeing each other."

"Is he going to be our new mother?" Cassiopeia asked. "I don't want a new mother."

"Eww," said Columba.

"Don't be so close-minded," Lyra told her twin.

"It's not that," Columba said. "I had an image of him dressing up in a witch's robe. He hasn't the

shoulders or chest for them."

Scorpius still looked shell-shocked. "I can't fault your taste. I mean, he's a more wrinkled version of Albus, but aren't you two a little... old?"

"I'll have you know that Mr. Potter and I are NOT old. Our virility is still undaunted by our age."

Three of his children stared at him with various expressions of disgust at the thought of their father possibly having sex. Cassiopeia just looked confused as she puzzled out the meaning of virility.

"Ewww," Draco's three oldest chorused.

"Oh," Cassiopeia said, as the meaning occurred to her. "Ew."

"You don't know that for sure, do you?" asked Scorpius "Please tell me that you don't know that for sure."

"If you do," Lyra added. "I hope you used protection."

Everyone turned to stare at Lyra, who became flustered at the attention. "In Beauxbâtons: les Révélations there are two accounts of male pregnancy, so it can happen."

"Oh, god," said Columba. "Now I'm imagining Mr. Potter in a witch's robe and with a swollen belly."

Draco was, too.

It was at that moment Feely, the house-elf announced the arrival of Mr. Harry Potter and ushered him in.

All eyes went to Potter's stomach.

* * *

"You didn't eat much lunch," Draco said, as he and Harry walked in the garden partly to escape the confines of the Manor and the various sets of prying eyes. "If you didn't care for the food, please give me a list of your favorites and I'll have the house-elves prepare them next time.

"The food was fine," Harry assured him. "I decided that I could stand to lose a few pounds." He hesitated for a moment. "You don't think I'm fat, do you?"

"Not at all."

"Are you sure? I got the weirdest impression that everyone was staring at my stomach today."

"Ha ha," Draco said, entirely unconvincingly.

They were passing a clump of rhododendrons when Harry paused.

"What's this?"

Draco looked at where Harry was pointing. Set near the rhododendrons was a flat stone with an

elaborate S carved into it.

"That's Scorpius' screaming rock."

"Is that a Wizard thing that I still don't know about after all these years?"

Shaking his head, Draco let a smile escape. "It's a Malfoy tradition, now in its second generation. Follow me and I'll show you the original."

As Draco led them past a patch of lawn where a white peacock strutted in front of a peahen and then across a wooden bridge that spanned a small stream, he explained about the stone.

"It all started after my first year at Hogwarts. I came home that year infuriated that Dumbledore had stolen the House Cup from Slytherin. My father found my quite justified vocalizations on the subject, and those on you, unbecoming of a Malfoy. Unfortunately, I was unable to control my outrage."

"Imagine that," Harry said dryly, then grinned when Draco gave him a scathing look.

"My mother decided that something should be done," Draco continued. "One day, she brought me to this corner of the gardens, far from the Manor, and showed me a stone." Draco pointed for Harry's benefit to the spot under a large tree not far from the Sanctuary of Merlin that one of his ancestors had built. "There it is."

He watched as Harry approached the flat stone.

"The 'D' is a bit worn."

"That's because I spent so many hours over the various summers standing on it and listing in great detail

my frustrations with you. After fifth year, I practically lived out here."

Harry grinned. "I think that year I could've used a stone of my own."

"The summer I needed it most, however, was the one when I could use it least," Draco continued. "It was before seventh year. With Greyback often roaming the grounds and Voldemort ruling my home, I feared to even leave my room, much less make my way out here. For a long time afterwards, I didn't use it. Then, when Astoria died..."

Draco turned away and looked at the stream they'd crossed, the sound of the water trickling merrily was in sharp contrast to his feelings. So many nights he'd seen the children to bed, reassured them that all would be well, then come out here to rail at the fates, to scream at Astoria for getting pregnant that last time against the orders of the healers, then to weep bitterly for being left alone.

When a hand came down on his shoulder, it startled him. Draco looked up at Harry, who seemed uncomfortable, as if he wanted to say something, but didn't know what. Draco started to turn away, when Harry's grip on his shoulder tightened, stopping him. His other hand came up to cup Draco's cheek.

When their lips met, it was gentle, offering comfort, compassion. As Harry began to draw back, a whine of protest rose from Draco's throat. He moved forward, his mouth chasing and recapturing Harry's. One of his hands threaded into that marvelous tangle of hair. The other slid around to the small of Harry's back to pull him closer.

Harry ceased all movement. Draco didn't let it stop him. He continued kissing, his tongue licking at Harry's closed lips until he opened them for him.

But it wasn't enough, not nearly enough.

"Make me feel alive" he murmured into Harry's ear. He thrust forward and ground his cock against Harry. "Make me glad to be alive."

Harry let out an incoherent sound of surrender and grabbed at Draco, roughly pulling him closer. He ran his hands over Draco's chest, then reached around to grope at his arse, squeezing his cheeks.

Before Draco knew what had happened, Harry had lowered him to the ground and was fumbling with the fastenings of their trousers. With hands too slow and uncoordinated, Draco tried to help him. At last Harry had them undone, yanking them down and out of the way. He shoved their underwear down, too, and they were skin to skin.

Draco gasped and arched as Harry palmed Draco's cock, then bit out a curse when Harry gave it an experimental squeeze. Lining Draco's cock up with his own, Harry wrapped his hand around them both. Quick, hard strokes followed, again and again and again. Harsh panting and filthy words of want and need fell against Draco's ear, urging him toward his rapidly approaching climax.

The ground was cold and hard underneath Draco. Harry was a heavy weight over him. The speed of the strokes, the pressure around his cock, the lack of any lubrication—it was all wrong. Not at all how Draco had imagined it.

Draco wanted it to last forever.

* * *

"I have to go," Harry said, scrambling to his feet and almost stumbling because his trousers were around

his ankles.

"You're sticky," Draco pointed out, admiring the view of Harry's arse as he hopped about trying to get his trousers up. "As am I. I was thinking that we could rid ourselves of our clothes and go wash in the stream."

Harry paused in his movements and stared at Draco, his gaze drawn to Draco's mostly clothed body, then down to his still exposed and now flaccid cock. Not one to play fair, Draco stretched and tilted his hips upward. Harry's mouth opened to suck in a breath, but he resolutely shook his head.

"I really can't stay," Harry said as his fingers did up his trouser's fastenings. "Ginny's bringing the children back in a few hours and there are still a thousand things for me to do."

"How about a kiss good-bye?"

"I'd better not. I kiss you and forget what I'm supposed to be doing. I—" Harry flushed. "No kisses."

"Not even as a thank you for lunch?"

Harry gave him a wry grin. "To be safe, I'd better send you a card." Moments later, he Apparated away.

Draco smiled and wished he could see Harry's face when someone pointed out that he had a bit of something on his trousers and he needed to do a cleaning spell. The possessive part of him wanted Ginny Weasley to be the one to see the spot.

* * *

Draco had failed his last challenge at Gringotts. For a second time, he hadn't been able to escape, though he liked to think that he'd made some headway. The challenge he'd set up he hoped caused his opponent the same level of frustration.

When his opponent entered the vault, there would appear to be an inch of water that he'd have to tread through to reach the rock. As he progressed the water would get deeper and thicker. By the time he was halfway to the rock, he'd be up to his neck and the water would have turned into honey. Even if he tried to turn back, the honey would continue rising until it was over his head.

Draco liked to think that his opponent might come to a sticky end.

* * *

At King's Cross Station Draco realised why Avada Kedavra was an Unforgiveable. If it wasn't, fathers of teenaged daughters would be constantly using it on lust-filled, pimply teenaged boys.

In the past, he'd only had Scorpius to see off on the Hogwarts Express. His daughters he'd escorted to Beauxbatons by use of a Portkey. They'd said dignified good-byes in the marble entry hall of the Palace before they were escorted away. Perhaps it had been a mistake to give in to his desire to have his daughters closer to home by sending them to Hogwarts, instead.

The near chaos at King's Cross Station had infected his children. The crowds, the noise of excited

students, the frantic farewells proved contagious. First Columba was sure she'd forgotten her favorite cloak and dagger set. Next, Lyra decided that she hadn't packed nearly enough quills and was her potion kit truly the best on the market? Draco was grateful that he'd left Talitha, Rana, and Alhena home with the house-elves. He was exhausted and the day had just started.

He'd been assuring all three girls that their friends at Beauxbatons would write to them while Scorpius looked on, bored out of his skull, when he heard from somewhere behind him "I'm in love."

The boy, who was pushing his cart with his school trunk in their direction, was eyeing the twins in a way that made Draco grip his wand tightly in his pocket. Surely no one would notice one little Cruciatus curse in the busy train station, would they? The cacophony would easily mask the screams.

This boy was even more moronic than usual, with his red hair and dopey grin. It was when Draco looked to the side to see Scorpius' friend, Albus, pushing his own cart that he realised why this was. It must be the Potter heir - James.

Well, it wouldn't do to curse the eldest son of his dearly beloved, would it? At least not in public, where he was likely to get caught at it.

"Draco!" Harry called out.

Draco wondered if Harry had sensed the danger to his first-born. Shifting his gaze to Harry, he noted his cheerfulness and decided that Harry hadn't discerned Draco's thoughts.

"You know them?" James whispered loudly to his father. "Introduce me."

"James, Albus, Lily, these young ladies are Lyra, Columba, and Cassiopeia Malfoy, Scorpius' sisters. Ladies, this is James, my eldest, his brother Albus, and his sister Lily. I believe you and Lily will be the same age," he added to Cassiopeia.

Lily and Cassiopeia eyed one another suspiciously.

Over the ensuing babble of various greetings, some eager, others sizing one another up, Scorpius said to James in a voice that carried, "My sisters are in sixth year. They're older than you."

James grinned in reply. "I happen to like mature women. They have experience." He turned to the twins. "Might I escort you both to your seats?"

One little hex, Draco muttered to himself. Nothing too horrible. Just an impotency charm that would last, oh, approximately twenty years.

"Did you say something, Draco?" Harry asked.

"No. That sound you heard was simply my teeth being ground to dust. Where are those Weasley friends of yours?"

"They're taking a Portkey directly from Norway to Hogwarts. Hermione thought it'd be easier than a Portkey to London, only to then put the children on a train."

While Harry and Draco talked, Scorpius and Albus boarded together with Lily at their heels. The only child still on the platform with Harry and Draco was Cassiopeia.

"I suppose I should get on the train, too," she said, making no move to do so.

Draco knew Harry was watching, but he didn't let that stop him from turning Cassiopeia so that she faced him.

"I understood that you were looking forward to attending Hogwarts instead of Beauxbatons. Was I

wrong?"

She shook her head. "I do want to go to Hogwarts. It's where Mother went, but.... I'm concerned for the twins. Scorpius told me that Sorting Hat decides what house you are assigned. I am obviously going to be in Slytherin, but what of Lyra and Columba? They might be Sorted into Ravenclaw or Gryffindor." A horrible thought occurred to her. "Or maybe even Hufflepuff!"

"Bite your tongue," Draco said in a stern voice. "And you are justified in your concern. If the twins are Sorted anywhere but Slytherin, they will be disowned immediately and tossed out into the snow. As it is early September, we will first need to conjure the snow in which to toss them. They will be reduced to wearing rags of the sort that you buy directly off the rack at Twilfits and Tattings. In no time at all, I am sure that they will turn into thin, wretched things that our dogs will howl at as they pass by."

Harry's face showed his shock at Draco's words. Cassiopeia, however, let out a small giggle.

"Oh, Father," Cassiopeia said. "You know we don't have any dogs."

"Then we will get some just so that they can howl."

With a bright smile she hugged Draco, then turned to board the Hogwarts Express.

"Wait," Harry said, making her pause. "You can talk to the Sorting Hat. You can tell it where you want to go."

"I won't need to," Cassiopeia said haughtily. "I'll be Sorted into Slytherin, the best of all the Houses. I will, however, let my sisters know of your advice."

Draco stood on the platform after she boarded. He waved to his children, noting with irritation that James Potter was leaning out a window between his two eldest. The whistle blew and steam hissed.

He waved as the engine moved down the tracks, only lowering his arm when it was no longer in sight.

"I used to think it'd get easier," Harry said. "I still feel as if the train's taking my heart away." He nudged Draco with an elbow. "Are you all right?"

"No. I have an urgent need to go home and research spells that will keep my children from growing up."

"Would you like to have dinner with me tonight?"

Draco glanced over at Harry. It was the first time Harry had initiated a date. He should be feeling triumphant that his plan was working. The Wizengamot was meeting in two weeks to discuss the custody suit and by then, with the way things were going, he and Harry should be a firmly established couple.

But it wasn't his plan coming to fruition that was sending a hum of happiness through him.

"I'd like that very much," Draco told Harry.

* * *

Draco hurried toward the infirmary at Hogwarts.

Earlier that evening, Harry had arrived at the Manor and they'd been indulging in before dinner drinks

when Draco had been contacted by Floo from Hogwarts. Headmistress Trelawney said little, only that she predicted dire consequences if Draco did not come to Hogwarts immediately to speak with one of his children.

When Draco frantically asked what was wrong, Trelawney had only babbled on about Cassiopeia needing to accept fate's hand in her life.

Harry had insisted on accompanying Draco to Hogwarts, so they'd Apparated to the main gates and almost run from there to the front steps.

Entering the infirmary, Madam Edgecombe stood to greet them, but Draco pushed past her, Harry following close behind him. They rushed to the bed where he saw Cassiopeia sitting on the edge. Her sobs were deep and heart-felt; her face was hidden in her hands.

"What happened? Are you in pain? We'll take you to St. Mungo's immediately where you'll get the best possible—"

"Father!" Cassiopeia said, lifting up her face and seeing Draco. "I'm not hurt. I'm just... I'm just..." The sobs transformed into wails.

Draco and Harry looked at each other, then at Madam Edgecombe who had joined them near the bed.

"I was told she became upset at the Sorting and would not calm down. I've given her a calming draught, but it's done little good. I thought it best to contact you before further measures were taken."

"Thank you," Draco said.

"You're welcome. I'll give you some privacy, then." Madame Edgecombe turned and headed for her office, sparing a moment to send a glance of dislike in Harry's direction.

Draco squatted down next to Cassiopeia's bed, and gently tugged her hands from her face. "Cassiopeia, talk to me. Tell me what's wrong."

"Look at me," she said. "Look at me!"

Draco saw nothing but a daughter who was precious to him, only much more rumpled, tear-stained, and red-nosed than usual.

She grabbed the front of the robe she wore and shook it at him. "I'm- I'm—"

"A Hufflepuff," Harry said and, for the first time, Draco noticed the badger symbol adorning his daughter's robe.

"It didn't work," Cassiopeia sniffed. Draco held out his handkerchief, but she'd already wiped her nose on her sleeve. "I told the Sorting Hat that I needed to be in Slytherin. That's where Columba and Scorpius are. Or Ravenclaw, with Lyra, if not Slytherin." She looked over at Harry accusingly. "You said the Sorting Hat would listen and it didn't."

"I-I—" Harry stuttered, then looked helplessly at Draco.

Draco pulled Cassiopeia close. "Hush, now," he said. He cradled her face in his hands and wiped her tears off her cheeks with his thumbs. "There's nothing to be upset about."

"I'm a Hufflepuff!" Cassiopeia cried, the declaration causing a new burst of tears to flow.

"You're also a Malfoy and I expect you to behave accordingly," Draco said, repeating the phrase he'd heard so often in his youth, but much less sternly than he'd ever heard his father say it.

Cassiopeia did her best to stifle her sobs, but tears still ran down her face.

The look of disappointment that Harry was giving him didn't even compare with the disappointment Draco felt toward himself. He'd been so absolutely sure that his children would be in Slytherin that he'd never even given a thought of how it might not be wise to disparage the other houses.

There was nothing to do now but lie through his teeth.

"Cassiopeia," he said softly. He moved a hand to her chin and tilted it up so that he could gaze into her eyes. "I never considered that you might be put into Hufflepuff because I didn't dare hope."

She sniffed loudly and looked at him, confused. Potter looked just as confused, but he wisely didn't say anything.

"While I knew there existed a slim possibility, what with sending all of you to Hogwarts, I didn't believe it might actually happen."

"What might happen?" Cassiopeia asked, then sniffed again.

"Think about it—Malfoys are now in Slytherin, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff, three of the four Hogwarts houses. Only Gryffindor remains and there's still Alhena, Rana, and Talitha to be Sorted.

Cassiopeia's eyes brightened. "A Malfoy could be in every house. We'd know everyone."

Draco nodded, then did a quick cleaning charm on her face and then a second one on the sleeve of her robe. "Think of the all the contacts."

"The alliances."

"Malfoys would rule the world," Draco stated.

"No," Cassiopeia said, shaking her head. "Just Britain."

"Maybe I should move," Harry said, causing both Malfoys to look at him.

"You won't move." Cassiopeia hopped off the bed and gave Harry a watery smile. "You love us too much, Uncle Harry."

Harry looking stunned, whether at the declaration that he loved them or being termed an uncle, was not clear. In the meanwhile, Draco rose to his feet and put his hand on his daughter's shoulder.

"Are you ready to return to Hufflepuff and show them that Malfoys are the best no matter what house they're in?" Draco asked her.

"Oh, Father. You're such a Slytherin. Hufflepuffs don't think like that." She went up on tiptoe and he bent so that she could put her arms around his neck and kiss his cheek. "But I love you, anyway."

"And I, you. Now let's get you back to Hufflepuff."

Draco strode to the door of the infirmary and opened it, revealing a short, frizzy-haired boy standing outside.

"Hello, sir. Hi, Uncle Harry. I came down to check on Cassie and was told I could wait out here for her."

"Cassie?" Draco repeated.

"You were worried about me?" Cassiopeia asked, stepped forward.

"Well... yeah."

"That was sweet of you."

The boy blushed. "You missed the tour that the prefects give all the new Hufflepuffs. I'll show you around, if you want."

"That would be great. You're a good friend, Hugo," Cassiopeia headed toward him, then hesitated, turning back to her father. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all," Draco lied. "Have fun with your friend."

Draco leaned up against the door frame and watched as Cassiopeia (definitely not Cassie) linked arms with the boy and walked down the hall until they turned a corner and disappeared. "Do you think I'll ever get to the point when I'll know how to do it right?"

"You're not doing too badly," Harry told him.

"I didn't do well in this instance." Sighing, Draco straightened up, and then looked back in the direction Cassiopeia had gone. "The good news is that she's already made a friend."

When Harry snickered, Draco looked at him sharply. "What?"

"The bad news," Harry said, unable to keep from smirking, "is that was Ron's youngest that your daughter walked off arm in arm with."

"Damn. Well, I'd better go nip it in the bud."

"How do you intend to do that?" Harry asked.

"I'm going to kill the little twerp."

"What! You can't kill him just because he's Ron's son."

"It's a perfectly good excuse." When Harry simply looked at him, Draco relented. "Fine," he huffed, "but if I end up related to Ron Weasley, it will be your fault."

* * *

Weak light filtered through the drapes, waking Draco. He stirred and yawned. Glancing at the clock he saw it was early yet, so he closed his eyes, hoping to fall back asleep. It was then he heard a soft snore to his right.

Blinking, he shifted around to see Harry asleep next to him.

They'd arrived back at the Manor and had dinner there, not in the formal dining room where Draco

usually ate, but at a small table in the library, near a fire that blazed in the hearth. As they ate, they'd discussed the various Hufflepuffs they'd known, good and bad, until late into the night.

Bleary-eyed because of the late hour, Harry had decided to take his leave. He'd stood up and promptly stumbled over his own feet. He'd mumbled a few token protests when Draco had grabbed him by his robe and dragged him up the stairs and down the hallway to his bedroom. They'd pulled off their clothes before climbing exhausted into bed.

Harry looked tired. Dark circles rimmed his eyes, undiminished by the few hours of sleep they'd had. The sheet had slipped off Harry's shoulders and was pooled at his waist. Although not nearly as lean as he'd been as a schoolboy, Harry had little to be ashamed of.

It occurred to Draco that this was another opportunity to move their courtship forward. He could slip under the sheet, take Harry's cock into his mouth, and be sucking him before he was fully awake.

He reached for the sheet, then paused. A few seconds of hesitation later, he pulled the sheet up so that it covered Harry's body once more, then turned over.

It's just because I'm too tired, Draco told himself as he tried to go back to sleep.

* * *

"I'm late," Harry said for the fourth time since he'd awakened. This time it was muttered, a marked contrast in the scream that Harry had emitted when he'd first looked at the clock upon awakening.

Draco leaned back against the headboard and watched avidly as Harry dressed.

"Since we're sleeping together—"

"We're not sleeping together," Harry said, snatching a sock from the floor.

"I'm sorry, Harry, but we did sleep together."

Harry ran his hand through his hair as he scanned the room for the match to the one he held in his hand. "I don't think it counts if all you do is sleep."

"It does. It says so in the rule book."

"What rule book?" Harry bent down and retrieved a sock from under the corner of the bed.

"Matilda Bulstrode's Book of Love, Like, and What Was Your Name Again? Millicent Bulstrode is her granddaughter."

Harry paused in putting on his sock to stare at Draco. "Millicent's grandmother wrote the Book of Love? No, wait, forget I said that. I'll concede we slept together. So? "

"So—I think it's time you introduced me to your friends."

"You've met my friends."

"Yes, when I was eleven. Not as adults. Also, I have a vague feeling that I may not have made a decent impression back then."

Harry let out a snort. "I don't see why you need to meet them again."

"If I don't, they will never say things like 'Harry, however did you manage to catch Draco's eye? He's far too intelligent and good looking for you'." Draco imitated Hermione's tone if not quite her voice perfectly.

"My friends would never say something like that."

"See! I told you so. That's why you must re-introduce me."

"Fine, I'll talk to Hermione about it. Are you happy now?"

Draco nodded his head. He'd wait for another time to discuss reintroducing Harry to his parents.

* * *

Draco studied the letter he'd written his parents. Three pages were filled with tales of his monumental suffering and the risk to his life due to that crazed maniac at Gringotts. Another page pointed out that he'd only taken on this challenge at their urging, so they were partly responsible, as well.

One paragraph mentioned the Sorting at Hogwarts. It was far better for Lucius to learn about it when he was thousands of miles away.

Should he tell them about his relationship with Harry, Draco wondered. Even thousands of miles in distance might not help matters. At last, Draco picked up the quill and wrote a post script.

P.S.—I am seeing someone. His identity may come as a surprise.

Quickly, Draco sealed the letter before he could have second thoughts.

* * *

"You're positive your friends know I'm coming."

"Yes. I talked to Hermione about reintroducing you to them and she insisted we have dinner together."

"What about Weasley? He may forget who I am."

"We can only hope," muttered Harry.

Before Draco could question him, the door was opened by Hermione.

"Hello, Harry," she said grimly, before turning to Draco and giving him a brilliant smile.

"Draco, how wonderful to see you! You look marvelous tonight. Is that a new robe?"

Draco was so shocked at the effusive greeting that he took a step backwards. It was only Harry's hand on the small of his back that kept him from retreating entirely. "It's nice to see you, too, Granger."

"Please call me Hermione. I haven't been a Granger in decades."

Draco handed Hermione the bottle of wine.

"Why, thank you, Draco. Ron and I are so pleased you could make it tonight," Hermione said while motioning them into her home and moving to stand next to Ron. She gave her husband a nudge with her elbow. "Aren't we, Ron?"

Weasley nodded several times. "Yes. Yes, that's right. We're glad you could make it because you're Harry's boyfriend. Any boyfriend of Harry's is a... um.... never mind."

"HELLO, WEASLEY," Draco shouted, startling everyone. "THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME."

"What?" Ron said, blinking in astonishment.

"YOU INVITED ME FOR DINNER AND I'M THANKING YOU."

Weasley, looking confused, glanced at Harry and Hermione, then back at Draco. "Um... right. I did. Sit yourself down on the couch while I... while I go help Hermione get everything ready." He began to tug on Hermione's arm. "You do need help in the kitchen, don't you?"

Hermione turned and gave Harry and Draco a weak smile before allowing Weasley to pull her out of the

room.

From the kitchen could be heard the sound of voices, but nothing was discernible except for Weasley's initial screech of "Could you explain to me why that git is out there sitting on our couch?"

Obviously Weasley had already forgotten.

Draco turned to Harry, who had his face in his hands. "Weasley's in worse shape than I supposed," Draco said. "And the experts were no help?"

"What experts?"

"For Merlin's sake, Harry, please tell me that you got your friend the best health care possible for the head injury he received."

"Oh right. The head injury." Harry's expression became sad. "Yes. We brought in all the experts, but there was nothing to be done. My advice is that if Ron says something strange, ignore it and pretend that everything's perfectly normal."

"Got it," Draco said. "You must have been through a lot with him. And Hermione - to take on a spouse so damaged..."

Harry nodded solemnly. "She's a saint."

* * *

Dinner wasn't nearly the ordeal that Draco had feared it would be. Hermione proved to be a passable cook, Harry kept smiling, and there'd been no bloodshed, so all in all, Draco couldn't complain.

He was shocked at the extent of Weasley's condition. Every time Draco attempted to make conversation with him or even say something simple like "PLEASE PASS THE SALT," Weasley would look at him in confusion. It was hard to believe the man was as bad off as he was and yet still working as an Auror. The Magical Law Enforcement Department had to be in very sad shape.

As bad as Weasley was, Draco was more concerned about Hermione. Throughout the dinner, she told Draco how handsome he looked, how intelligent he was, how he was incredibly charming - all of which were blatantly true, but he was shocked that she was actually saying so. In the meanwhile, she kept sending glares in Harry's direction.

It was only after dinner when Hermione pulled Harry into the kitchen to make coffee and fetch the dessert that Draco figured out what was going on. He and Weasley had adjourned to the parlour and spent a few minutes feeling awkward before Weasley excused himself to go to the bathroom. Draco took the opportunity to move outside the kitchen door where he just happened to be able to overhear part of Harry and Hermione's conversation.

"—-that's all there is to it," Harry was telling Hermione.

"I've seen the way you look at him. That's not all there is to it, Harry James Potter."

"Stay out of it, Hermione."

"He deserves better."

There was a moment of silence before Harry answered so quietly that Draco could barely hear him. "Yeah, he does."

"Oh, Harry. I'd feel bad for you if I weren't so angry. I can't believe you're making me feel the way I do toward Draco."

"You could always form a society," Harry said, more brightly. "And make badges."

That's all Draco heard for there were sounds of cups rattling followed by footsteps approaching the door. Hurriedly, he returned to the parlour.

He didn't understand the bit about the society and badges, though he did approve of badges in general. However, one thing was quite clear from what he'd overheard - Hermione wanted him for herself.

Draco scooted back in time for Harry to appear bearing a tray full of cups and saucers and coffee. Hermione carried a cake into the room after him. The scent of cake must have reached Weasley's nose for he returned to the parlour.

When Hermione sliced the cake, Draco couldn't help but notice that the piece Hermione handed to him was far larger than that she gave to her husband or that she'd passed to Harry.

The conversation was stilted and they all pretended that they were too focused on eating to talk. Finally, when there was nothing but crumbs on their plates, Hermione stood up and addressed them.

"Harry and Ron will do the dishes," Hermione said, giving them both a look that made them rise from their chairs and start gathering the plates and cutlery. "In the meantime, I plan on showing Draco our herb garden."

Dear God, Draco thought. She's going to make her move on me.

"That's all right," Draco said. "I don't have to see it."

"But I want you to see it."

"I wouldn't want to put you out like that."

"I insist," Hermione said, eyes glinting with determination.

Reluctantly, Draco nodded. He'd tried to avoid the coming unpleasantness. Now there was nothing left to do but let her say her piece and then let her down gently.

Together, they left the house, a Lumos from both of their wands lighting the path.

"I wanted to speak with you alone, Draco," Hermione said. "I'm concerned. Your relationship with Harry has been moving awfully fast. I'm worried about what might happen to you if it doesn't work out."

"Hermione, I know what's going on."

"No, Draco, I really don't think you do."

"I do," he assured her. "You haven't been very subtle about it. Even Weasley must realise what's happening."

"What do you mean?"

"You've been ignoring poor Weasley, giving Harry death glares all evening, and practically drooling all over me."

"What?"

"Now you've hauled me out to show me your garden by moonlight - a classic move, one that Pansy tried on me when we were ten."

"What!"

"While you've matured into a lovely and accomplished woman, I'm afraid that I will have to turn down your overtures. I know that living with Weasley must be trying and you have my utmost admiration for taking on the burden of being with him but, Mrs. Weasley, I will not have an affair with you."

The slap on his cheek was harder than the one he remembered from years before.

He watched with a smile on his face as Hermione flounced back to the house, her robes flapping to reveal nicely shaped ankles. If he'd realised how easily she might succumb to his charms, he would've chosen her, but it was too late. He was committed to Harry.

He felt oddly comfortable with that thought.

By the time he returned to the house, Hermione had barricaded herself in the back bedroom. The sound of things being broken could be heard through the walls along with muttered cursing. The poor woman was taking his rejection hard.

"What's going on?" Harry asked.

"Nothing you need to worry about," Draco assured him. "You're still the only one I want to sleep with."

Harry looked puzzled, but it was if a light had gone off in Weasley's head.

"What!" yelled Weasley. "You two really are boyfriends?"

"YES," Draco said patiently. "HARRY IS MY BOYFRIEND. THAT'S WHY I'M HERE TONIGHT."

Weasley stared at Draco for a moment before shaking his head and returning his gaze to Harry. "Oh, that's not right. That's not right at all. I can't believe you're serious about this git."

"Ron, shut up," Harry muttered.

"Harry!" Draco admonished. "Is that any way to speak to your best friend?"

Ron stopped mid-sputter to turn and stare at Draco. "What?"

"THAT'S RIGHT, WEASLEY. YOU AND HARRY WILL ALWAYS BE FRIENDS. OUR BEING BOYFRIENDS WON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE TO YOUR FRIENDSHIP."

"Merlin's tangled beard," Ron shrieked in a voice that contained notes that only dogs and Crups could hear as he stared at Harry and Draco. "Malfoy's gone mental and Harry's sleeping with him."

* * *

"I want to know what happened."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Harry." Draco sipped at his brandy, then leaned back against the couch in the newly refurbished Manor drawing room. He looked in disapproval at Harry who'd gulped down one glass and was well into his second. You'd think he'd had a trying evening versus spending it pleasantly with friends.

"Let me jog your memory. Hermione stormed in, announced in tones that would work better than a fire freezing charm that it was time for me to take you home. You have a mark on your cheek that looks remarkably like a handprint. Now what happened?"

"A gentleman doesn't discuss such things," Draco said, taking another sip of brandy and then placing his glass down on nearby table.

"Draco," Harry said warningly.

"If you insist, then I'll tell you that there's truth in the saying 'Beware the wrath of a woman scorned'." Draco rubbed his sore cheek. "Hermione's so physical. I always liked that in a woman."

"You're kidding," Harry said.

"I'm not. It was one of my favorite things about Astoria."

"I didn't mean that. I meant the other part. The bit about a woman scorned. You certainly can't mean

that Hermione... " Harry's voice trailed off to avoid putting the awful thought into words.

Draco arched an eyebrow at him.

"Hermione would never...."

"What can I say, I'm irresistible."

"Funny how we've managed to resist you for decades, then."

"Yes, but whatever resistance to my charms you all may have had has evidently worn off. First you, then Hermione. Weasley's a basket case, so he doesn't count, but I'm sure Longbottom will be knocking on my door any day now."

Draco thought for a moment, then his face brightened. "I do hope the resistance to me wears away for Oliver Wood soon."

Draco let out a laugh when Harry tackled him and then kissed him until he forgot all about anyone else.

* * *

Draco entered the Gringotts vault and, upon viewing the challenge, decided he needed to take the matter up with the Head Goblin.

In the center of the room, as before stood a platform and on the accursed platform was the rock.

As in his previous times, Draco did various spells to seek out hidden dangers, but found none. As before, he needed to grasp the rock before the trap was triggered.

This time, when Draco grasped the rock, nothing seemed to happen. Draco released the breath he hadn't realised that he was holding and took a step back off the platform. The walls and ceiling immediately begin to shrink, closing in around him.

Everything was coming closer except the door to the vault. That was now at the end of an extended hallway. The hallway stretched out in length and shrank in diameter as the seconds passed.

"Damn," Draco muttered, before heading toward the exit at a run. He didn't know if he was going to make it, but he was sure as hell going to try.

* * *

"He's evil," Draco said, pacing back and forth, still fuming about his failure at solving the latest Gringotts challenge.

"You're right." Pansy, sitting on the couch, didn't bother looking up from her copy of Witch Weekly. Savfair claimed to be busy with clients so she'd chosen to visit Draco.

"Incredibly evil," Draco continued. "I'm in competition with someone who'd give Voldemort a run for his money."

"Definitely." Pansy flipped a page.

"Did I tell you what the lunatic did to me?"

"Four times. Oh, look - your cousin Teddy won 'Most Charming Smile'."

"I was sweating afterwards. It was disgusting."

"Poor thing." Pansy studied the photograph. "I don't remember Professor Lupin being quite so dashing."

"He was."

When Pansy glanced up at him, Draco flushed. He still remembered Professor Lupin's kindness after the Boggart lesson. Having noted that Draco's Boggart was a Hippogriff, Lupin had pulled him aside after class and asked about his injury.

Draco thought about his younger self. How innocent he'd been - his biggest fear a Hippogriff. He'd had no idea of the things that lurked in the darkness of his future.

Lupin had spoken quietly with him and, for months afterwards, Draco had studied exceptionally hard and had always been on his best behavior in class. When it had later been revealed that the professor was a werewolf, Draco had felt personally betrayed.

"He was very dashing," Draco repeated, "in a quiet sort of way. You were too enthralled by me at the time to notice anyone else."

"But you weren't too enthralled by me."

Instead of stepping in it, Draco decided to take a detour.

"Let me tell you again about that lunatic opponent of mine. He's determined to kill me. He must be mad."

"Maybe not so much," Pansy stated flatly.

* * *

Two nights later, Draco studied Harry as he explained a case he'd worked on when he was a rookie Auror and was partnered with a more experienced one who'd bought into the entire 'Destroyer of Voldemort' image.

Harry's green eyes sparkled behind his glasses as he described the series of mishaps that had occurred when his partner had expected him to be all-powerful and assigned him near impossible tasks while Harry, thinking that all Aurors knew how to do things like that, had struggled to accomplish them.

As Draco sat on the decidedly worn, but comfortable couch in Harry's home after eating a simple dinner of takeaway together, and laughed, he realised that he enjoyed seeing Harry so animated.

He asked a series of questions about other Auror partners and Harry had launched into a second tale

when a voice was heard from the fireplace.

"Harry?" Molly Weasley's voice called.

Harry stood and moved closer to the fire. "Hello, Molly."

"Oh there you are, dear. I was hoping that you might join us Sunday night for dinner. Now that the children are back at Hogwarts, you must be terribly lonely. Ginny will be here and I'm sure you'll both find plenty to talk about together."

By the way Harry was delaying, it was obvious he was trying to turn down Mrs. Weasley's invitation politely, but could think of no way to do so.

Rising from the couch, Draco strode to the fireplace.

"I'm afraid that Harry has already agreed to spend the day with me."

Harry looked at Draco gratefully.

"Draco Malfoy?" Mrs. Weasley asked, a frown momentarily on her face, before she wiped it away. "I heard that Harry was seeing you. You're welcome to come too, of course."

"We were planning on Harry getting to know my younger children better," Draco lied smoothly.

Mrs. Weasley paused then added unhappily, "They're welcome to join us."

"And," Draco said, thinking fast. "My parents are due back from their trip soon."

"Hmmph," said Mrs. Weasley, finally hitting an obstacle that she wouldn't overcome. "I suppose it will have to wait for another time." She smiled at Harry. "Do take care of yourself, dear. One can never be too careful these days."

After Harry bid her good-bye and the fireplace darkened, Draco moved the fireplace screen into place.

"You really do need to screen your calls," he told Harry.

Harry shrugged and returned to the couch, plopping down onto it. "I've never had a reason to before. They'd never interrupt anything except me working on paperwork from the office."

"Never?" Draco asked, sitting down next to Harry. "No wife, no children around, and you didn't take the opportunity to entertain a series of lithesome young creatures?"

"No," Harry said. Their eyes met. "There's only been you."

Draco tried to wrap his mind around that, but couldn't. He'd been in mourning, a perfectly reasonable explanation for eschewing romantic or sexual companionship, but the idea of Harry sitting alone each night, doing paperwork, felt wrong.

Hadn't anyone else in the entire Wizarding world had the temerity to pursue Harry and ignore or push past any objections he had on the matter? Obviously, Malfoys were made of sterner stuff.

Harry was still staring at Draco intently. To diffuse the situation, Draco relaxed back against the couch and grinned.

"So," Draco said. "That was your ideal woman."

"Oh, shut up," Harry muttered, leaning back against the couch, too.

"How will I ever hope to compete with her?"

"Shut it."

"Perhaps I should be noble and give you up."

"Draaaco."

"I don't suppose Arthur Weasley would do the same." Draco's eyes lit up with amusement. "But perhaps you can convince him to share her. Have yourselves a threesome."

"Arrgh!" Harry said, tackling Draco and sending him sprawling onto the couch cushions.

"Hmm.... Talking about Molly and Arthur excites you to the point that it makes you sexually aggressive." Draco mused, lying prone under Harry. "I must remember that for future reference."

Being straddled by Harry, his weight pressing down on him, was more enjoyable than Draco would care to admit.

Harry got a mischievous expression on his face. A second later, he plunged both hands into Draco's hair and began mussing it.

"Not the hair," Draco cried, trying to stop laughter from escaping.

"Yes the hair! Although there's not all that much of it anymore."

"That's heresy, you foul beast!" Draco attempted, but not terribly hard, to get Potter to stop.

"It'll be so messy, people will think we're related," Potter said, his hands continuing their mission to make Draco's hair spring up from all sides.

"No! You'll be forced to marry me, then, because no one else will."

Harry's hands stilled. His smile dropped from his face as he stared at Draco.

Silently, Draco cursed himself. He'd been considering how best to propose to Harry. He'd imagined it many times in his head—he'd be dressed in his most elegant robes, they'd have a fine dinner followed by a walk under the stars. Fairies would be hired to flit about them.

Bursting out with it like that hadn't been part of the plan.

"Or," Draco said, "You could marry me for other reasons."

Harry moved off of Draco, looking upset, then got to his feet. He took several steps away, distancing himself. "Draco, I need to tell you something and... and it's not going to be easy for me to say."

"No!" Draco leapt off the couch. Harry couldn't reject him. He couldn't! He hurried to Harry's side. "Don't answer now. Think about it for a few days. Promise me that you'll think about it?"

"Look, Draco, you don't understand—"

Draco's lips covered Harry's, preventing any words of possible rejection from leaving his mouth. Draco drew back after a moment.

"Please, Harry," he breathed out, before kissing him again. "Please," he murmured against Harry's lips.

Harry stepped back. "Stop. I-I-I can't think when you do that. I do things - things I'd never planned on doing."

"Good." Draco moved closer, but Harry held out a hand, stopping him.

"Don't."

"Then promise me that you'll think about what I asked."

Harry stood quietly for a moment. "I'll make you a deal. If you ask me again in a few days, I'll give you my answer."

"Agreed."

Draco Apparated back to the Manor in a good mood—until he saw the letter from his solicitor on his desk. It was a reminder of the Wizengamot court date and of a meeting they had beforehand to discuss the matter. It was then he realised that at no time, when he feared that Harry was going to reject him, had he thought of the custody suit soon before the Wizengamot.

Somehow he'd lost sight of the purpose of this courtship. He couldn't afford to lose focus of it. His children were at stake.

And he needed everyone to know that Harry was his before the trial. Even if Harry didn't agree to it,

Draco knew the way to do it, too.

* * *

It was so easy. A few indiscreet conversations, an anonymous owl sent to The Daily Prophet, a trip to the jewelers on Diagon Alley where he ordered an engagement ring in a voice a bit too loud.

When the newspaper arrived the next day during breakfast, Draco put down his toast and flipped immediately to Rita Skeeter's 'A Bug on the Wall' column where all the gossip was printed.

Draco's eyes latched onto his name. It was there in black and white—speculation that he and Harry would soon be announcing their engagement. A photo of each of them accompanied the article.

Draco felt as victorious as he used to whenever he caught the Snitch. He'd done it. To a good portion of the Wizarding World, he and Harry were as good as married. Wearing a smile of triumph, Draco started to read the entire article.

His smile dropped slowly away. Rita had been a bit more thorough than Draco would've liked. Along with speculation that he and Harry might soon announce their engagement was a snide insinuation that it had come at an advantageous time for Draco. It mentioned that the Wizengamot would shortly decide if Draco was a fit parent, or if custody of his children should be turned over to the Greengrasses.

Slamming the paper down hard enough that the tea in his cup sloshed over, Draco let out a curse.

"Father?"

Draco looked down the table to see Alhena and Rana staring at him with wide, frightened eyes. Talitha who was busy scooping the jam off her toast with her fingers paused, sticky fingers half-way to her mouth.

"It's nothing," Draco murmured. "Finish eating, otherwise you'll be late for your lessons."

Alhena and Rana nodded, though neither returned to eating with any enthusiasm.

After he saw Alhena and Rana off to their lessons and sent Talitha to be bathed by a house-elf, he paced back and forth in the drawing room. The article had done what he'd wanted, clearly implying that he and Harry were an established couple.

As for the second part of it, he could only hope that Harry hadn't read it. He couldn't, no, he wouldn't lose Harry over something that Skeeter woman had written. Fortunately, Harry knew what Skeeter was like. Draco remembered fourth year when she'd printed up the outlandish tales he'd told her, embellishing them even more so in the process. Surely Harry wouldn't believe the article.

Draco took a deep breath. Of course Harry wouldn't believe it, even if he did bother reading it.

Beginning to calm down, Draco was startled when Pansy arrived by Floo carrying a copy of the newspaper. Pansy never arrived by Floo. She hated ashes on her clothing and thought Apparating was much more civilised.

"Did you see the papers today?" Pansy demanded, not bothering to inspect her robe for damage.

"Yes, I must make an appointment to speak with their editor. It would be nice if they didn't continue to use that photograph taken when I was eighteen. "

"You didn't see it," Pansy said. "My life is over, it's your boyfriend's fault, and you don't even know about it."

She thrust her copy of The Daily Prophet at him. "Front page. Bottom right column."

As Draco read, his body began to shake. His hands felt distant from him, as if they belonged to someone else. Pansy was saying something, but he couldn't hear her over the blood pounding in his head.

The words didn't make any sense. His mind refused to comprehend their meaning at first, but gradually it began to sink in.

Swindler Preys on Fears

A swindler, posing as an American pureblood with an expertise in potions, has tried to cheat Wizards all across Britain of almost one million Galleons.

Rick Savfair, 43, preying on fears, especially of those Purebloods among us, claimed that he had discovered the reason why some children are born Squibs. Backed by a mishmash of Muggle science and pure malarkey, Savfair claimed that he had created a potion that would ensure parents that no child born of their loins would be a Squib.

The Investigator in charge of the case, who the Magical Law Enforcement Department declines to name, spent weeks compiling evidence, going so far as to infiltrate the most stately of drawing rooms, and the inner circle of Pureblood society.

Draco didn't feel the paper drop from his fingers. He didn't realise that he had, himself, fallen to the floor until he looked up to see Pansy squatting next to him, her voice loud and anxious as she shook him by the shoulders.

"Draco? Draco?"

"He used me," Draco whispered. "He never... not at any time."

"But you were using Potter, too?" She studied his face and her voice grew quiet. "Weren't you?"

Draco could only look at her, the truth easily readable on his face.

Lowering herself next to him on the floor, she leaned against him. "Oh, Draco. I'm so very sorry."

Unable to form the words to answer her, he patted her hand, which was latched around one of his arms and gripping tightly.

"We're quite a pair, aren't we?" Pansy asked. "Both of us falling for a fraud."

Draco nodded.

How long they sat there, Draco didn't know. Slowly, feeling began to creep in. It started in his back, which was getting sore. Despite the thickness of the carpeting beneath them, his arse was none too comfortable, either. His head throbbed as he felt a migraine coming on.

Looking over at Pansy, he noticed for the first time that under her makeup, her nose was red and roughened from crying.

Savfair had hurt Pansy. Potter had known that he was a con man and had done nothing to warn her, so Potter was at fault, too.

Rising to his feet, he bent to give Pansy a hand up. "Would you mind staying here at the Manor until I return?" he asked. "I might be a while and I would rather Talitha, along with Alhena and Rana when they come home from their lessons, not be left alone with the house-elves."

"Of course. I certainly don't wish to go home and be inundated with owls or, much worse, people calling on me under the guise of sympathy, but relishing my predicament. How long do you plan to be gone?"

"Indefinitely," Draco said, pulling his wand from his robe pocket. "I'm going to see Potter and I'm going to kill the bloody bastard."

* * *

Icily polite, Draco had asked for directions to Harry's office. He'd been shown to a door that was only few doors down from the Head Auror's office that Harry had occupied for several years before stepping aside and returning to regular Auror duties.

Before he'd left the Manor, Pansy had tried to reason with him. The only thing that had made a dent in his resolve to off Harry was that if he went to Azkaban, he'd never see his children again.

He rapped firmly on the door and heard Harry's clear, strong voice telling him to "Come in."

Harry's voice wasn't supposed to affect him anymore, Draco thought, stifling the small feeling of awareness and arousal that rose within him. They were over and done with. Forever. Reminding himself that Harry was dead to him, Draco opened the door.

"Draco!" Harry leapt up, a smile shining from his face. "You should've owled me that you were coming. I'd planned a lunch meeting, but I'll cancel it."

"Don't bother, Potter."

Harry's smile faltered, before valiantly returning, though much diminished. "It's not a bother. Really. There's a new place that opened up off Diagon Alley. The food's supposed to be fantastic, though the place might be a bit beneath you."

"That's not the only thing that's beneath me," Draco sneered.

Harry stiffened. "What are you talking about?" he asked in a flat tone, indicating that, despite his words, he had a good idea of what was going through Draco's head.

"Allow me to congratulate you on a job well done. What a shame that you're already as high in the echelons of the Magical Law Enforcement Department as you can go. Now they can't promote you for going above and beyond the call of duty. Perhaps you could get a raise in pay instead."

Draco let his eyes travel down Harry's body, then leisurely make their way back up to the angry flush on Harry's face. "I'd be happy to attest that you're worth it," Draco leered.

"Stop it," Harry hissed through his teeth.

"Stop what, Potter? Stop implying that you used your body to get what you wanted from me? That you whored yourself out to solve a case?" Draco's tone hardened. "Believe me, I'm not implying anything."

"That's not the way it was."

"That's exactly the way it was!" Draco shouted. He closed his eyes briefly and breathed deeply, regaining his momentary loss of control.

"It's not," Harry insisted. "I was desperate for a break in the investigation. You came along and... and I should've told you the truth," Harry said. "I know that now."

"You should've." Draco glided forward and his voice became husky. "If I'd known what you'd be willing to do, I might've made better use of you." He reached out and gripped Harry's chin firmly. "I never did fuck that pretty mouth of yours. Never rammed my cock down your lying throat."

Wrenching away, Harry glared at him. "Shut up, Malfoy."

"Tell me," Draco said with a smile on his face that didn't reach his eyes, "did you ever ask yourself why it was so easy to get close to me? How you managed to charm me when we'd once hated each other?"

The expression on Harry's face was exquisite as it occurred to him that there might have been agendas at play other than his own.

"Read Rita's column," Draco said as he strode toward the door and opened it. "It's several pages back from the article describing your... brave heroic actions."

Ignoring the people milling about in the hallway, Draco exited Harry's office. When he shut the door, he heard it thud closed with an undeniable finality.

* * *

Draco slid into his chair at the table that faced the Wizengamot. A few feet away, seated at a second table, were his in-laws, Osric and Vera Greengrass, along with their remaining daughter, Daphne. Osric was stroking his long beard, which lay thickly on the chest of his thin, stick-like body. Vera, plump with red hair that could only have come from a potion, sat primly beside him. Both were smiling.

Daphne turned to smirk at Draco, making him wonder what tricks her family had up the sleeves of their robes.

Leaning toward his solicitor, he whispered, "They look too confident. Is there something I should know?"

Greg Goyle stopped retrieving papers out of his briefcase, and turned toward him. He considered the matter for a moment. "Before I say anything, do you promise not to overreact?"

"When have you known me to overreact?" Draco said

"You get mad, screech, and then do something supremely stupid, usually by breaking something."

"That was years ago. I was a child."

"Actually, I was thinking of yesterday in my office when you found out how much the Greengrasses were planning to ask for in child support. You know, my mother gave me that inkpot you shattered."

"Money's the real reason behind this, you know. They want the child support they'd get from me."

"Yes, Draco," Greg sighed. He didn't roll his eyes because Draco, besides being his best friend, paid him a small fortune to act professionally. "You told me that several times. I couldn't get you to shut up about it. Their financial situation coupled with the demands they've made, should they win custody, bolsters our case."

"Then why are they acting like the Kneazle that swallowed the Snitch?"

"You're not going to like it," Greg said.

"Tell me."

Greg took a deep breath. "Yesterday I was informed there'd be calling another person to the stand to testify."

"Who?"

"Potter. From what I could glean, someone friendly with the Greengrasses heard you and Potter argue and told them about it."

Harry was going to testify against him. Draco wanted to get mad, screech, and break something.

He glanced toward the Minister of Magic who'd settled into her chair. McGonagall was as sharp-eyed as

ever. She'd probably notice if he broke Greg's briefcase over Osric Greengrass' head.

Minister McGonagall nodded in his direction when she spotted him looking her way. Although he hadn't voted for her for Minister, he was relieved that she was currently occupying that chair. Though McGonagall had favoured her house at Hogwarts and was almost insanely obsessed at winning at Quidditch, when it came to individuals, she was fair. He still remembered how she'd scolded the fake Moody on his behalf and he'd heard about her tearing a strip off of Potter because he and George Weasley had ganged up on him on the pitch in fifth year.

The best thing about McGonagall was he knew that she'd put the interests of the children first. Remembering that fact had helped him sleep at night since this business had come up.

But now Harry was going to testify and McGonagall might be swayed by what he said. Harry, who Draco had called a whore.

There was a noise in the back of the courtroom and Draco turned to see the man occupying his thoughts enter and seat himself on a bench. Resolutely, Draco returned his attention to the front of the courtroom and tried not to think about how good Harry looked.

McGonagall banged her gavel and peered at them over the rim of her glasses, calling the courtroom to order. The other members of the Wizengamot, who'd been chatting among themselves, quieted. Draco and Greg rose to their feet, as did the Greengrasses.

"A complaint was filed by Osric and Vera Greengrass stating that they believe that the custody of the children of their daughter, Astoria, deceased, and Draco Malfoy should be turned over to them. The Wizengamot has read your complaint. Mr. Greengrass, is there anything you'd care to add?"

"Draco Malfoy was a Death Eater during the last war. His father, who resides at Malfoy Manor, was also—"

"Mr. Greengrass," McGonagall interrupted. "That was all in your complaint which I stated that we'd read. Are you under the impression that the members of the Wizengamot lack the ability to comprehend what

we've read?"

"No, but—"

"Then let me repeat my question—Do you have anything to add to your case that you did not write in your complaint?"

Osric bobbed his head up and down. "Yes, Madam Minister. I'd like to call for Marietta Edgecombe, who currently serves as Healer at Hogwarts to testify."

Draco groaned inwardly. Over the next ten minutes he had to listen to Madam Edgecombe describe how Cassiopeia had been inconsolable after her Sorting due to her fear of disappointing her father. Greg mitigated it by asking if other children had ever been upset at their Sorting. He then had Edgecombe relate how Draco's presence had calmed his daughter.

Edgecombe's testimony was followed by that of a professor from Beauxbatons who'd disagreed with Draco's decision to transfer his daughters to Hogwarts.

"Do you believe that the education at Hogwarts is somehow inferior to that of Beauxbatons?" McGonagall demanded of the professor, who stammered, then quickly began backtracking.

At last, Osric called Harry Potter to the stand.

"You have recently been in a relationship with Draco Malfoy, have you not?" Osric asked.

Harry nodded. "I have."

"We have heard Marietta Edgecombe testify that you were present when Mr. Malfoy visited his daughter

at Hogwarts. Was that the only time that you have observed Mr. Malfoy with his children?"

"No, it wasn't."

"You're a parent yourself, are you not?"

"I am."

"In your presence, have you ever heard Mr. Malfoy speak to his children or behave in a manner that shocked you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Yes. Did you hear what Mr. Malfoy told his daughter would happen if one of them were Sorted into a House other than Slytherin?"

"I am," Harry said, "But he didn't mean it."

"His own daughter feared that he did. Can you tell me what those threats consisted of?'

For a moment, Harry looked mutinous. Finally, he said quietly, "He threatened to disown them."

Draco tried not to squirm in his seat when McGonagall looked at him disapprovingly. Murmurs ran through the Wizengamot.

"Disowning his child for daring to be Sorted into a House not of his liking," Osric said, making sure everyone had heard it. "Not exactly the ideal parent, is he?"

"No," Harry said. "He's not the ideal parent."

Chatter spread around the courtroom at Harry's words. The Greengrasses beamed, pleased with the testimony. Osric smiled at the members of Wizengamot, satisfied that he'd won his case.

"He is, however," Harry said in a louder a voice, "one of the most dedicated parents I've seen."

Vera and Daphne gasped and Osric spun to look at Harry.

"Draco doesn't know everything about being a parent," Harry said. "At times, he's dictatorial with his children. At others, he's much too lax and allows them to twist him 'round their fingers. But he's there, every day, trying. Trying his best to do what's right. Trying his best to keep them safe. Trying his best to be the parent they need. Then, at the end of the day, he goes to bed only to wake the next morning, and do it all over again.

"There is no doubt in my mind that Draco would do anything for his children." Harry's gaze shifted so that his eyes met Draco's. "Absolutely anything."

"But... but making an effort at parenting is not all that it takes. Mr. Malfoy has been known to make bad decisions in the past. Surely you do not trust Mr. Malfoy's judgment? He was a Death Eater!"

"I would trust him with my life."

"But he was a Death Eater!"

"I believe Mr. Potter has already answered that question," McGonagall said. "If you have nothing further to ask him, let's proceed. Mr. Goyle, do you have any questions for this witness?"

Greg nodded. "I have just one. Harry, you said you'd trust Draco with your life. Would you trust him with your children's lives?"

"Yes," Harry said firmly.

Draco decided it was a good thing he'd never got around to cursing James Potter.

"Thank you," Greg said. "That's all I have for this witness."

Harry left the stand.

The trial concluded shortly after when McGonagall, having enough of such nonsense, called for a vote. When the raised hands were counted, Draco won by a vast majority.

Ecstatic, Draco hugged Greg, then hurried forward to thank Professor McGonagall who sternly reminded him that his children were an enormous responsibility. She softened momentarily and wished him good luck. Draco then spent an inordinate amount of time smirking at the Greengrasses.

By the time he was done, Harry was gone.

* * *

The night after the trial, Draco felt worn out. Most of his focus and energy had been spent anticipating the trial and now it was over. He'd make an early night of it by taking a bath, then going to bed.

He was in the library, picking a book out to read for a short while before bed, when there was a loud banging on the front door. Wrapping his bathrobe around him more tightly, Draco waved back Feely, indicating that he would get the door himself.

The banging continued. Draco gripped his wand tightly, wondering who might be at his door. It was much too late for ordinary visitors. Opening the door, he sighed in exasperation when he saw that it was Harry.

"Potter? If you think all is forgiven because of your testimony, then you're sadly mistaken," Draco said, then rapidly stepped back as Harry barged past him and into the foyer.

"Savfair has escaped from custody," Harry said. He looked about the room wildly as if sure Savfair was hiding behind the antique grandfather clock.

Draco shut the door and scowled at Harry. "And you're here instead of chasing him down because...?"

"Until he's apprehended, I'm going to stay here to ensure your safety. He may be bent on revenge."

"You're the one who arrested him."

"That's right. And, as far as he knows, we're a couple. He might plan to get at me through you."

Harry shot a glance at Draco's attire. Draco refused to blush. What did it matter that Harry saw him not at his best? It wasn't as if they were seeing each other anymore.

Pulling his gaze away from Draco, Harry turned and began to prowl about the room. He brandished his wand like a sword he'd use to slay anything that threatened Draco. His actions made Draco want to do

odd things, like kick him for thinking that Draco was the type that needed to be rescued. Actually, that wasn't so odd. Since their falling out, Draco had often thought of kicking Harry.

No, not Harry. It was Potter now. Draco had better remember that.

From above, Draco heard Rana call down. "Father? What's going on?"

Glancing up to the landing above, he saw Rana and Alhena looking over the banister at him and Potter with wide eyes.

"No need to worry," Draco assured them. "Potter's acting like a panicked idiot, that's all."

"Is a panicked idiot worse or better than a git?" Alhena asked.

"Or a prat?" added Rana.

"Let's leave all the discussion of Potter's failings for the morning, when we'll have more time. For now, go back to bed."

Draco watched them head back toward their rooms, then turned to see Potter watching them, too.

"Upstairs—is the only access through the windows and these stairs?"

"Yes. You don't think Savfair would be low enough to attack my children, do you?"

"He's desperate. Who knows what a desperate man might do?"

Until that moment, Draco had thought that Harry's concerns had little merit. But if his children were in danger, that was a different story.

"Feely, Peevy, and Stan!" Draco yelled.

Three house-elves popped into the foyer.

"Stan?" Harry repeated, more to himself than anyone.

"The children might be in danger. I want each of you to guard them tonight, with your life, if necessary."

The house-elves all exclaimed how they were honoured to be chosen and how they wouldn't allow anyone near their charges. They would've continued to proclaim their joy at being trusted with so exalted a task, if Draco hadn't waved it aside and ordered them to the children's bedrooms.

"I should contact my friends. Have them help patrol the grounds," Harry said.

"No, Potter. You are not inviting a gaggle of Gryffindors to go galumphing through my gardens. Besides, the Manor is well warded. You must be invited in by a Malfoy or by a house-elf through instructions by a Malfoy."

Harry glanced at the door. "You didn't invite me in."

Draco suddenly found the tapestry on the far wall, which he'd seen every day of his life, extraordinarily interesting. "I may have forgotten to adjust the wards so that they didn't admit you."

Harry paused in pacing back and forth like a caged lion. "What?"

"An oversight that will be corrected as soon as possible."

"Maybe it wasn't an oversight," Harry said, prowling toward him. His voice, a low growl, caused a shiver to run through Draco. Harry being all dominant was not turning him on. It wasn't.

"Maybe," Harry continued, closing in and forcing Draco to retreat, "you wanted me here."

Draco's back hit the door. Harry continued on until he was pressed against Draco, his arms trapping him on each side. "Maybe," he said," tilting his head so that his mouth was almost nuzzling Draco's jaw, "you wanted me here. Wanted me here with you."

Inwardly Draco cursed his reaction to a take-charge Harry.

"Are you really here to protect me and my children?" Draco said, as Harry continued to hover a hair's breadth away.

Harry nodded, then rotated his hips so that his hard length ground into Draco.

"Then, might I suggest that you seek out your villain somewhere other than in my trousers?"

Harry stopped what he was doing and stared at Draco, then carefully levered himself away and took a step back.

"You're right. Duty comes first. But when Savfair is caught, you and I are going to have a little talk."

Talking Draco could do. It was being around Harry while they talked that Draco wasn't sure he could handle.

* * *

Draco woke to a light touch on his head. His eyes fluttered open and he saw Harry leaning over him, a soft smile on his lips. He returned the smile sleepily and reached up to latch his hands around Harry's neck. As he pulled him down for a kiss he remembered that they weren't together anymore and moved his hands to Harry's chest so that he might shove Potter away.

Unfortunately, his shove had no effect. Potter remained straddling Draco's prone form on the couch.

"I take it Savfair has not stormed the Manor and killed us all yet," Draco said.

Harry nodded. "I've been keeping careful watch."

"Yes," Draco said rolling his eyes. "Obviously you've maintained constant vigilance while molesting me in my sleep."

"I was brushing your hair back from your face," Harry explained. As if to prove the truth of that statement, Harry's hand smoothed over Draco's hair again.

"Stop it."

Harry's hand stilled, then moved to the cushion of the couch next to Draco's head. "Okay." His eyes roved down Draco's body where his bathrobe was gaping, showing a large expanse of bare chest. "You know, I won't let anyone hurt you. You're mine."

Draco fought the urge to pull his bathrobe closed again. "Now I know the real reason Voldemort's curse bounced off of you as a baby. You're head's just that thick. Since you didn't get it before, let me make it clear - we broke up. I'm not yours."

"But you are. I used you to get information on Savfair. I admit that. I needed to meet him, be a part of his social circle, if I was going to get the evidence I had to have to arrest him."

"You didn't need to kiss me or... or anything else to do that."

"No, I didn't, but I couldn't help it. I couldn't stop myself. Ginny had left years before. The children were at Hogwarts most of the time. I... I worked and didn't do much else. Then came you. You made me feel good again. Alive again."

"Are you trying to make me regret my actions even more, Potter?"

"I told Ron and Hermione that I was using you, much to Hermione's disgust. All it took was one evening together and they knew it was a lie, even before I did. You see, I didn't expect to feel anything for you. I didn't expect that I would fall in love with you. I didn't expect you, Draco."

"You didn't expect me?" Draco repeated, gazing into Harry's eyes.

"No," Harry murmured.

Draco shoved his knee hard and fast into Harry's groin. Harry let out a low scream and fell off the couch.

He curled into a ball on the floor. Draco leapt off the couch and stood over him.

"How about that, Potter? Did you expect that?"

Draco was gloating with satisfaction at achieving some measure of revenge when there was a loud pounding at the door.

It was Savfair, Draco thought. He looked down near his feet to where Harry was writhing. It was Savfair and Draco had just unmanned his protection. Not only was Harry not able to guard Draco, he wasn't able to guard himself.

"I'm sorry, Harry," Draco said. "I didn't mean it. All right, I did, and it felt bloody fabulous, but now you've got to pull yourself together." Spying Harry's wand in his robe pocket, Draco pulled it out and placed it in Harry's hand.

"Do you think you can use it?" Draco asked. The reply was another groan.

Draco took a deep breath, then gripped his own wand firmly.

"Don't worry, Harry. Though you're a complete and utter berk, I'll protect you."

The pounding was louder. So far, the wards were holding, but they might not last.

"We didn't live through everything we have," Draco continued, "we didn't survive Voldemort, we didn't come so close to being together only to die at the hands of some fast-talking, small-time, low-born American."

Harry managed to unclench his eyelids and stare at Draco.

"This isn't it for us, Harry. This isn't how we end. I won't let it be."

Draco had no time to say anything further because a familiar voice accompanied the pounding at the door.

"Malfoy! Harry! Are you in there? Answer me!"

"That's Weasley," Draco said, lowering his wand.

Draco strode out into the foyer and yanked open the door.

"COME IN, WEASLEY," Draco said, allowing him past the Manor's wards.

"Have you seen Harry?" Weasley asked, glancing about. Through the open doorway, he spied Harry on the floor and raced to him, kneeling by his friend's side.

"Harry, what happened? Are you hurt?"

"Uhhhh," Harry groaned.

Weasley turned toward Draco. "What happened?"

"HE TRIPPED," Draco said.

"Tripped?" Weasley looked to where Harry was clutching himself. "How'd he trip and hurt his... no, never mind. I don't want to know." Weasley stood up but continued to give Harry concerned looks. "I came to

tell both of you that Savfair's been captured. He was posing as a Muggle and was taking the Chunnel to France."

"THANK YOU FOR LETTING US KNOW," Draco said. "NOW I HAVE TO HEAL HARRY."

"Go ahead."

"IT REQUIRES A POTION."

Weasley continued to stand there.

"ONE THAT'S RUBBED ON."

"Oh. Oh!" Ron backed toward the exit. "I'll just leave you two to it, then."

As Weasley exited, Draco summoned the potion from the storage cabinet where they kept such things. He prayed it worked.

As things turned out, he might want that part of Harry to be in good condition, after all.

* * *

"I can't believe you did that," Harry said for the fourth time. He was still on the floor, propped up on his elbows and watching Draco.

"Excuse me," Draco said. "Do you even know me? Of course I did it."

"But I testified for you."

"You told the truth. Do you think you should be rewarded for that?"

"Yes!" Harry said belligerently. A few seconds later, he shook his head. "No, you're right. My telling the truth shouldn't change things. You kneeing me will, though. I'm not sure if I'll ever trust you next to my bits after this."

Draco looked pointedly at where his hand was rubbing the potion into Harry's skin and where Harry was reacting favorably to it. The potion had done the job with the first application, but Draco continued to rub it on Harry. He'd already used twice as much potion as necessary.

"Really? Should I stop then?"

"No!" Harry said. "I mean, not yet. It's beginning to feel better. Perhaps a bit more potion might do the job."

"If this hasn't fixed you up yet, then I'm afraid we may have to try something else. There's one thing I know, but it's ancient magic. It almost always works, though."

"What do you have to do?" Harry asked warily.

"I need to kiss it better."

Breaking out into a grin, Harry laid back on the floor and spread his legs. "I guess I'll just have to suffer through it."

* * *

Like most mornings, Draco woke to Talitha's demands for her breakfast. Unlike most mornings, he woke up next to Harry, who was lying on his side, looking at him.

"Hey," Harry said softly.

"Morning." Draco leaned forward and brushed a kiss on Harry's lips.

"Shouldn't you get Talitha?"

"In a minute. Once in a while, I luck out and she falls back asleep."

Harry nodded. His fingers toyed with the edge of the sheet. "So - we're good, then?"

Draco thought on that for a moment. Neither of them had been honest at the start, both of them having hidden agendas. Beside him, Harry was worrying at his lower lip, which was already beginning to redden and swell, making it more delicious looking.

"All is forgiven," Draco said magnanimously. "As long as you spend every day of your life making it up to me with prodigious amounts of pampering and sex."

Harry grinned. "I think I can do that."

"Good." Draco waved a hand toward his lower regions. "You can get started with that now."

Before Harry could do anything, Talitha let loose with a second volley.

"I'll go get her, if you want," Harry volunteered.

Draco nodded and relaxed back into bed while Harry quickly donned Draco's bathrobe. Draco's rest was interrupted by a series of yelps and crashes and Harry racing back into the bedroom with Stan, the house-elf, behind him, trying to hit Harry with a lamp.

Sheepishly, Draco remembered that he'd never told the house-elves that they didn't have to guard the children anymore and Stan took his job very seriously.

* * *

Harry and Draco were still at the breakfast table, it being Sunday. Alhena and Rana had been there earlier and questioned their father as to why Mr. Potter was still around. They'd accepted easily enough Draco's explanation, which was a complete and utter lie, then left to go play in the gardens under Stan's watchful eye.

"For some reason, I'm starving this morning," Harry said as he piled more sausages on his plate, then bit into his third slice of toast.

"You did work up an appetite last night," Draco said.

Harry shook his head. "Most workday mornings I spend an hour at the gym. I'm never this hungry afterwards." He smoothed a hand down his flat belly. "I'd better be careful. Too much time spent with you and I might wind up getting big."

Draco's mind went to the luncheon Harry had attended earlier in their relationship and Lyra's comment about male pregnancies. He decided that as soon as possible he needed to pick up a copy of Beauxbâtons: les Révélations.

Finishing up the sausages, Harry mournfully eyed the empty tray.

"There's more toast," Draco said, offering him the some, which he accepted. "Though the jam is almost gone, there's still plenty of honey left.

Harry paled, taking the jam instead and scrapping up the remainder from the sides. "No honey, please. I had a recent run-in with honey and would rather not encounter it again anytime soon."

"With honey?" Draco said, a suspicion forming. "It didn't happen to occur at Gringotts, did it?"

"How did you....you git! You set that up! I almost drowned. Then I had to wash my hair half a dozen times to get it out."

"If it improved your hair, then I've made a significant contribution to the world and can die a happy man."

"Oh, you're going to die, all right."

Before Draco could reply, a clatter of noise and voices could be heard coming from the front hall.

Draco grabbed his wand and headed for the source with Harry behind him. It couldn't be Savfair. It couldn't be. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement was filled with idiotic Aurors, but even they couldn't be so incompetent as to allow a prisoner to escape twice.

When Draco reached the front hall he realised that the situation was worse than an escaped prisoner bent on revenge.

His parents had returned home from their trip.

Standing in the middle of the foyer, Lucius tossed the sunglasses he'd been wearing to the side, where Feely, well used to his master's habits, caught them in mid-air. He did the same with his cane, and Feely caught it too.

While Narcissa was enlarging various suitcases and trunks, directing Peevy on where to take them, Lucius was studying his surroundings intently, as if he suspected Draco of doing all sorts of destructive things to his home during his absence. Draco made a mental note to keep his father out of the repaired drawing room for as long as possible.

It was then that Lucius spied Draco and Harry standing nearby.

"Draco!" Lucius roared as he strode further into the Manor. "We go away on a trip and have returned to what must be an alternate dimension. Or, Draco, have you in fact lost your mind and become involved with Harry Potter?"

Harry stepped forward and wrapped an arm around Draco's waist. "Draco asked me to marry him," Harry said, conveniently leaving out the part where he hadn't answered and their subsequent break up.

Draco would've complimented Harry on his subterfuge if he hadn't been staring at him in open-mouthed shock.

"Dear Merlin," Lucius swore.

Draco began to step away, but Harry grabbed him by the shoulders and kissed him thoroughly, before turning to face Lucius. "Aren't you going to congratulate us, Dad?"

Lucius' mouth opened but no discernible words came out, only sputtering noises. After a few seconds of that, he turned to his wife and hissed, "Narcissa, do something!"

Narcissa eased past Lucius to where Harry and Draco stood united.

"Congratulations and welcome to the family, Harry, dear," Narcissa said, giving Harry a kiss on the cheek.

"Thank you, Mother," Draco murmured when she gave him a kiss, as well, along with a quick hug.

"Thanks," Harry echoed faintly.

"I suppose you haven't planned your honeymoon yet," Narcissa said. "Have you considered the Bahamas? We quite enjoyed our visit there."

"Narcissa!" stormed Lucius.

"What's wrong? Did you prefer Australia?"

"You know that's not what I—" Lucius' voice broke off as his gaze met that of his wife. He took a minute to straighten his robe while gathering his composure and then drew himself up to his full height.

"Welcome to the family, Mr. Potter," he said stiffly.

He held out a hand. When Harry took it to shake, he dragged Harry in close to him. "Mark my words, Mr. Potter. Break my son's heart and you will know pain such as no one has ever known before."

Harry shook free and glared at Lucius. Lucius glared right back.

"Well," said Draco. "Now that the death threats are out of the way for the time being, shall we all go have a glass of champagne to celebrate?"

"Make mine a double," Lucius and Harry both said at the same time, causing them to glare at each other once more.

* * *

Draco and Harry finally managed to escape from Narcissa and her rapidly expanding plans for their wedding late that evening. Draco hoped she wasn't serious about the parade of unicorns

"The children will be surprised to hear we're getting married," Harry said as he toed off his shoes.

Folding his arms across his chest, Draco leaned back against the bedroom door and stared at Harry. "They can't be any more surprised than I was."

Harry flushed. "About that..."

When Harry's voice trailed off, Draco prompted him to continue. "Do go on."

"I wanted to tell you 'yes' when you asked, but couldn't. It wouldn't have been right to accept when you didn't know the truth."

"Of course not. It's far better to present it as a fait accompli."

"I didn't mean to. I planned on asking you, if you didn't ask me. Then your parents came home, Lucius was spouting off and... and I couldn't risk losing you. Not again."

Draco arched an eyebrow. "You were going to ask me?"

"Yes, when the time felt right."

"Well?" Draco said. "Is the time right now? I'm waiting."

Harry stared at him, then a grin broke out on his face. Eagerly, he grabbed Draco, kissed him, then pulled him toward the bed. In a matter of moments, Draco was flat on his back, Harry hovering over him.

"Marry me," Harry said. He kissed Draco, then drew back. "I love you, you know."

Draco thought of all that had occurred between the two of them - the fights and angry words as children. Harry nearly killing him one year, then saving him from Fiendfyre the next. It all felt like a lifetime ago.

Maybe it didn't matter how they'd started off, not when they could start a new life happily together.

"Really, Harry," Draco said. "The answer's obviously yes. Did you even need to ask?"

* * *

Draco felt himself being shaken awake.

"Harry," he yawned, "though I am flattered by your unceasing and seemingly endless desire for me, even I need my sleep."

"You don't need to do anything."

"That's what you said the last time you woke me. Lying back and enjoying it is what exhausted me less than an hour ago."

"I woke you because I have to ask you something."

"If you're planning to ask if I'm a Sex God and then praise my sexual prowess to the rafters, do get on with it. I realise that it might take a while."

"No, it's not that. Though you are really, really good," Harry added hurriedly. "It's just that when I told you I loved you, you didn't say anything back."

Draco sighed. "Despite that lovely appendage between your legs, you are such a girl." He reached out and grabbed Harry by the shoulders, pulling him close.

"I'll go to great lengths for those I love. For example, to keep my children with me, I was willing to romance you. For you, I'd climb the highest mountain, climbing as in Portkeying to the top. I'd slay the foulest beast, if it was already captured, tied up, and preferably unconscious. I'd go to the ends of the earth for you , as long as I could be back home in time for dinner, Hell, Harry, I'd even be willing to Polyjuice as Molly Weasley for you to give you a sexual thrill. I love you, you berk."

Harry grinned.

Draco closed his eyes and tugged Harry closer so that his head rested on Draco's shoulder.

"Draco, did you mean it?" Harry asked a few minutes later.

"Yes. How many times do you need to hear me say that I love you?"

"No, I meant the part about Polyjuicing as Molly Weasley."

As exhausted as Draco was, he found the energy to push a laughing Harry off of him and whack him with a pillow.

* * *

Draco picked up the rock from the middle of the platform in the Gringotts vault and was once more surrounded by a void. Taking a deep breath, he stepped off the platform.

* * *

Emerging from the Gringotts vault, Draco let out a cry.

"Harry, you prat. You're supposed to use different challenges, not repeat ones from not long ago."

"The Goblins told me that they found you curled up on the platform the last time I set up this challenge. You hadn't taken a single step into the void that surrounded it. Since you failed so miserably—"

"I wouldn't say miserably." Draco corrected.

"Miserably," Harry repeated, "I thought you should have another shot at it." He looked at Draco, who was unruffled and entirely composed. "How'd you manage to do it this time?

"Simple," Draco told Harry. "This time I knew you were out here waiting for me."

Epilogue

Narcissa insisted on throwing an engagement party for them. When Draco and Astoria had become engaged, due to the state of their reputation at the time, Narcissa had had to content herself with a small dinner party. This time, she intended to do things the right way. Draco decided to indulge his mother's wishes. Harry was too wise to object overmuch.

The party was held in the gardens of Malfoy Manor on a weekend. The children were more thrilled to be returning home briefly for the party than they were about the engagement. Although it was unseasonably warm, spells had been cast to ensure that the temperature remained comfortable. With Narcissa in charge, it didn't dare rain.

Wanting the party to be a success and to keep any party crashers or nosy reporters out, Draco had hired a team of security guards to patrol the grounds. Within the first hour, they'd thrown out eleven reporters and fourteen photographers. There might have been one more reporter if Draco hadn't ordered spells to repel insects and other pests be performed on the grounds before the party.

More importantly, Draco had hired Cassiopeia and Hugo to keep his father under control. Already, they'd

resorted to shoving a sleeping Talitha into Lucius' arms. Lucius had to refrain from stalking around and threatening various Weasleys for fear of waking his granddaughter.

Which was fortunate for Weasleys were in attendance in droves. Or would that be packs, Draco wondered.

Standing by his side, Harry greeted two of the Weasleys happily.

"Ron! Hermione! So glad you could make it."

"Congratulations, Harry." Hermione said. She brushed a kiss against his cheek, then turned to Draco.

Draco took a step back. "You do know I'm a taken man now, right?"

"I'll try to control myself," she said dryly.

Weasley looked back and forth between Draco and Hermione. "I don't understand."

"NOTHING FOR YOU TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT. SHE CAN TEMPT ME ALL SHE WANTS AND I WILL NOT SUCCUMB TO HER CHARMS," Draco said.

"You are such a git," Weasley said, scowling. "I don't even know why I'm here."

"HARRY AND I ARE ENGAGED," Draco told him. "THIS IS OUR ENGAGEMENT PARTY."

"Bloody hell!" Weasley turned to Harry. "Why does he keep doing that?"

Behind Weasley's back, Draco put a finger to his lips, reminding Harry not to mention Weasley's problem.

"I haven't the faintest idea, Ron" Harry said.

"Look, Ron," Hermione said. "There's a table over there filled entirely with desserts. Let's go see how many of them you can eat." She began to drag him toward it.

"SEE YOU LATER, WEASLEY," Draco shouted after them.

Draco turned to see Harry grinning widely. "What are you smiling about?"

"Nothing. I'm just glad to see you getting on so well with Ron."

"I am well-versed in how to deal with society's unfortunates," Draco preened. "It's a gift."

Harry nodded, still grinning. The grin slowly disappeared from his face as he saw something over Draco's shoulder.

"What is it?" Draco asked.

"Ginny's here," Harry said.

"You invited her. You assured me that you were no longer pining for her."

"I'm not! But have you seen her date?"

Draco turned to look. Next to Ginny Weasley was a very pleased looking Marcus Flint. Spinning back around he saw that Harry had taken the opportunity to escape to somewhere else.

"There's never a hero around when you need saving," Draco muttered.

"Draco! Just the man I wanted to see," Ginny said.

Draco straightened his spine and greeted both her and Marcus. He could do this. Years ago, he'd survived Voldemort sleeping a few bedrooms down the hall. He could certainly manage a conversation with Harry's ex-wife.

Ginny put her hand on Marcus' arm. "Be a darling and fetch me a glass of champagne."

As Marcus trotted away, Ginny turned on Draco with a feral smile. "I really must thank you for sending Marcus Flint my address."

"Forget about it. Please," Draco told her.

"But I don't want to forget about it. Marcus is fascinating. It's rare to meet a man who takes such pleasure in his work. He's also willing to do anything I ask of him."

Draco eyed her closely. "Are you threatening me with Marcus?"

Ginny smiled. "Of course not. It's not like your family has ever done anything to harm my family."

Smiling back, Draco reached into his robe pocket to be sure his wand was handy.

"Besides," Ginny continued. "I brought you a present." She held out a small package then, with a wave of her wand, enlarged it.

"I'll put it with the others," Draco said.

"Please open it now. I insist."

Warily, Draco undid the wrapping. Inside the box was Beauxbâtons: les Révélations.

"Page two hundred and forty-seven," Ginny prompted.

Opening it to the page cited, Draco read several paragraphs. He paled and slammed the book shut.

"Something for the wedding night," Ginny murmured, then laughed.

Still laughing, Ginny turned on her heels and went to join Marcus, leaving Draco to plot revenge. Perhaps he'd introduce her to Blaise.

* * *

It was toward the end of the party when Fleur finally walked away from Draco after warning him against hurting Harry. He wondered if it was her Veela blood that had caused her to screech at him like that.

"How many is that for you?" Harry said, giving Fleur a look, having overhead part of what she'd said to Draco.

"Let me see—I've now been threatened by Ginny, Bill, Fleur, Charlie, Molly, and Longbottom. I can't believe Longbottom threatened me. You'd think Deputy Ministers of Magic would have more pressing things on their schedules."

"Molly Weasley threatened you?" Harry asked.

"Well... not in so many words."

"Then I'm sure you misunderstood."

"I'm sure I didn't. Molly was much more subtle than her children. She apologised several times for killing my Aunt Bellatrix but reiterated that sometimes killing was the only option when it comes to protecting a loved one."

"Really?" Harry asked.

"Yes. She raises children, kills dangerous psychos, and promises destruction without turning a hair." Draco sighed theatrically, "I think she's my ideal woman, too."

Harry elbowed him hard in the ribs.

"How many death threats did you get?" Draco asked, changing the subject.

"Does Blaise not-so-subtlety propositioning me in the event that we break up and go our separate ways count as a threat?"

"No, but I believe that I am long overdue for a private talk with him on the matter." He took a few steps toward where Blaise was standing, then paused and turned back to Harry. "Don't interrupt if you hear screaming. It just means that I'm making my point."

Harry grabbed Draco by his robe and pulled him back. "You can't hex someone every time they proposition me."

Oh, how little Harry knew him. Luckily, there was time enough for him to learn.

"Fine. I won't hex him," Draco said, while mentally adding a 'yet' to his statement. That made it not a lie, right? "Besides my father, who else has threatened you?"

"Pansy, Nott, Pansy, Goyle, and Pansy."

"You said Pansy three times."

"She threatened me three times. All three times going into nauseating detail of what she'd do to me. I think that counts."

"No it doesn't. She'd only be able to kill you once. Therefore, I received more death threats at our engagement party than you did."

"Fine," Harry huffed. "You win."

Draco smiled in triumph. He always liked it when he beat Harry at something. "Walk with me," Draco ordered Harry. "Moving targets are much harder to hit."

Strolling, he saw that Molly Weasley had cornered Lucius. Moving closer, he determined that they were discussing the sniffles Talitha had suffered through the evening before. Molly believed it was a common cold and Lucius maintained that it had to be some rare and exotic disease for Malfoys never caught anything 'common'.

Draco passed a table set away from the gathering where George Weasley was making the usually serious Lyra laugh with tales of growing up as a twin.

Shortly afterwards, they came upon James, who was staring morosely at the slowly melting ice sculpture of a peacock.

"What's wrong, son?" Harry placed a comforting hand on James' shoulder.

James sighed. "I'm in love, but I think she's already taken."

Just one curse, Draco thought to himself. Just one, that's all I ask.

"Is she married or engaged?" Harry asked. When James shook his head, Harry continued. "Then she's not taken. You still have a chance with her."

"You think so?"

"I do. Go for it, son. She'd be lucky to have you."

Draco decided that this might wind up being the shortest engagement in Malfoy history, because if

James did anything with one of his daughters because of Harry's urging, he was going to kill Harry.

James grinned up at his dad, who smiled back. And who continued to smile until James walked past Ernie Macmillan to ask Pansy Parkinson if he could fetch her a drink.

"He likes mature women," Draco informed a stunned Harry.

"Just one curse," Harry muttered while watching Pansy smile indulgently at James. "Just one."

Draco knew then that he and Harry were destined to be together.

The End

Don't forget to return to LiveJournal or InsaneJournal to comment and vote!

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