“This is a sharp time, now, a precise time—we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world. Now, by God's grace, the shining sun is up, and them that fear not light will surely praise it.” –The Crucible, by Arthur Miller

* * *

Harry sat at his desk with Malfoy and Malfoy’s file folder in front of him. They both looked fuzzy; Harry’s glasses got kind of smudged sometimes. It made the world blur and lack clean lines. Maybe he just got tired, Ginny suggested once, after they broke up.

Maybe she was right. It had been a long, pointless day.

He was supposed to be doing some good. Rounding up Death Eaters. Fighting Inferi. He didn’t know, maybe saving orphans from burning buildings.

Instead he was here, bringing up Malfoy on charges of public disturbance.

“There’s been a big mistake,” Malfoy said.

“Sure.” Harry wondered how soon they could get this over with.

“It all began with the first letter you got from Hogwarts.” Malfoy settled in with the air of someone telling an involved and fantastic tale. “See, you were supposed to go to a school in a remote land called Nevada, but there was some mix up with the owls, and—”

Harry wondered how soon he had forgotten that this was Malfoy. “Shut up,” he said.

“Well, then.” Malfoy turned neatly and headed for the door. “Nothing to see here. I’ll just be going.”

“I’d say nice try . . .” Harry spelled the door closed.

Actually, it might have been a nice try, considering that pretty much the last thing Harry was interested in was messing about with Malfoy. There were real criminals in the world capable of real harm. Harry should be dealing with them, instead of people who were all sweeping epic talk and not even the littlest bit of action.

“So.” Malfoy strolled back into the room. “This is where you do your do-gooding. Rounding up Death Eaters and saving orphans from burning buildings. It’s very . . .” Malfoy paused, pretending to think of a word. “I can’t even be bothered. It’s too lame.” Malfoy was staring sadly at Harry’s dusty file cabinets.

Malfoy was getting the max sentence.

Harry made sure to mark it on his sheet.

“And how is that working out for you?” Malfoy continued, turning from the file cabinets, apparently having recovered from their depressing state. “Fighting evil, I mean.”

“Because you already know all about being lame.”

“That really the best you’ve got?” Malfoy smirked.

Harry frowned and looked down at the file, reading with mounting surprise. “You chained yourself to the Ministry sculpture?” he said after a bit. “Really?”

Malfoy’s smirk widened.

Harry again remembered it was Malfoy and was no longer surprised.

“I was protesting.” Malfoy’s voice was full of aggrieved dignity.

“Alright.” Harry made another mark on the file. “You have a thing against Ministry statuary.”

“No. I have a thing against the Ministry.” Malfoy came up to the desk and tapped his finger on the file, not even really looking at it. “Make sure you write that down on your very important papers.”

“Whatever,” Harry said, shutting the folder.

Trust Malfoy to want his criminal record to look dramatic.

“And just what did you think chaining yourself up would change about the Ministry?” Harry asked.

Malfoy shrugged. “You have to admit it was a significant improvement to the décor.”

“Do I really?”

“Come on. Live a little. Offerings of human flesh always spice things up.” Malfoy paused. “And serve as reminders of the immutable nature of mortality. You could be sacrificed to pagan gods any day. So, you know. Live a lot.”

“Okay.” Harry opened his file again. “So you were offering your flesh? Is that what we’re calling it now? List of charges,” he muttered, sifting through the papers. “List of charges. Here we go. P-R-O-S-T-I-T—”

“Only in your dreams. Oh, or if someone named Roxana is asking. Or Bridget. Or Azniv. She’ll sound kind

of foreign."

Malfoy might've slipped off to his happy place there, for a moment.

Harry resisted the urge to bang his head against a wall.

"Where was I?" Malfoy shook himself. "Oh yes, my sacrifice on the altar of injustice." Draping himself over a chair, he deigned to explain. "You see, we—me and many others—are appalled at the discrimination of our system. We were to be united in bondage as a mass statement of protest against the Ministry. We won't stand for inequality! We are for the rights of puppies and unicorns and Pygmy Puffs, and we demand—"

"These others you say are with you," Harry interrupted, before Malfoy could wax further poetic. "Shall we invite them to join us for tea?"

"Don't be silly. You never put in that order for extra crumpets like I asked." Malfoy flapped away Harry's distinct lack of amusement. "Didn't you notice they aren't here? Goodness. And here I thought you were an Auror. Aren't you supposed to have keen powers of observation and such?"

Harry recognized that smile from school. Now that it was turned on him and not to suck up to their professors, Harry realized Malfoy never actually expected anyone to believe all his bollocks. He just expected them to let him off anyway because he was . . . irresistible. Or something, Harry didn't know. People weren't actually charmed by that.

No, really. They weren't.

"So, what?" Harry asked. "You forgot to pay these other people to be your friends?"

"They got held up, I suppose."

“And you went through with it anyway? Chaining yourself to a statue in the middle of the Ministry all by your lonesome? Not much of statement. More like an embarrassment.” Harry couldn’t help being annoyed at having to write up charges on absurdities. “Like to make a fool of yourself, do you?”

Malfoy’s smile flickered, but when he spoke his tone was light. “I’m hurt. You would know the answer to that question if you remembered me at all from school. I guess you just never noticed me. No, I don’t blame you.” He put up a staying hand. “You were so big and important and world-saving; of course you would never notice little old me.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I noticed you, Malfoy.”

“Really? Because I stay up at nights, worried about whether you did.”

“Obviously. Since you did all that stuff to get me in trouble when most times I couldn’t be bothered to remember you existed.”

“Can you forget I exist now?” Malfoy asked hopefully.

“You don’t care what other people think,” Harry said, too surprised by it to remember to tell Malfoy to shut up. In fact, it was like Malfoy was coming into sharp focus, like maybe Harry’s glasses weren’t so smudged or maybe he was waking up some more. Like he was seeing something new, something that wasn’t paperwork or annoying gits who had to be processed or goose chases that ended in changing nothing.

“Sure,” Malfoy said, but didn’t sound so.

“But you can’t care what the Ministry thinks, either. This wasn’t about injustice or whatever, since it’s not as if one bloke chaining himself up in the Ministry is going to start some kind of movement anyway.” Harry shook his head, and Malfoy went back to looking like Malfoy, his washed out skin and hair not so very different from the beige carpet and gray file cabinets. “It’s always about getting attention with you.”

He tried not to sound as weary as he suddenly felt.

Malfoy stood up again. “Well spotted. Now can you just give me my sentence and lock me up?” Malfoy glanced with wide eyes at the closed door. “Unless my sentence is listening to your vast untold wisdom. Dear God, have you no mercy?”

“Sit down.”

“Really, Potter? So hungry for company you lock criminals in with you? You’re even crazier than I—”

Harry stood up suddenly, fists on his desk. “Sit down,” he said again, angry because he couldn’t see straight, or was it the other way around?

Malfoy looked startled. “What’s that?” His voice was softer somehow. “A nerve?”

But he sat down.

“Look,” Harry said. Back on subject. “Why’d you do this? Did you even think about the consequences? Do you people ever think about anyone but yourselves when you—” Back off subject. Harry clenched his jaw for a moment and then let it go. “What do you have against the Ministry? Despite that it’s full of bureaucrats and incompetents.” Back off— “What is it this time? Did the Minister’s hippogriff, like, peck you, or something?”

Malfoy blinked. “You’re really asking me this.”

“You’re right,” Harry said sourly. “The Minister doesn’t have a hippogriff. Was it a big dark scary forest?”

“You really don’t know what’s going on. You really don’t even . . .” Malfoy looked tired, suddenly. It made

him seem smaller in the chair.

It made Harry feel smaller also, like there was something vital he had missed.

“Well, this has been fun,” Malfoy said suddenly. “We should do it again—never. Possibly ever, but now I’ve got to run. I must get to Jimbo.”

“Jimbo?”

“That’s my future cell mate.”

“Um. Right. Here’s a thought. What if his name isn’t Jimbo?”

“Then obviously his parents named him wrong.”

“What if you don’t even have a cell mate?”

“Then I shall imagine one.”

“Jimbo.”

“He’s very fit, by the way. And what we do in the privacy of our public cell is our own business. Don’t be a bigot, Potter.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, realizing he still didn’t see something.

“Right then.” Malfoy stood. “Mustn’t keep Jimbo waiting. Off we go.”

Harry stood too.

“I’m eager to visit my cell,” Malfoy rambled. “I’m thinking of putting a nice little throw rug by the latrine, and hanging drapes over the bars. Jimbo so loves a jolly gingham print.”

Harry shook his head in frustration. “I just want to know what people like you think they’re doing, is all.”

“People like me?” Malfoy turned back, sounding interested in spite of himself.

“You know . . .” Harry had to loosen his jaw again to say it. “I don’t actually think you’re that bad a bloke.”

“Stop; I’m blushing.”

“I just think you make bad choices. And it’s not even all your fault. Your parents—”

“You don’t talk about my parents.” Malfoy’s voice was suddenly low. He was closer than before.

They were at eye level. Harry wanted to look down on him. “Whatever. I just mean, you’re ignorant—” he went on right over Malfoy—“and selfish, but you’re not cruel. Maybe in petty ways, but when it comes down to it, you don’t actually want to physically hurt or torture anyone. You’re not evil. And I think most people are like you. They don’t actually want to do anything wrong or commit crimes, they just don’t think . . .”

“Poor Potter.” Malfoy was looking at him almost thoughtfully. “No really, poor Potter. Living in a world full of Malfoys. Not evil enough to kill or let die in Fiendfyre, but not good for much else. Doesn’t the in-between suck?”

“I didn’t say—”

“What we really need is a villain of the piece. Hey, I know, make it out to be me after all. Me and other former Death Eaters. You could take away our rights, our jobs, our homes; you could start up talks about sending us all to prison or interning us in—”

“Shut up, Malfoy,” Harry said, rolling his eyes.

Malfoy clucked his tongue. “It’s terrible, isn’t it? When the world doesn’t give you all the dark packaged in a nice neat lord that you can slay. When all the world gives you are human beings. Don’t you sometimes wish Voldemort was alive and you were the Chosen One so you could save us all?”

No.

No, Harry never thought of that, never wished it, even in dreams—in nightmares—

Where he was the one with the cold red eyes who wanted to remake the world in an image he could bear, a place where he could save them all from despair.

“Of course you’d say that,” Harry snarled. “Weren’t you a big fan of some dark lord or other? I seem to remember that.”

Malfoy looked away.

Take that, Harry thought savagely, but it was a strangely empty victory.

Malfoy walked over to the chair again and sat down. “Alright,” he said. “Fine. Tell me what the good

choice is."

"What?"

"Since I've made such bad ones in the past." Malfoy's expression was carefully neutral. "Say I have a problem with—with things that the Ministry is doing. How would someone who's not . . . let's see—ignorant and selfish and pettily cruel—go about fixing that?"

"Lots of people don't like the Ministry's policies," Harry said, annoyed by Malfoy's act. "But we don't go around making public disturbances or anything."

"Go through the proper channels. Why didn't I think of that?" Malfoy gushed. "Thank you so much. You've been such a big help; I don't know what I'd do without—"

"I've never gotten along with the Ministry either. What, you think you're different, special?" Malfoy was just like all those others. They never did horrible, far-reaching things like the Voldemorts and Grindelwalds, who thought only of the world. They did small things, selfish things, stupid things, because they thought only of themselves.

In the end, there were too few Voldemorts and Grindelwalds to make the world so dark. There was just enough of everyone else.

"You can't just go around doing random stuff because you don't like something," Harry said. "You want to change something, you have to work at it. You have to get inside it and work. A little bit at a time."

"Right!" Malfoy said, falsely bright. "Because that's exactly what you did against Fudge and Umbridge and the Dark—and my—and those dragons at the Triwizard Tournament. Yessir. You were patient and you waited and you worked within the system; you followed the rules."

"It's not like it was with Voldemort!" Harry took a deep breath through his nose, made sure to unclench

his fists. “Weren’t you just saying that? Most things that are wrong aren’t like Voldemort. You can’t fight them all the time; you can’t defeat them once and for all. They don’t end, and there are some things you have to . . .”

“Accept? Give up? Because the world isn’t your oyster after all?”

Harry’s face grew tight. “The world was never my oyster.”

“So you never had a set-up where you had a clear enemy and you were the only one who could save us all?”

There it was again. That thought. That nightmare.

Harry pressed his hands into his temples.

“Maybe it wasn’t pleasant or easy,” Malfoy went on, “maybe it was bloody awful, but at least you knew what you were doing.”

Harry lifted his head. “I never knew what I was doing,” he grit out.

“That’s a lie. You walked into that forest and you knew you were going to die.”

“I’m still alive. In case you missed that part.”

“Doesn’t matter. You believed it, and you believed it’d save everyone. You knew what to think. It wasn’t fair, maybe it wasn’t even easier, but at least you knew.”

Harry slumped with his cheek in one palm. “Yeah, you had it so much worse being an ignorant sheep. Cry me a river.”

“All I’m saying is it usually isn’t so black and white. But that doesn’t mean you have to give up, have to accept, have to go with it because it’s all so unclear and too late to choose sides and there’s nothing you can do. I did that once and it was fucked up enough for me, thanks. I’m not doing it again.”

“Bully for you,” Harry snapped.

“Great. I’m glad we had this chat. But I’m sure Jimbo is worried about me, so—”

Harry flicked a hand. “Just go.”

It was obvious from the way Malfoy paused that he hadn’t expected to go anywhere for a long time. “You’re not going to charge me?”

“Not if you leave quickly enough.”

Malfoy hesitated.

Still.

“I said get out,” Harry said, and Malfoy did.

* * *

The autumn after Voldemort’s defeat they’d gone back to Hogwarts, but it hadn’t felt the same. The

castle was still being repaired, faces were missing, students repeating their seventh year looked too old.

“You can’t go home again,” Hermione had said.

Ron had said sure you could, because Hogwarts had never been his home, and “we’re of age. We can Apparate any time we want.”

It was less that Ron didn’t understand the Muggle quote and more that he’d been wanting to comfort Hermione. “Anyway,” he’d said more seriously, “I’ve got this Putter-Outer.”

“Yeah, I guess. It can always bring us back,” Hermione had affirmed, and smiled.

After school Harry and Ron went into Auror training. It was three years long. Ron didn’t make the final cut and Harry did.

“Maybe it was never really meant to be,” Ron had said. George had needed help with the joke shop anyway, and Ron seemed content with business and marketing for the time being. Maybe he took it so well because he remembered a time when he wouldn’t have, a time when he would have run away, made himself useless by virtue of feeling so. A time when he’d needed the Deluminator to bring him back.

As glad as Harry was that Ron was being reasonable this time, Harry was used to fighting it out. Harry was used to conflict, climax, resolution; he was used to every part of his life being exposed and explored and ended definitively, for good or ill. But Ron had changed, for the better, Harry knew, and this time Ron accepted, didn’t hold a grudge, and moved on. No fighting, no talking about it, no clapping each other on the back about it, no diving into freezing pools. That Ron was gone and even the Deluminator wouldn’t bring him back.

It didn’t change that Harry felt miserable that he would be an Auror and Ron wouldn’t get to. He felt defeated and angry on Ron’s behalf, strangely guilty and wrong-headed on his own, and he didn’t know where to put these feelings. Seventh year when they’d been hunting Horcruxes and Ron had deserted them, he’d known exactly where to put those things he felt: deep down where they couldn’t touch him,

couldn’t stop him, couldn’t get in the way of finally defeating Voldemort.

He’d hated that. Hated having to put Ron in second place, hated having to shove down his heart into hiding where Voldemort couldn’t find it. Harry was glad he would never have to do it again, would accept any amount of confused feelings if it meant he didn’t have to be an automaton who couldn’t take the time to mourn after losing a friend that way. But that was the one thing he hadn’t had, camping in the forests after Ron had left: confusion. Harry had had a mission. Everything else came after.

Harry had done the same with Ginny. He’d put her away, put her away so he could take her out again later, when everything was over, when he could deal with things like romance and love and happiness. He had hated that, too. As with the confusion of friendship, he would take the real Ginny any day over merely dreams of Ginny, over dreams of her softness and fire, of their white picket fence and three children. The real Ginny was wiser, was funnier, was strong in a way dreams could never convey.

But the real Ginny also wasn’t for him, not her softness nor her fire; the fence and the children were not theirs. He took her out again and she had changed, as had they all, and Harry didn’t know how to deal with that, because it wasn’t something he could fight. There was nothing to fight for; it just was.

Harry had put his life on hold that year finding Horcruxes and fighting Voldemort. It’d been hard and unpleasant and he had hated it; he was glad he’d never face that again. But he’d known, then, what had to be done. He’d known who the bad ones were, what had to be fought and how, where he stood in it all. He’d made the choice in the end, as Dumbledore said, but choice was mostly nominal when your only options were live free or die. The thing about walking into a forest with Voldemort in it is you know what’s going to happen. You tell the Snitch it’s the end and you whole-heartedly believe it, and that makes it easier in some ways than walking into the unknown.

Your life was written out for you and you’ve followed the text to a letter.

Shut the book.

You’re done.

That’s when the real war begins.

* * *

A week or so after failing to bring Malfoy up on charges of public disturbance, a pamphlet appeared in every copy of the Daily Prophet the Auror department could track down.

Harry took one look at the pamphlet and immediately thought of Malfoy. He knew from looking at Malfoy’s file the week before where Malfoy worked. Harry went there immediately after the Auror briefings.

Once at Borgin and Burke’s, Harry strode into the backroom and dropped the pamphlet on Malfoy’s workbench. “Got anything to do with this?” he asked.

Malfoy turned to look up at him, and Harry had to blink several times. Then his annoyance fell away in sudden peals of laughter.

Looking at him now, Harry wondered how he could’ve let Malfoy get to him so much this past week. He’d been aggravated at having to waste time on him, and peeved at having to come here to take care of more of his stupid pranks. Harry must’ve forgotten again that it was Malfoy, that he wasn’t worth the fuss. Malfoy was ignorant, bigoted, selfish, but mostly harmless, and completely ridiculous. He was just a punk.

And he was wearing the thickest goggles, his irises the size of Galleons, blurry gray moons blinking on and off.

Malfoy ripped them off his face, but by that time Harry was guffawing.

“Laugh it up, four eyes,” Malfoy muttered. “Can you please?” Louder now. He tossed the pamphlet aside.

“I’m trying to work.” He went back to tweaking something with a tweezers on a weird old typewriter.

“What the hell are these things?” Harry picked up the goggles. “They look like the petri dishes we grew things on in Potions.”

“Can I help you, Mister Great Auror Potter? I mean, aside from all the things that there’s obviously no help for.”

Harry looked through the goggles without putting them on. Everything looked huge, so huge he could only look at one thing at a time, but each thing was sharp and breath-takingly clear. He could see details in the wood-grain on Malfoy’s desk that he never would have guessed were there. The image made Harry’s vision go so wonky he felt nauseous. Wondering if that was how Malfoy saw the world, Harry put down the goggles and picked the pamphlet up again. “This article,” he said, vaguely amused by it now rather than annoyed. “It’s what you were talking about. Before.”

“What article?”

“This one. About poor Death Eaters being oppressed by Ministry restrictions on where they can work.” Harry scoffed as he flipped through the pamphlet. “Is this kind of propaganda legal?”

“Let me see.” Malfoy took the pamphlet and opened it up, primly smoothing down the folds. His white-ish head bent over the text for a moment, his expression looking thoughtful and intent. “Oh, you mean this article. Yes, I got it with my paper, too. I haven’t read it yet.”

“Right.”

Malfoy looked at it for another moment. “But from the opening sentence I can tell whoever wrote it is a genius. I wish I had that kind of skill. That way with words, his sense of timing. Oh, the power of a quill! His way with rhyming.” Malfoy folded the parchment up neatly, handed it back to Harry, and pretended to go back to his work.

“It’s also slander.”

Malfoy threw down the tiny hammer he’d picked up. “Come on. It’s talking about Carthage Parris. The bloke is insane.”

“Really? I wonder why. His whole family was tortured and killed by Death Eaters.”

“Doesn’t give him a right to be a mad man. No, wait, you’re correct.” Malfoy held up a hand, looking almost apologetic. “I’m mistaken. He completely has that right. No man should be denied stark raving lunacy, if that’s his calling! . . . If he pursues it in St. Mungo’s, where he’s locked up and not influencing politics and not sowing fear in our society.”

“Sowing fear?” Harry snorted. “Can you purple that prose up a bit?”

“You think I’m being over-dramatic?” Malfoy’s voice was going tighter. He was agitated now, his hands moving quickly and expressively. “Carthy’s the one who’s saying even the Death Eaters cleared of all charges should go to Azkaban. He’s accusing people of being Death Eaters just because they might’ve been friends with Death Eaters. He’s even accusing Zabini’s mother of being a Death Eater.”

“She wasn’t one?” Harry shrugged. “Knock me over with a quill.”

Malfoy stared at him irately for a few seconds, then snatched the parchment out of Harry’s hands. “You don’t get to hold this.”

“Good. Because it’s bollocks.”

Malfoy jumped off his stool. “You can leave,” he said. His face had gone livid very quickly.

He should get that checked out. “Thanks.” Harry pulled over Malfoy’s stool and sat down. “I’m fine right here.”

“No, we should be leaving; you should be arresting me.” Malfoy sneered. “I’d far prefer that to the keen torture of tolerating your ignorance.” He was apparently in a passion about something or other.

“You really think the Ministry’s being unfair to former Death Eaters?” Harry asked incredulously. “Lots of people think that what most Death Eaters got wasn’t half of what they deserved. What do you deserve?”

Malfoy’s lips, if possible, seemed to go whiter. He was practically vibrating with restrained emotion. “It’s not to the point yet where I’m forced to listen to you,” he said. “You can’t harass me in my place of employ. I still have a few of my rights.”

“Shop’s public property, you know.”

“This room isn’t!”

“You’re probably right on that. Which is why I talked to Borgin before I came back here. Technically, it’s his property. He said I could come back here without a warrant, or anything.”

Malfoy sat back down abruptly. He faced away, but Harry could still see a slight trembling in Malfoy’s hands. It had to be only through sheer stubborn will power that he was able to pick up the little hammer and go back to doing whatever he was doing with the typewriter.

Harry watched for a while with that same abstract curiosity, remembering the conversation they’d had when Malfoy had been arrested before. Then, too, Malfoy had seemed worked up, as if he was really convinced as to the seriousness of whatever quibble he had with the Ministry.

“I’m not saying I agree with everything the Ministry’s doing,” Harry said eventually.

“Alert the press.”

“I just want to hear what you really think. So the Auror department can determine the threat you pose.”

“Here you go.” Without looking up from his tinkering, Malfoy handed him back the pamphlet. His face was taut, and his knuckles were still white.

“You admit to writing this.”

Malfoy flung down his hammer and gestured expansively, turning back to Harry. “Yes oh yes, I confess; please arrest me now or my conscience will never be at rest.”

Harry smiled involuntarily. “You really do want to go to prison. Missing Jimbo?”

Malfoy frowned. “Who?”

“Your cellmate. You—er, you made him up? Last time.” Harry wondered why he remembered that so clearly when obviously Malfoy didn’t. In fact, that whole conversation remained very stark in his memory, which was odd considering most days blurred into the rest lately.

Harry shook his head. Jimbo had just been weird; that was all.

Malfoy’s expression turned thoughtful. His head tilted as though he saw something in Harry’s face, something that mollified him somehow. Or just made him really tired, because he sighed and looked down at his work again, fiddling with his hammer. He seemed over his former ire, or had swallowed it somehow. “Oh, him,” he finally said. “Jim. Good old Jim. He bent the bars, rolled the toilet paper out the

window, slid down the roll, and had himself an escape."

Harry smiled again. "Clever."

"More than throwing a whole water fountain at a window."

"So I guess you're hurting for company."

Malfoy glared at Harry. "Apparently not like some people," he murmured, and went back to his work.

"What?" Harry shifted on the stool, then picked up the goggles again. "What are these? Really."

"Stop pawing at them. They are used to very delicate handling and will be very cross with me for letting you touch them with your big ruddy club hands. And I won't be able to explain it to them because they are goggles, Potter."

"I do not have club hands," was mostly what Harry got from that.

"That's what I told my abdomen in fifth year after you embedded one into it, but it was headstrong and refused to be convinced."

"Your abdomen was headstrong?"

"Abdomens can be headstrong." Malfoy managed to look arrogant about knowing this when Harry apparently didn't.

Harry scowled down at the goggles. "I'm surprised you even wear these things."

Malfoy made an annoyed sound. “I do intricate work. I need to see some of the little parts up close. Now give them back.”

“It’s just you’re always so meticulous about your appearance.” Harry gave them back.

“Meticulous about my . . .?” The goggles dangled from Malfoy’s hand as he trailed off.

Harry glanced at Malfoy’s hair, still sticking up and kind of staticky from when he ripped off the goggles. The planes of his face were awkward, even more so than when he was a kid, because when you were a kid you might grow into narrow, pointed features, but adults were stuck with sharp bits poking their chin and cheekbones out. Malfoy’s collar was unbuttoned and his clavicle was visible, sharp and pointed like his face. The bones of his wrists were just as visible under rolled up cuffs, hard barbs delicate and vulnerable looking in their nakedness.

Harry looked away, clearing his throat. “You used to be. In school.”

Malfoy huffed. “My mother—anyway, just because some people’s parents taught them how to be properly groomed. I mean,” he said, glancing at Harry, “just because some of us had parents at all.”

“Yes, thank you, Malfoy. I’m now reminded of my perfectly parentless status. Shall I go off and cry?”

“Don’t get my hopes up.” Malfoy hitched a shoulder. “I just thought I should remind you about the orphan thing.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because I feel sorry for you never having had anyone to teach you how to comb your hair?”

“Your mum taught you to comb your hair?”

Almost self-consciously, Malfoy pushed his hair down, then seemed to realize he was doing it, and stopped. “Well, of course she did,” he said finally. His voice sounded funny. “It’s what mums do, Potter.”

The sudden image that came to mind of Narcissa standing over young Draco with a comb made Harry feel distinctly odd. Whenever he remembered how much Narcissa had loved her son, Harry remembered Malfoy was a normal kid, who probably had done lots of normal kid things. And he wondered if his own mum had lived, loving him as much, whether he would have grown up normal too and found Malfoy not so different after all.

Malfoy went back to working on his typewriter. Harry watched for a while, uncomfortable. He started sorting through Malfoy’s tools while Malfoy harped at him for touching his things.

“What delicate work do you do, anyway?” Harry asked after a while.

Malfoy gave a subdued sigh again, but for once gave a straight answer also. “Mostly I repair magical antiques.”

He’d better watch it, or he might start to sound amiable.

Harry demanded, “Like Vanishing Cabinets?”

Malfoy changed color again, but he didn’t look up. “Yes, just like that.” His voice was all hard and prickly. “I couldn’t picture a better career for me, even if I’d actually had a choice. Isn’t it just smashing to have the opportunity to facilitate some impressionable teen in loosing murderers and werewolves on a lot of school children? I’m so frenzied with anticipation at the possibility, I can barely work on this.” He pushed down a key on the typewriter and then took the key off to poke some pieces down inside.

Harry's voice was flat. "You can't bait me, Malfoy. You're not worth it, so don't try."

Malfoy paused, and then went back to poking the insides of his machine. "You really are that self-centered. When did everything I say start to be about you?"

"You are talking to me, you know."

"Of course. Silly me. Because my job right now isn't actually fixing this. It's keeping your pathetically bored and lonely self entertained."

"You wish. You couldn't keep me entertained for the life of you." Harry paused. "Except for those first couple of seconds when you were wearing those goggles."

"Are you requesting that I wear them? Is it just me, or is that a little . . . deviant? How particular your tastes are." Malfoy said all this without even looking up.

"And I'm not lonely," Harry added. "Whatever your sad, pathetic needs make me out to be, this is not a social call, Malfoy."

Malfoy snorted.

"Shacklebolt came in this morning with this." Harry picked up the pamphlet again. "Said it was inflammatory material and we should find out the author just to make sure he isn't up to something serious."

"Shacklebolt said my news bulletin was inflammatory?" Malfoy said, and beamed.

He shouldn't look like that. He should be ashamed of himself, obviously, for being preposterous and troublesome, for doing all this just to gain some attention. He should hang his head and blur into the background, instead of being the clearest, brightest thing Harry had seen in weeks.

Malfoy was practically glowing, with pride, a spark of humor, and something more beneath, the passion from before.

It annoyed Harry endlessly. "I'm keeping my eye on you, Malfoy."

"Voyeur. Deviant, like I said. Want me in the goggles, do you?"

Harry smiled sourly. "Yeah, I can hardly wait."

Malfoy looked at his typewriter for a while. "You know," he said, without looking up. "It's not like I can get a job in the Ministry to—how did you put it—take the beast down from within."

"I don't think I mentioned beasts. Or taking anything down. I said you're melodramatic."

"None of my friends can get jobs in the Ministry. And we can't get jobs at the Daily Prophet either, or any of the syndicated publications. What voice are we supposed to use to dissent, again?"

"Well, not little bits of rubbish in the dailies, anyway." Harry waved the pamphlet around once more, frustrated again. He didn't like Malfoy's reaction to finding out the Aurors were taking him seriously; he didn't like Malfoy beaming like that. Malfoy wasn't serious; the pamphlet was rubbish, and Harry resented Malfoy acting like he was on some kind of crusade when all he was really doing was getting in the way. "You think this is really doing something? You think this is really fighting in the real world?"

"I think my world is more real than yours." Malfoy clenched his fists, beginning to get angry again, too.

“Uh, no. No, I really don’t think so.”

“Let me tell you a little story.”

“Will there be milk and biscuits?” Harry mocked. “Because I can’t have story time without biscuits.”

“No. But you’ll sit there and listen because it’s what you really want, isn’t it.” It wasn’t a question. He was spitting his words, meaning them to sting, his whole face tight. “That’s why you’re here. Saying these things, trying to get a rise out of me.”

Harry made a derisive noise. “In your dreams.”

But he sat there and listened.

He didn’t know what compelled him. Maybe he was just fascinated by the things Malfoy came up with. By how clueless he could be, how selfishly blind, trapped in his own view of things.

He wanted to see Malfoy’s eyes go bright again, his lips go white again, his hands move quick and furiously like articulate birds.

“After the—Voldemort,” Malfoy was saying. “Voldemort died and we acted like everything could go back to normal. But there was Mud—Muggleborn registration. There were Purebloods watching it happen. The trials happened so quickly; everyone just wanted it to be over. Over, instead of actually resolved. Sometime soon, it’s going to explode.”

“And somehow you’re the only one who sees this.”

“You’re the only one who knew Voldemort was back.”

Harry, who'd been in the process of rolling his eyes, suddenly went stiff. "That's entirely different."

"Why? Is it so impossible to believe people are burying their heads in the sand all over again? Not facing the truth?"

"It's different," Harry hissed. "I saw Voldemort corporealize. Maybe you even mean what you say; maybe you even think you're seeing things, but it's not the same. It was flesh and bones and blood."

And Cedric Diggory's dead eyes.

Malfoy was wrong, because nothing would ever be as real as that still gaze was in Harry's dreams.

Nothing would ever see so clearly as those eyes; the rest was just a blur.

"Like I said," Malfoy went on, "isn't it nice to have evil all in one big bad. But when people can't turn around and fight a common enemy, they turn around and fight each other. If a real war starts, it'll be even uglier than the last."

"And you're going to prevent it. What, want to be a hero after all this time, Malfoy?"

Malfoy regarded him for several moments, then seemed to withdraw from the fervor he'd slipped into all over again. His eyes were cool and his face blank, and Harry could read nothing in his hands.

Resenting the distance, wanting to press deeper, Harry said, "I heard you, you know. At Hogwarts, sixth year, you talking about your precious task. With Snape. About how you thought he was going to steal the glory. Is that what you're after now?"

“I can see where you would make that connection.” Malfoy nodded. “Because civil disobedience and peaceful protest are so much like killing D-Dumbledore.” His voice only slipped a little. “At least we’re agreed now as to the magnitude of the situation.”

“Magnitude? Do you even care about the magnitude? I don’t think you ever really acted for any cause, Malfoy. Just for yourself. For the attention. Your glory. Don’t you realize you’re just looking for a battle?”

Malfoy’s short and self-imposed resolve seemed to break. “Yes!” he said wildly. “Yes, I’m looking for a battle, and you should be too! They’re everywhere, all around you, and there’s so many, you don’t even know where to begin. Why do you think you’re even here, Potter? You want a fight!”

Harry made a loud choked sound that he was sure was meant to be a laugh. “Battles everywhere? What are you on about?”

“There are,” Malfoy insisted. “But they’re all the same to you, aren’t they? It’s just a job, isn’t it, because nothing has the desperation or immediacy o-of Voldemort. But to me it doesn’t follow then that if there’s something bad, something wrong, we should just accept it because it’s not as bad as all that."

Frowning, Harry shook his head. Malfoy didn’t know what he was saying. “It’s not that simple.”

“Nothing ever is. But you wish it was. You and the Ministry. That’s why they’re fighting us. And that’s why you’re fighting me. You want the times when it was just me you had to fight. Just me to yell at and insult, just me to trip you in the hallways.”

Harry stared at him incredulously. “Wow,” he said eventually. “You really believe that, don’t you. Malfoy, for your information, it was never just you and me. I always had something bigger going on. More important things to think about.”

“Oh, please, don’t shatter more of my delusions; I can’t stand it.”

“I’m doing my job,” Harry hissed, more annoyed than ever at Malfoy’s sarcasm. He stood up. “But not very well. Next time they bring you to me to write up your charges, I’ll just throw you in a cell.”

“Glad we’ve got that cleared up.” Malfoy smiled brightly. “That way I can give my regards to Jimbo.”

Harry paused. He was angry and he didn’t care and he wasn’t going to ask: “I thought Jimbo had himself an escape?”

Malfoy laughed, and Harry had to scowl and leave because Malfoy’s weird mood swings made him want to smash things.

* * *

At the time Ron got rejected, Harry had been at least relieved he’d never have to worry about Hermione in that way. He didn’t remember her ever failing at anything she tried, and around then she was the picture of success. She had been attending the university of her choice and making top scores, just like she had always dreamed. And then when she graduated she applied for a Ministry position and got it, and began to slowly work her way up. And she started a million projects, her House Elf liberation and wizard Muggle education campaigns, and so on

What she failed at was making any difference.

Then Harry remembered she actually had failed at S.P.E.W. back at school. When it came to living on the run from a Dark Lord and outsmarting Death Eaters and withstanding torture, Hermione won, but when it came to a cause she cared about, things were different. There were no enemies or dangers or imminent threats of death and so even her friends didn’t help her as much as they could.

Harry and Ron helped her these days, especially because she’d added causes they could get their heads around, like freeing Buckbeak and reforming Azkaban and stopping the hunt of centaurs. But the world at large could care less, and making them care more was a long process at best.

“Tilting at windmills,” Hermione said.

“Er, or a bunch of lay-abouts who can’t see beyond their own noses,” Ron said, because that time he really didn’t understand the Muggle quote.

“There’s not an immediate threat so they think that everything’s okay.” Hermione shrugged. “Can’t see the forest for the trees, I guess.”

“We could lob them in the chins.” Ron sounded hopeful. “Tip their heads back.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “You can’t just go around knocking sense into people.”

“I know,” Ron said, as though he regretted it. “Sometimes I just think it was easier when frog faces like Umbridge were in charge. You know, people you could fight. Then you could just form secret armies. Eh, Harry?”

Harry started and then looked away, because he hadn’t been thinking of Umbridge but of Voldemort, seventh year after everyone had admitted he was back and bad news and didn’t have to be convinced there were still things wrong with the world.

“It’s not like that,” Hermione said. “I mean, we don’t have to fight Fudge any more. There aren’t Death Eaters. It’s a different kind of war.”

“The kind you can’t win,” Ron mumbled.

“It’s just slower. You just have to work from within. You just have to try.”

They did. Hermione had her projects and societies and campaigns, and tried to use her position in the Ministry for good.

Ron put his considerable marketing skills to use. He was a personable salesman, genuine and relatable, and people found him more trustworthy than the remaining twin. He adapted some of the Wizard Wheezes products in support of some of Hermione's causes, and used them to promote anti-blood-bigotry and fair treatment of Elves.

And Harry thought that by becoming an Auror he'd be doing something good by definition.

It wasn't that they wanted to save the world. They'd been there and done that, and frankly it hadn't been Harry's cuppa. He just wanted to be a normal bloke. But at the same time, he wanted having saved the world to be worth it.

* * *

About another week after Malfoy had mass distributed his aggravating little flier in the Prophet, Ron Flooed Harry and told him to turn to a program on the wireless network under a protected frequency.

The password was "Snape lives!"

The program was Protestwatch.

The voice was Malfoy's, even if it was disguised, and this was personal.

Since last seeing him, Harry couldn't stop thinking of every petty criminal he had to charge and process as Malfoy. It was just Malfoy after Malfoy, not truly evil, not truly even bad, but like Malfoy had said: not good for much else. The more Harry thought about it, the longer and more endless the procession of Malfoys seemed, and the more angry at the real Malfoy Harry became.

He had to keep reminding himself Malfoy was just one person. He'd just been crossing Harry's radar lately because he was like all the rest of them: selfish, ignorant, misguided. He wasn't out to annoy Harry personally.

Until now.

Harry knew where Malfoy lived from his file. When Protestwatch ended, Harry Apparated into an alley by a rundown complex in a not so nice Muggle section of London, and made his way to one of the tiny flats.

It was a far cry from the huge manor. Not that Malfoy doesn't deserve every bit of peeling paint and cracked tile.

Malfoy opened the door. "Potter? What . . . ?"

The quirked brow and expression of confusion—which of course was feigned—made Harry, if possible, even more angry. He pushed past Malfoy and into the corridor.

"Do come in." Malfoy shut the door behind Harry and then turned to lean on it. "And to what do I owe this untold pleasure?"

"You already know."

Gray eyes turned speculative as they roamed over Harry. "Hm, yes." His eyes returned to Harry, smug now. He was smirking about something, his voice dryly amused when he spoke. "I think I do know. The question is, do you?"

"Potterwatch."

The smirk slipped off and Malfoy's expression went carefully neutral. "That program cashed in way too much on name recognition. I found it shockingly exploitive. Didn't you?"

"You stole it."

"We in the biz call it riffing."

"Biz? What are you even saying, Malfoy?"

"That I'm a big time wireless producer now. That means I get to say things like take the mickey." Malfoy rolled his eyes as Harry's scowl deepened. "Don't be this way. The program is fantastic. It's the very definition of brilliance and cunning." His lips twitched. "Natch."

"You took something that was important, that gave people hope, and you cheapened it."

The lips thinned. "Actually, I made it more expensive. I couldn't bring myself to run a program on Potterwatch's shoe string budget. It just isn't dignified for an entrepreneur like me. So of course I had to start my own new program, which is infinitely more endowed. You should appreciate my—"

Harry never did find out what it was about Malfoy he should appreciate. He certainly couldn't find anything on his own. He was too busy quelling the impulse to punch all Malfoy's teeth out. Then Malfoy would be maimed, preferably also ashamed, and at the very least unable to host any Wizarding Wireless Network programs, without any teeth and all. Problem solved.

They kept trying to tell him at Auror Headquarters that violence didn't always solve problems. Harry got what they were saying, really. They were saying there weren't any solutions at all.

"Potterwatch is mine," Harry said tightly. They were still standing in the dark hall behind Malfoy's front door.

“Was it, really?” Malfoy said, interested. “Because if I remember my history correctly it was started by persons wholly unconnected to you by blood or contract, and none of the revenues ever passed through your hands. I could be wrong, though. I could go check the detailed legal proof I obtained before I launched my own—similar but clearly not infringing on copyright—program.”

“Just shut up, Malfoy; I meant it was about me.”

Malfoy looked so honestly startled that Harry wondered whether it was the first sincere expression Malfoy had used in years. Then Malfoy apparently recovered from whatever shock his poor system had been forced to endure, because his expression was sardonic again, his voice light. “Ah. I had no idea. You will excuse me, Potter; my confusion is understandable. You see, I thought the program was about truth when the rest of the magical media wouldn’t give it to us. I thought it was about laughing when no one else could. I thought it was about hope.”

“You have no idea what it was about!” Harry shouted, incensed that Malfoy was claiming a higher ground. “You were a Death Eater at the time!”

Malfoy looked blank. “Right,” he said eventually. “I almost forgot. I was far too busy flaying unicorns alive and murdering Muggles and torturing halfbloods to stop for a bit of tea between and a Potterwatch ‘Fenrir: Pup-‘er-Pet’ segment. What was I thinking?”

“You can’t act innocent,” Harry grit out. “You did torture people. You cast Crucio. You did whatever Voldemort told you; I know you did. You’re not innocent at all.”

Although it was obvious Malfoy was trying to maintain his mask of detachment, something behind it leaked out. Harry wondered if it made his cheeks pink, too, the way Malfoy looked those other times he’d flown into a rage, but the light was too dim to see by.

Yet he could see Malfoy’s eyes, even though the gray should have only blended into the shadows. They shone, and Harry wondered if it was because there were tears in them. He wondered when Malfoy’s face had become so dynamic that he could read its expressions and the emotions behind it, why he noticed,

why he could see it. He wondered if it was because his glasses for once weren't smudged and he could see clearly, just this once.

Then Malfoy looked away and Harry remembered Voldemort had forced Malfoy to torture the people Harry had seen him torture, forced him under threat of death to him and his whole family. Whom he loved.

And Harry hated that, hated that he couldn't blame Malfoy. That Malfoy couldn't just be evil. That Malfoy was just like all the rest of them—selfish and wrongdoing but with reasons and justifications and a brilliant smile and bright eyes and a mother who he'd die for, tried to kill for, and Draco was human, so despicably and incredibly just human.

"Look, I'm sorry," Harry said finally, having stared too long at the white curve of Malfoy's neck below the purple shadow of his averted face. "I know that Voldemort made you do those things. I know you didn't want to."

Malfoy looked back at Harry and clicked his tongue, sounding prim even though his eyes still startlingly burned in the lackluster light. "Yes, but let's be fair. I still did them, didn't I?"

Annoyed, Harry wondered how Malfoy had manipulated him so that he was actually defending the git's actions. "It's not your fault."

"Potter, Potter!" Malfoy sounded exactly like a very brittle Lockhart. "Honesty's always best! We both know I could have said no."

"And gotten yourself killed," Harry said, rolling his eyes.

"You don't think that would have been better? Am I really such a boon to wizarding kind? You said you never noticed I existed. And now, it seems, I'm a burden to you. That's all I am, all I'm doing, isn't it, just getting in your way."

Harry scratched the back of his head. “No. Well, I mean, you must get up to something else. Sometimes.”

Malfoy let out a sudden, surprised bark of laughter. It sounded strange to Harry. “I forgot how blatantly self-centered you could be. Don’t worry,” he added, catching Harry’s look. “It’s refreshing. Reminds me of my youth, when our positions were reversed. I was so carefree!” Malfoy reflected, a smile twitching at the side of his mouth. “And also frighteningly sophisticated for my age.”

“Positions?” Harry said suspiciously.

“Why, Potter! Thank Merlin I never had such a filthy mind, anyway.”

Malfoy turned to go down the corridor, airy, dismissive, and it made Harry bite out, “You didn’t really listen to Potterwatch. I mean, it was for our side, not yours. You didn’t listen.” He paused. His hand was rubbing anxiously on the side of his thigh. “Did you?”

Malfoy paused without turning around. “That year was all silence,” he said, and walked down into the shadows.

Harry could see the gleam of Malfoy’s white neck from behind, the way it held the head above so carefully, painfully high, the hair smoothed over it soothing and soft in comparison to that harsh insistence. Harry thought of the image that had flashed to mind before, Narcissa combing back those staticky strands. He wondered if Narcissa had laughed as Malfoy rode toy brooms when he was one year old, loved Malfoy as Lily had loved him, cooed to Malfoy as he drifted to sleep in his crib, while Voldemort came for them all.

He remembered Narcissa’s voice, soft and strained (silent, silent), after he’d just died once, asking whether her son was still alive. He remembered Narcissa begging Malfoy to identify him at Malfoy Manor, to save them all, but he had been unable to say. He’d looked lost, so defeated, sounded thick, weak, unable to speak. Silent.

Of course Voldemort had lived there that whole year and it hadn't been quiet at all. There'd been screams and dying, the sibilant hisses of Parseltongue and the sad tones of Draco's family cringing and shying, saying, "Yes, Master", "no". There had to have been a thousand terrible sounds, and Harry bet Malfoy remembered them all as silence, laid thick over the echoes of childhood love and laughter.

And now here was a home of no memories, a poor pokey corridor with warped wood that creaked beneath Harry's trainers as he walked down it, walls that closed in close. Harry imagined the sitting room, barren and white, what Malfoy's room must be like, empty, alone in the gloaming.

It was true, what Harry had thought before. Malfoy was just like all the rest of them, Malfoy after Malfoy, survivors of the war. Harry didn't think it in so many words, but felt it, that they were each of them, all of them walking down a long dark tunnel to a destination unknown. And though each of them walked the same path, they always walked alone.

Which was why when the corridor turned into sitting room with a magic fire crackling in the defunct grate, resentment flared. The wood had all been polished to shine gold beneath a deep red rug, and cheerful light spun silver off of tinkling bits of broken glass hanging from the ceiling. Malfoy had chosen quality-and-old over cheap-and-new, so though the fabric of the sofa was worn and didn't match the sagging leather chair, they both looked warm.

Malfoy's back was turned, his bright head bent over books and papers across which his slender fingers thoughtfully—lovingly, Harry thought—trailed. Then Malfoy gathered up the parchments and things, holding them to his chest so stray papers couldn't slip away, like an embrace, Harry thought, and hated that too.

As if he had made a sound, Malfoy turned around slightly, raised a brow and said, "Oh, it's you. Did you get lost?"

Harry heard himself snort and look around the room derisively. "Nice place. Where'd you put your peacocks?"

Malfoy's brow dropped and he turned around again, clutched his papers closer, and went over to the table. Spreading them out in a tea-stained colored mess, he arranged himself in front of them, on the

floor, and somehow managed to look very busy. “You might want to ask Goyle that,” he said distractedly. “He’ll eat just about anything.”

Harry had been about to say, “Sorry, I didn’t mean it,” but instead he gaped and said, “Goyle ate your peacocks?”

“Mm,” Malfoy said without looking up. “Little lemon butter, they can be very tasty. If you’re very hungry.”

Even if Malfoy was having him on, it seemed kind of tasteless. For Malfoy, anyway, whose truffles from his mother weighed in at fifty Knuts a pop and who always had a peacock feather quill.

Harry frowned and sat down on the sofa across from Malfoy on the floor. He sunk in deep and it was hatefully comfortable, and he wondered for a moment why he forgot to bother about things like cushions and nice couches in his own flat. He just never thought about it, he’d told Hermione, when she’d asked why he’d left the walls white.

Malfoy was ignoring him, whizzing about magic scissors spelled to cut things into squares and bits of Spellotape and a goopy paintbrush from a pot of glue. He was scribbling things with a seagull quill—those were the cheapest kind, and there were inks of other colors and quills scribbling on other portions of his papers.

Somehow Malfoy had managed to make the pine chest he was using as a coffee table look like Mrs. Weasley’s kitchen. Harry guessed he was pretending to look very industrious so Harry would go away.

“What are you doing?” Harry said finally, irritated because Malfoy just kept whizzing about and wasn’t paying him any mind.

“Making a newspaper,” Malfoy said absently, not looking up.

“Like your pamphlet thing?”

“No, less like that and rather more like a newspaper.”

Harry saw now that the big sheet in the middle was a lay-out, like one he had seen for the Quibbler at Luna’s house, only this one was big like a sheet on newsprint. Malfoy was arranging the articles and pictures and drawings, sticking them into place, making notes for headlines, shading in backgrounds with the doodling quills. Harry was sure it was all very cunning and brilliant, just like Malfoy’s Potterwatch rip-off. “Thought you said you couldn’t be in the papers?” he demanded.

“That’s why we’re making our own.” When Malfoy went on, Harry was pretty sure it was because he wanted to hear himself talk, and not because he actually wanted to share. “We have enough writers and resources for a weekly, now.” Then he went back to his very important doodles and Harry was back to watching.

Malfoy’s quill was gray, but Harry could see the lines of black and white in it, each individual strand like veins from the center. The reason he could see them was probably the brightness of the light in here, the warmth and the golden color of it; Harry can see every detail everywhere, even the color of Malfoy’s face between the ruffled strands of the feather. That should be gray, too, but it wasn’t; it was pink and thoughtful from the fire, and the plume kept brushing Malfoy’s cheek as he wrote.

Harry didn’t even know why he was still there. Now that he thought about it, he didn’t know why he had come in the first place, to Malfoy’s stupid flat, his stupid mismatched sitting room, where he was waving that stupid feather around his stupidly sharp cheekbones.

Harry snatched the quill out of Malfoy’s hand. “You were making me want to sneeze,” he snapped.

Malfoy humphed and grabbed it back.

“I could just inform the Aurors you’re creating a problem,” Harry pointed out, still waspish. “You haven’t crossed the line yet, but—”

“Except for that minor incident with the Ministry furniture and bondage,” Malfoy added helpfully, sticking the article he’d been working on to his base paper.

“They’re going to be worried about the broadcast. It’s worse than the pamphlet. It will get people talking, and—”

“And Shacklebolt thinks I’m inflammatory.” Malfoy preened.

“I just don’t understand why you’re using Potterwatch,” Harry exploded. “Protestwatch, whatever; you stole the idea. It’s wrong to use it to go defending Death Eaters when Death Eaters rounding people up and torturing and killing them was the reason there was even a Potterwatch in the first place.”

Malfoy finally stopped sticking things to his paper. He was swirling his quill. “What if people were rounding up and torturing and killing Death Eaters?”

“Come off it! No one’s doing that!”

“But they want to.” Malfoy looked up. His voice had gone flat. “Don’t you think the fact that just one word from you could stop free press that I have every right as a Wizarding citizen to produce is a bit . . . telling?”

So Malfoy had been listening to his threats.

Well, good, Harry thought, but felt slightly disgruntled. “That’s only reasonable, seeing what your side did during the war. I mean,” he added, seeing Malfoy’s head dip back down with a sneer, “I don’t see how you can compare not letting you have a wireless show that could cause a lot of problems to not letting Muggles and Muggleborns live.”

“I’m not comparing them,” Malfoy said, waving a wild hand. The scissors stopped their magic chopping and dropped to the table with a thunk. “I’m just saying this is the way things start sometimes. Certain people can’t be in the papers, on the wireless. We can’t get jobs, can’t get housing. Sooner or later, people question their right to live. I can assure you Carthage Parris already does.”

“No one’s denying you housing, Malfoy.”

“Oh, honestly.” Malfoy flung down a photo and sounded so much like Hermione Harry looked at him closer.

Malfoy’s hands were poised for flight, bones curled and ready for unfolding; the fire was flashing on his face and making the blood that had risen beneath his skin flicker and flare like its own pale, pointed flame. He was saying something, his voice just as sharp and hot, but Harry wasn’t listening. It was just Malfoy; it wasn’t important; Harry just watched those hands.

“Why do you think I’m living here?” Malfoy finished in a huff.

“Er . . .” Harry looked back up at Malfoy’s face, licking his chapped lips. “I thought the Ministry took all your money?” he ventured.

Malfoy’s eyes narrowed. “And you think I don’t make enough at Borgin’s to live in a better hole than this? With my mum? And Goyle, Merlin help me?”

“Your mum lives here?” Harry looked around, trying not to appear worried.

“Look at this place!”

“I said it was nice. I like what you’ve done with—”

“Spare me.” Malfoy made a gagging sound.

“It’s warm,” Harry said, and was annoyed with himself for feeling defensive.

Malfoy’s eyes widened, and then he quickly looked down at his lay-out thing. Picking up the quill, he started swishing it around again. His expression was thoughtful, his lashes made fairer by the light, strangely coy. “Fair enough,” he said finally. His voice was soft and weird and stilted. “I—thank you. I guess.”

Harry didn’t know what it was about Malfoy that made him feel just fine when he insulted him and feel like he needed to apologize if he complimented him. “Anyway, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ve hardly been arresting former Death Eaters for having big townhouses,” Harry said, shifting uncomfortably. “It’s not illegal to live somewhere . . . else, if you wanted.”

“You didn’t listen to anything I just said, did you.” Malfoy didn’t appear to require an answer. “The Ministry hasn’t done anything yet. It’s the fact that they’re quietly letting it happen. Sometimes not so quietly. Look at Carthage Parris.”

Malfoy apparently meant literally. He was waving around a parchment, and when Harry grabbed Malfoy’s wrist and pressed his thumb in the pulse so he could still and see it, he saw there were crude moving drawings on it. Two panels: the top one full of little stick Muggles with little stick pitchforks chasing after a witch. She looked suspiciously like McGonagall, with her pointy little hat and the square shawl with cross-hatched lines on it to represent tartan. She ended tied to a stake, burning in a fire of scribbles.

The lower panel was full of wizards and witches, including the McGonagall figure, chasing after a wizard who looked suspiciously like Stan Shunpike. There was a Muggle sad-face on his arm with a wiggly line coming out of its frown. There were even little spots on his face, and then he burned on a stake too.

It was actually all rather horrific, but Harry had to stop his lips from twitching at the expression Malfoy had managed to capture on the face of the figure who was obviously supposed to be Parris, leading the pack. Harry scowled instead.

Malfoy jerked away from him, and it wasn't until then Harry noticed he'd just kept holding Malfoy's wrist to look at the comic, instead of taking it himself. He sat back, feeling funny, and Malfoy, now happily liberated, picked up his comic again in order to gaze at it with fondness. Pushing his tongue between his teeth, he bent to add more scribbles to someone's hair, and Harry realized with a start was supposed to be him, caught in the pushing mob chasing after the spotted bloke. There was a zigzag on his forehead for the scar.

"Why are you so obsessed with Carthage Parris, anyway?" Harry demanded.

Looking up in surprise, Malfoy broke into a smirk. "Jealous?"

"You said people were looking for a villain," Harry said testily. "Someone to blame. Isn't that what you're doing with Parris?"

"I'm not blaming everything on him. Just all the things he's doing wrong." Malfoy painted glue on the back of the comic and pressed it onto his lay-out, tongue pushing back out as he tried to place it just right.

"Voldemort killed his family."

"Someone may have mentioned that." Malfoy was going to get glue in his hair, the way he was flourishing about. "Once or twice." He already had a tiny scrap of paper taped to his sleeve.

"Well," Harry continued, "then you can't just throw him down, say he's evil, expect people to attack—"

Malfoy froze. His glue brush was in the air and the scrap fluttered on his sleeve. Then he very carefully sat the brush down. "Potter . . ." he said, then tried again. "Potter, who said anything about evil? Who said anything about attacking?"

“If he’s messing up your life as much as you say, you obviously want him out of the picture—”

“Out of the picture?” Malfoy made an uncontrolled movement. Pale-faced, he licked gray lips and said, “I see. I think killing the Dark Lord addled your brain, Potter. You don’t know any other way to fight.”

Harry didn’t know what Malfoy meant. “First off, I didn’t kill Voldemort; I tried to disarm him, and his own Curse backfired—”

“But you’re not exactly wracked with guilt over that accident. Face it, Potter, even if you never could commit murder, V-Voldemort was bad enough to die. We all wanted him to; it’s okay. But that doesn’t mean that in every fight you come across from now on, you have to keep at it until your enemy is dead, with the only alternative being to let him walk away.”

“I don’t know what you’re—”

“I’m talking about everyone. How no one is as bad as Voldemort, and that makes it so you feel you can’t fight anyone, because the only thing you’ve known is an epic struggle to the death.”

“You don’t know what I know!”

“That’s true.” Malfoy tapped a headline with his wand and it started moving. He peered down at it with a little line between his brows, then sat up in obvious satisfaction. “I just know what I know, and that’s that you have to pick your battles, and you have to find new ways to fight them every time. And that is what I am doing. I am not trying to destroy Carthy as a person. I am fighting a battle of ideals. I am just like Ghandi.” He raised his chin and looked angelic.

“Ghandi,” Harry repeated, disbelieving.

“Yes. You should learn about Muggles. It’s your heritage, and anyway they are very good at setting examples on how to be stupid. Granger wrote her thesis on Muggle relations; I should think you—”

“Weasley,” Harry corrected.

“Don’t say filthy things like that.”

Then Harry exploded, “What were you doing reading Hermione’s thesis?”

“Informing myself, unlike some people.” Malfoy sniffed. “Ghandi was a bit of alright, for a Muggle. And he was played by that very attractive Muggle actor.” Malfoy’s voice turned wistful. “I wish I looked just like him.”

“What?”

“I told you,” Malfoy said, snapping out of that happy place he went to all over again. “He’s very attractive. Meanwhile, look at me.” Malfoy shrugged and went back to doodling under the headline he’d just enchanted.

Harry didn’t look at him, because he didn’t want to accidentally open his mouth and have words come out.

“I’m thinking about shaving all my hair off, just like him,” Malfoy rambled on.

Harry accidentally opened his mouth. “Don’t.”

“Why not?” Malfoy demanded, scowling. “I would look good bald. I’ve been told I have an eggshell scalp, thank you.”

“Just . . .don’t.”

The scowl fell away and then Malfoy’s lips started twitching in that way they had. “Fine, fine,” he said, smirking. “I won’t. Just for you.”

Now it was Harry who frowned, and went back to looking anywhere but at Malfoy. He eventually slid to the floor and fiddled with Malfoy’s papers for a while, getting his hands lightly slapped away until Malfoy finally squawked, “Can you touch anything without crumpling it, Potter?”

“How did you get the text to move like that?” Harry asked instead of answering, pointing at the scrolling headline.

Malfoy said his typewriter, and that Harry was a luddite, and didn’t he know anything? And then he proceeded to babble about it while absently folding a bit of parchment.

“Here,” he said suddenly, thrusting a paper crane into Harry’s hands. “I know you haven’t been listening to a word about my genius invention. Murder this poor wee thing, and don’t bother me if you’re going to sit here.”

Harry flipped through Malfoy’s comics and articles, stopping to read some and deliberately crinkling the crane loudly while he was at it. Malfoy’s drawings were mostly composed of stick people, but somehow they managed to have very expressive faces, and their theatric gestures were actually amusing, though Harry would never admit it. And the articles were sharp, incisive, often witty. Harry guessed he’d really never given Malfoy enough credit for those Skeeter articles.

He glanced from one of them back up to Malfoy, who had his tongue between his teeth again and real glue in his hair this time. He seemed perfectly happy in his state of dishevelment, and the quills and office supplies whirring all around him in a manic dance.

Harry leaned in around a pair of scissors, which snipped warningly at his hands, and plucked the scrap of

paper taped on Malfoy's sleeve.

Malfoy looked up in surprise. Harry thought he may have forgotten anyone else was still there.

Harry didn't meet the odd look Malfoy was giving him. "Did you really listen to Potterwatch?" he asked finally, to avoid it.

"Maybe." Malfoy looked back down. Licking the nub of his pencil, he went back to shading a corner of his lay-out. "One or two episodes. 'Fenrir: Pup-'er-Pet' really is a classic segment."

"How did you even know about it? It was a secret."

"With ingenious passwords such 'phoenix' and 'Boy Who Lived' and 'Free Buckbeak!', you can't really be all that secret. Shame is never private, Potter."

"They really had 'Free Buckbeak'?"

"Exile was too good for that chicken. Potterwatch laughed at lots of things," Malfoy continued eventually. "It could make bad things—not so bad. The whole point was hope. People need something to believe in."

But there's nothing, Harry wanted to say.

"What you should be asking is, do I believe in me?" Malfoy said. "Your evening's entertainment is over. Go home and annoy yourself. In case you haven't noticed, I am very busy and important here." Then he went back to his scribbling.

* * *

Harry got back together with Ginny after they both got out of Hogwarts. It might have seemed to others—Ron and Hermione, for instance—a long time to wait, but a part of Harry had felt like he had been waiting forever. Was still waiting. For her.

Because when they got back together it was glorious enough, and more than that, but it wasn't what he remembered. It was something new. She wasn't the Ginny he had been waiting for; she was new too. And rounder, sharper, braver and more gentle than before, just not . . . home again.

And the Harry she had been waiting for was gone, too. Of course there had been a Harry she had waited for before, and that was a different Harry too. When she was ten she had fallen in love with a hero Harry, fallen so far down into the depths that she had had to wait for Harry to come save her. But by her fifth year she was a new Ginny who didn't need saving, who had loved a new Harry who wasn't a hero, only a boy. She had thought every Ginny who would ever come to be would love every Harry; the pattern was so prevalent she'd thought that was who she was.

"You think you know yourself," she told Harry a long time after, a long time after he had gotten over it, a longer time after she had fallen for Dean. They both had had too much wine. "You think you are a certain way, want certain things, need certain things. But things change, so gradually some times you never notice, unless you're truly looking for it . . ."

"Lot of good that does," Harry said, taking off his glasses. He rubbed his temples. "Think I need a new prescription."

"You're just tired. Anyway, I'm not talking about that kind of seeing; I'm talking about seeing. Like if something opens your eyes, or someone takes you by the hand, or you make the choice—see the choice, recognize yourself in it. That's when you see who you've become, and it's different than before, and the things you thought you were are stripped away to who you really are."

"Sounds complicated," Harry said, and thought she was right: he was just tired.

"But it's not," Ginny whispered. "It's easy. God, Harry, it's so incredibly easy."

Harry wondered at that because it wasn't as if Hermione and Ron made anything at all look easy. He wondered if Ginny would've said they hadn't looked enough, hadn't seen that they were no longer right for each other when for so long they thought they were. Oh, they obviously loved each other just as much as they ever did; that much was certain. It was in the warmth in Hermione's eyes when she looked at him, in the eagerness of his touch when she was near, in the way they always came back together after every single fight.

Harry just never thought there would be so much fighting. Maybe he thought it'd tone down or something after they were finally together. Maybe he thought Hermione wouldn't espouse her career almost as fatefully as she did her husband, that Ron would never feel the need to run away again now and again, the way he had escaped once before he remembered why he would always come back. Maybe Harry thought they'd make a nice little family and get a nice little house and it would be home again.

It was the "again" part that got Harry, because he didn't think he'd ever really had one, a home. If he had, they had been Hogwarts and Sirius, and both were gone now. He'd walked once from the former to the latter, from life into the arms of his godfather, death, and Voldemort—the end, he'd told the Snitch. He hadn't had to worry, then, about finding a place to stay.

He worried now, because part of what Ginny had said was true. He looked up and saw himself, and he wasn't who he was before; what he wanted was something new. He realized how he'd always noticed the way blokes looked, the way they flew, the movements of their muscles as they walked. He noticed he never knew what to do with girls, their soft parts, their tears, their feelings he could never understand.. He noticed men, on the street, and in pubs, even his friends, all around him, everywhere.

But it wasn't easy, incredibly or at all. It felt like the Prophecy had, the Chosen One settling about his shoulders, this fate making him different from all the rest. He didn't think he was disgusted by it, or disapproved at all, or anything of that sort. He mostly thought about how he just never got to choose to be this way, that he never would have chosen to be gay when he'd always pictured himself with a wife, when all he ever really wanted was a family, a normal life.

He had come out of that forest without a home; he had been looking for one ever since.

* * *

Harry kept his eye on Malfoy, just like he said he would. It was his job, after all. The second Malfoy put a toe in the wrong direction, Harry could go to Shacklebolt with what he knew. The Aurors could stop the trouble Malfoy was potentially causing before most of it even started. They were already uncomfortable with the Our Runed Fortune, the new underground newspaper circulating about.

But Harry had to have proof of actual criminal activity to bring Malfoy in, of course. That was why, Harry told himself, he never watched Malfoy when he was on the job. It was always after, mostly in the evenings, sometimes on days off. He followed along when Malfoy went out, stayed near by when Malfoy stayed in. He kept track of the places Malfoy had been, the people he had seen. It could be important. Shacklebolt could need the lists.

Harry never wrote any of it down.

When Malfoy arrived at the Hogshead after around a week of this close scrutiny, Harry should have assumed a disguise. He should have pretended to patronize the Hogshead, covertly garnered information by eavesdropping. Then he should've immediately reported what he knew to Shacklebolt. He had seen a lot of Malfoy's cronies walk in, too—among them Pansy Parkinson, Gregory Goyle, Blaise Zabini. He recognized other Slytherins, children of Death Eaters, a few people with the Mark on their arms. It looked to be some kind of important meeting.

Instead, Harry walked in and sat down and managed to look conspicuous. If Malfoy was doing anything illegal, Harry supposed, he'd be more circumspect about it. Malfoy was a Slytherin, after all, and this was a public place. Aberforth looked unhappy, but Malfoy had visited him several times during the past week.

Harry had remained in some contact with Aberforth since the battle of Hogwarts. He could have asked him what Malfoy on about. But even though Aberforth hadn't known Harry before that battle, he'd known about Dumbledore—known Dumbledore was using him, and hadn't told him anything. Harry wasn't sure Aberforth would tell him anything now, either. That was why Harry didn't ask. That, and the other minor detail that Harry didn't like how Malfoy had told Aberforth what he was up to, but hadn't told him. Hadn't flown at him again, his hands expressive and quick, color high on his cheeks, hadn't looked at him at all.

That's what staying under cover got you.

That was why Harry didn't bother to stay in hiding at what turned out to indeed be a meeting. Malfoy nattered on about rights, staying peaceful, proving that they could be productive members of society. They could be the best members of society, in fact, and they needed not violence or bloodshed to prove their superiority; they could rise about solely on the merit of their work ethic and genius and pureblooded bigotry blah blah blah-ity blah. Harry wasn't paying much attention. He was watching Malfoy closely.

Just like he said he would.

After Malfoy was done, some other people talked. Aberforth even chatted with some of them, and then there were drinks. Most of them were leaving, and Malfoy was slipping into the booth across from Harry, plunking a plate of chips down between them. He was grinning, such a smile as Harry had never seen before, perhaps from too much to drink, or maybe just the success of his little rally or whatever. Harry guessed it was the latter. Malfoy's eyes weren't shiny; they were dancing.

"So," Malfoy said eagerly, "what did you think?"

"That you're not a very good criminal mastermind." Harry had been thinking about what to say; that was mostly what he'd come up with.

"Good, good." Malfoy sounded truly pleased. "That was my plan exactly."

"What?"

Instead of drizzling the vinegar like any normal person, Malfoy had a tub of it and dipped his chips in until they were soaking wet. It figured, Harry guessed. It wasn't like Malfoy was ever much of a honey person. "Since you've been following me about like a puppy," he said, after finishing his chip, "I thought I'd show the Aurorly types I'm willing to have full disclosure. Then they can know Carthy's accusations of

us using Dark Magic and still trying to resurrect Voldemort and that is all claptrap."

"I haven't been following you about."

"You do latch on to things, don't you. Sometimes I worry about using complex sentences with you. Do you hear anything after subjunctive clauses?"

"Who was that man?" Harry asked, ignoring Malfoy's jabbing.

"The big one was Goyle. You might remember him from skirmishes such as the one where Granger grew teeth down to her knees, or the one where—"

Harry didn't understand why he bothered paying Malfoy any heed at all; he really didn't. "The dark-haired bloke. In back. He kept staring at you."

"There was a dark-haired bloke who couldn't seem to look away the entire time? Somehow, I just do not find this shocking. But I'm trying," Malfoy rushed to assure him. "Potter, I really am." He waved a chip around to emphasize how hard he was really trying.

"Shut up," Harry snapped. "You're not exactly hosting a knitting circle here. He could be a Death Eater who's not interested in your whole Ghandi obsession thing. Or he could be a spy of Parris who will try to make trouble for you or—you just don't know."

"I do not have Ghandi obsession," Malfoy said haughtily. "I have Ghandi respect, and profound Ben Kingsley lust."

Harry resisted bursting into tears over his lager about Malfoy's arrogant stupidity, but just barely.

Malfoy had his head tilted, speculatively looking at Harry who was still speculatively looking at his lager.

“What if this bloke did turn me in?” Malfoy asked suddenly. “Would you corroborate his story?”

“I asked you a question,” Harry grit out. “Did you know him?”

Malfoy happily munched down more chips. “You’re jealous.”

“I’m an Auror,” Harry corrected, now having to resist the urge to bang the pint over Malfoy’s head.

“Fine.” Malfoy looked disappointed. “I know him, alright? He helped me set up my wireless frequency.”

“I want his name.”

“Are you mad?” Malfoy looked as though he thought Harry really was. “I’m not giving you that kind of information; I don’t want you to stalk my friends too.”

“Who said anything about stalking?”

“It’s not so much what was said,” Malfoy hedged, “as people who were stalked.”

“I’m not stalking you.”

“Really. You show up at my meetings, my home, my work. You even show up at my arrest. Coincidence? I think not.”

“This is business. Shacklebolt—”

“Says I’m still inflammatory?” Malfoy looked hopeful.

Harry gave up.

He wasn’t surprised Malfoy could intuitively recognize surrender of any kind, which he learned when Malfoy immediately switched the subject.

“So, you met all my friends. Parkinson was very pleased to see you again, by the way. She always admired your shoulders and extreme heedlessness. And other things I refuse to repeat. Don’t you dare go after her either, Potter. We are soul-mates.”

“I thought she married some Scandinavian bloke.”

“Ours is a tragic affair.”

“You didn’t seem very . . . attached when she was here a few minutes ago.”

“We must love each other from afar. Intimacy is forbidden. Our burning passion must be kept forever concealed. We are doomed, doomed; that’s what I say.” Malfoy was sounding more and more pleased with this idea. “We should have clandestine meetings in grottos. There need to be more grottos in general, I think, and more clandestine going on in them. I have firm respect for time honored traditions, you know.”

“So,” Harry said, more and more annoyed by this idea. “You keep your burning passion forever concealed by babbling about sexing her up in some cave?”

Malfoy shuddered. “What horrid things you do say. And I do not babble. Anyway, what I was saying, before I was so rudely interrupted, was that you have met all my friends. Now, where are yours?” Malfoy waited a while for an answer. “How come you never hang around with Granger and the Weasel any

more?”

“I do.” Harry swallowed. “They’re my best friends.”

“Hm.” Smoothing his fingers over a napkin, Malfoy pushed away his plate. “You’ve spent more time in my company the past week than you have in anyone else’s,” Malfoy said finally. “Trailing around after someone you hate might say a thing or two about the people you like.”

“I don’t hate you.”

Malfoy blinked. “Go on, shatter what little knowledge I had of you.”

“And I haven’t spent time in your company. This is the first time I’ve talked to you in . . . days.”

Malfoy snorted. “Fine. You’ve spent more time just outside the luminescent aura of my company. Don’t think I don’t see you watching from the shadows.”

“Just making sure you’re not making trouble, Malfoy. I am an Auror.”

“You’ve said that already,” Malfoy pointed out, ever willing to assist.

“Then that’s because it’s true.” Harry scowled, wishing he had something better. “I’m an Auror, and you want to start another war just because there isn’t one.”

“I told you—”

Harry cut him off. “Yeah, you told me. You told me people are going to start fighting sooner or later.

Mostly, it seems like that would happen because it's always going to happen. There's always been war. People are always going to be unhappy, no matter how many Voldemorts you slay."

Malfoy clucked his tongue. "Such a defeatist attitude." He was trying to sound flippant, but it wasn't really there. Tracing his finger in some water circle some other beverage had left on the table, he finally asked, "What happened to you, anyway? Why are you so . . ." Malfoy trailed off, still tracking his hand in the condensation. His fingers were so strong and long and masculine and elegant Harry wanted to grab them and smash them into the table.

"What happened with your mates? With Hermione and Ron? And the weeniest Weasley. The girl one."

"Don't go around using their names like you know them."

Malfoy went on writing things in water.

"Nothing happened," Harry said eventually. "They just—they fight a lot. Hermione and Ron. They spend so much time bickering that sometimes I wonder why they bother. I know they really love each other; it's just . . . I can't tell you this. I can't go around telling you stuff like this."

"Sure you can." Malfoy grabbed Harry's lager and took a swig. "You can because we're not friends. You know I really don't give two shakes."

"Yes, that makes it so much better."

Malfoy gave a fluid shrug. "Have it your way."

Harry frowned down at his own watermark.

"And the Weasley of the female persuasion?" Malfoy prodded. "Not the brood mother. The other one.

There was a time I thought you two were an item. Around the same time I had to get my guts stitched into my abdomen, but I'm sure you had better things to worry about then. Oh, what a time."

Harry shrugged. "She's with Dean."

"Thomas? They were a thing too, right?"

"Yeah. She . . .she always wanted me, you know? But she said . . . something like, 'you can always be someone different,' and that when someone shows you that it's . . .' Well, she said something like that, anyway."

"When someone shows you that it's what?" Malfoy demanded.

Harry shrugged. "I don't know, she said it would be easy. But it's not."

Malfoy thought for a while. "She just meant what you really want can be staring you right in the face."

Harry looked away. He should tell Malfoy he couldn't have any idea what Ginny had been thinking, that he and Ginny were worlds apart, not similar at all. Instead he said, "I don't know. I looked at her face a lot. Freckles, just here." He waggled his fingers over the bridge of his nose.

"You looked, but did you really see?"

Harry's jaw clenched. "She said that." Really, it was like everyone knew everything but him.

"Dunno," Malfoy said quickly. "Think it's just a quote from something."

Harry kept on frowning down at the circle of water in front of him. “You know what?” he said eventually. “I think you wrote those articles about me in fourth year.”

“The Skeeter ones?” Malfoy perked up. He got that smug smile on again. “Why, yes. Yes, most of those were me.”

“It’s not a compliment.” Harry was appalled.

“Stop thinking of yourself for once and think of me. Admit they were brilliant.”

“They were hackneyed.”

“Were not!”

“You used the phrase, ‘glistening tears’ like twenty times. And ‘lambent’ way too much.”

“I can’t help it if your tears are like diamond dew drops of despair.”

“Please stop.”

Malfoy laughed.

Harry watched him.

“You have to admit I’m better than the Prophet,” Malfoy eventually said. His eyes were glowing again, and the color in his face wasn’t from the alcohol, and even in the bad lighting of the pub, Harry could see every bit of brightness perfectly.

“I don’t read the Prophet.”

“Of course you do.” Malfoy took another swig of the lager and then made a face. “You’re in it every day.”

“That would be why I don’t read it.”

Malfoy hand shot out and the pint tipped wildly. Harry caught it and righted it. “You say I have club hands,” he joked.

“You do. But anyway I didn’t say that; my goggles did.” Malfoy didn’t sound like he was paying attention even to himself—which was probably true, since he was talking about goggles talking. Instead he was peering at Harry with interest, a funny look on his face, as if he was trying to figure Harry out.

Apparently Malfoy would have very much liked to be on every page of the Daily Prophet, or something, and didn’t understand why Harry wouldn’t.

Harry pretended to be interested in wood grains on the table. He wished Malfoy would figure out that if he didn’t like being in the paper all the time he probably wouldn’t like being stared at like that either, like some surprising bug under a microscope. Then Harry realized Malfoy probably did know that and was still staring at him just to annoy him.

“You really don’t like all that publicity, do you.” Malfoy sounded like a professor talking to a student who had failed all his subjects.

“You just now figured that out? I thought you were smart.”

Malfoy perked up a bit from his apparently profound disappointment in everything that was Harry. “You did?”

“No.”

Malfoy went back to his somber depression. “I thought it was some kind of act.”

“What?”

“The modesty thing. It’s like bragging, only less honest.”

“I wouldn’t act modest if I wasn’t.”

“Oh God.” Malfoy put his head into his hands. “I really am an idiot.”

Harry didn’t disagree.

“I’m an idiot, I mean, because I forgot you were an idiot. How could I imagine you were capable of such guileful manipulation? Should have known. You’re too dense to be anything but revoltingly earnest.”

Harry snorted loudly. “Maybe I’m not dense enough not to know that going around lying all the time is kind of stupid.”

“I think you’re confusing an intelligence quotient and your personal moral standards. They’re inversely proportional, you see.”

“Whatever.” Harry shrugged. “There’s no point in pretending to be someone you’re not.”

“There’s all kinds of point.” Malfoy drew himself up.

“Is there? You don’t do it. You act like exactly who you are, most of the time.”

“I do not!” If Malfoy drew himself up any further he was going to start floating like Aunt Marge.

“Do too. You’re miserably candid.”

“Listen here.” Malfoy’s hands were tight around the tankard, and he was speaking through grit teeth. Color stained both cheekbones. “I am very good at Occulemency. I’m very good at—”

“If you were so good at hiding what you feel, Malfoy, you’d be pretending you didn’t give a flip what I was saying, and you’d be calm now, wouldn’t you?”

Malfoy pressed his lips together hard, then said very loudly, “I am calm.”

“I can see that.”

Malfoy deMarged. Mostly. “Don’t raise your brows at me, Potter; it doesn’t suit you. This is all your fault, anyway.”

“Maybe you just have trouble staying calm around me.”

“Don’t smirk, either, especially when exposing your foolishness.”

“What ever you say, Malfoy.” Harry smirked some more while Malfoy glowered. “It’s alright, you know. I mean, it suits you too. I wouldn’t want you to be someone you weren’t.”

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Honestly, Potter, like I’m worried about what you think.”

“Whatever.” He looked at Malfoy for a while, and Malfoy didn’t look at him, fiddling with the napkin and the pint and the vinegar and whatever else came to hand. It was the first time Harry had been talking to him in any recent memory when Malfoy wasn’t working on some project or other, something to keep his hands busy. It kept making Harry want to hold them still. There was still faint color on Malfoy’s cheeks.

Harry looked away. “What about you?” he demanded suddenly. “I mean you’re different. You’re different than I remember from school, anyway. What happened?”

Malfoy looked up, and then very pleased. Liked the opportunity to talk about his favorite subject, Harry guessed. “I don’t know,” Malfoy said, smirking. “I still think you’re terrifically overrated. And a prat who likes to subject everyone to his horrid moods. Oh, and you’re still disfigured.”

Harry put a hand up to the scar on his forehead. “I’m not disfigured.”

“No, no. Trust me; you are.” Malfoy was really very generous. “Don’t worry, it makes me look better in comparison. This is why I’ve let you hound me. Next to you I’m devilishly good looking.”

Harry watched him incredulously. “What are you doing with your face?”

“What? This is my rakish smile.”

“You look like you’ve got something stuck in your teeth.”

“I do not!” Malfoy sounded defensive. “I’ve been told it’s seductive.”

“No, really, you put your tongue behind your lips and you looked really—” Malfoy did it again, and Harry looked away. “You look really stupid.”

Malfoy began muttering under his breath. “I’m going to kill Pansy,” he said, louder.

Harry looked back and laughed. “Come on, Malfoy,” he said, still smiling. “You haven’t told me what you’ve been doing since school. Besides staging a revolt, or whatever.”

“Revolution.” Malfoy’s chin jut out.

Harry laughed again. “Whatever.”

“I’ve always been this brilliant and witty and clever.” Malfoy didn’t put his chin away. “You just never took the time to notice before.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Save me. I meant the part about you and this—cause. You never seemed so . . . dedicated before.”

“You take that back right now, Harry Potter. I was utterly and completely dedicated to exposing you for the lame-brain you were back at Hogwarts. No one appreciated my efforts, but that does not mean they were not zealous and heartfelt.”

“Okay.” Harry’s voice was slow. “You’re saying you’re a fanatic, basically.”

Malfoy was trying to look like Ghandi again. “When it’s about Truth, I am.”

Harry could hear the capital letter. He wanted to be annoyed but he was just shaking his head, smiling. “So when did you decide to stop trying to spread your delusions about me, and exchange it for a more

worthwhile goal?”

Malfoy smirked. It was very disturbing. “You said it’s worthwhile,” he pointed out.

Harry shifted in his chair. “I said it was ‘more’ worthwhile. I still think it’s pointless.”

“Maybe I should carry around a dictionary for you.”

“Sometimes you sound like Hermione,” Harry said. That was very disturbing also.

Malfoy considered that, looking like he’d swallowed something he hadn’t decided whether to spit out or not. “Thank you,” he said finally, stiffly. “I’ll take that as a compliment.” Apparently he was convinced Harry was trying to insult him. “She’s a very bright witch.”

“The brightest,” Harry said. He thought of Hermione, how she might even have liked Malfoy, if the latter could have ever gotten over the initial prejudice. Ron would probably have an apoplexy. Hermione would tell him to forget it, that he should learn to judge people for who they were, not who they had been, and Ron would say he did, and wasn’t supporting House Elves and giants and centaur rights enough? And Hermione would bury herself in her causes, and Ron would have to get away for a while, and then they would kiss, and make up, and go on as before, and Harry wondered whether that was what happily ever after really was.

“You should see them more,” Malfoy said. He was back to dragging a forefinger through the water on the table, but he had obviously seen the path of Harry’s thoughts.

Harry shrugged. “It’s hard right now. They’re . . . they have other things to worry about.”

“So, not their best mate, then?” Taking another sip of the lager, Malfoy still didn’t look at them.

“They lost a baby. Last month.” The words tasted bad in Harry mouth, and he grabbed the pint back from Malfoy. The glass didn’t taste any different where Malfoy’s lips had been.

“Sorry.” Malfoy said it so quietly Harry wasn’t sure he heard him right.

“Not like it’s your fault.” That didn’t taste right either.

“But that’s just it, isn’t it,” Malfoy continued in that same soft voice. “Infants aren’t supposed to die unless there are Dark Lords to kill them.”

Harry conjured up all the disgust for Malfoy he could in his face. “It was a miscarriage.”

“Yeah,” Malfoy said, as if that explained it all. “Perfectly natural. And yet you still feel bad it couldn’t be saved.”

“I don’t.”

“Maybe. But you still hate a world where things like that are true.”

Malfoy took back the pint, began turning it around, looking at it from different angles. “I know what it’s like to be so afraid of death you’re not even really living. And it made me appreciate what I’ve got. And it’s brilliant. Did you know that? Life is really brilliant.”

“I know.” Of course it was brilliant. It was all so bloody brilliant. Too bad so many never get to enjoy it, and there was nothing, but nothing you could do about it.

Harry shook his head. That was just Malfoy claiming to know Harry’s thoughts; it wasn’t what Harry really thought. He knew what the world was like, and he’d accepted it.

“But it’s why I’m doing this,” Malfoy went on. “Protesting against the Ministry. Fighting what they’re doing. Even if Carthage Parris wins, I’ll still have had this. I’ll have done what I wanted, lived the way I thought I should, and it’ll have been worth it. No one can make me afraid like he did—like Voldemort did—again. No one can take away my freedom like that. Because even if the worst that can happen happens, I’ll still appreciate how good I got it. To have survived. Lived.”

“That’s . . .” Harry didn’t know what that was. Of course he already knew all this. That was why he’d fought; that was why he went into that forest to die—because life was precious. “That’s great, Malfoy,” he said finally.

“No.” Malfoy moved his hands off the pint, writing in the water again, nonsense things that didn’t last. “That’s exactly it, Potter; you don’t know how great it is. Intellectually you know, but you’re not living it. You look at your life and you’re treading murky water.”

Harry’s hands tightened into fists on the table. “We can’t all go around waving swords,” Harry spat. “Some of us have already done that and we’re tired. We’re fighting for the long haul, Malfoy—making a real difference, instead of fighting wars that will start again every few decades or so anyway.”

“We have to do both,” Malfoy said. “The only thing we can’t do is sit and watch the world pass us by.”

“Whatever,” Harry said. He tried it again. “Whatever. I do things my way. You can do whatever you want.”

Malfoy was silent for a long time. “Can I?”

“What?” Harry said irritably.

“You never answered my question. From before. About if someone was to turn me in, try to make trouble for me. What would you tell the Aurors? That you’ve been following me? That I admitted to the pamphlet? That you saw me writing the Fortune?”

“That’s it?” Harry demanded. “That’s what this is about? This whole conversation? You just want to know whether I’m going to fucking turn you in?”

“What else could it have been about?” Malfoy was looking at him steadily, calmly.

It infuriated Harry further. Malfoy wasn’t supposed to be calm around him. Malfoy wasn’t supposed to keep his cool around him; he wasn’t supposed to be able to. He was supposed to talk, swift and breathless; his chest was supposed to heave narrowly beneath his thin shirt. Harry was supposed to be able to see the pulse point in his throat and the heat in his eyes, like there was a whole silver metal workshop in there, on fire, pumping bellows, melting hard things, melding something beautiful.

“Harry,” Malfoy said suddenly.

It startled Harry so much he could look back to Malfoy without wanting to clock him in the face.

“Harry,” Malfoy said again. “If you had to choose, one or the other. Would you turn me in? Or would you let me go?”

Harry didn’t say anything.

“What if they brought me in? Just say they did. Just say you had to tell the Ministry everything I’ve been doing. Everything you’ve suspected me of, everything you think I and my friends might be capable of. Either that, or tell them you’ve been watching me, and I haven’t been doing a single thing out of the ordinary. Which would you do?”

Harry closed his hands into fists. His jaw clenched so hard it began to ache.

“Let me put it yet another way. What if you just had to identify me? Just point at me, and say to the

Aurors, the Ministry, any of them, ‘yes, that is Draco Malfoy’, or ‘no, that is not’. What if that was all you had to do?” When Harry still said nothing, he asked quietly, “What if you even had an excuse? What if my face was puffed up by a balloon, and you could almost convince yourself you couldn’t be sure?”

Harry was silent.

“No,” Malfoy said. He shook his head vehemently. “Choose, Potter. Either way. Don’t just stand there, not knowing which way to fall, too terrified to make a choice. Don’t let them take away your power to choose. Don’t let them silence you. The worst thing in the world—the worst thing in the world—is silence.”

* * *

Harry had seen Draco Malfoy only a handful of times after the got out of Hogwarts and before he was arrested and brought to Harry’s office to be charged.

The time he remembered best was on Christmas Eve, when Andromeda held a large party for Teddy. He should get to have Christmas at home every once in a while, she argued, and even if he had no parents, that home should still be full. So the Weasleys came, and friends of Weasleys, and Thomas’s, and some Auror friends of Tonks’. And Narcissa and Draco came, because Andromeda had invited them thinking life was too short, and that they would never show.

But they did, and hung in the back and looked washed out and out of place just as they had at the feast after Voldemort’s defeat, until Andromeda realized life really was too short, and went forward to draw them out. Andromeda welcomed them and introduced them around, as if everyone didn’t already know, and Narcissa looked stiff and mortified the whole time while Draco looked lost.

Later in the night, Harry had noticed Teddy missing, and went out into the yard to look for him. The air in the house tasted muggy and warm, full of too many people’s bodies and breath hazing up the light. Out here it was clear, and he could see his own individual breath in front of him, ethereal, alone.

But he wasn’t alone, because Teddy was out there, looking up at the night sky, hair as silver in the

moonlight as the tall man's beside him. Draco was showing Teddy the stars, and Teddy was laughing with delight.

"No she's not!" Teddy shrieked, full of giggles.

Malfoy nodded solemnly. "Is too. Your grandmum's up there. So's your aunt, and your cousins, and all of the Blacks, all the way back to Orion."

"Why would they live up there?"

Malfoy's head tilted, exposing white throat as he tipped his head back to the sky. "Some say our past is up there. And our future, all mapped out. And all you're doing down here is following it. Just trudging along until you die."

"I don't want to die," Teddy said practically.

"Me neither." Malfoy laughed. "I want more biscuits."

"And juice."

Harry looked up too, and could only remember Moody falling from the sky.

Teddy toddled over and told him to look, look, see, grandmum was up there.

Looking down at Teddy, Harry could only remember trying so hard not to drop the baby when he was younger, trying to figure out what to do with him before he could talk, trying to know what a godfather was supposed to be, when his had died before he could really know him. Harry took his glasses off and told Teddy sharply, no, he couldn't see.

Draco had come toward him with a wand. When Harry started away, Draco rolled his eyes and said, “Shut up, Potter. It’s only temporary.” Then he’d tapped Harry’s temple and murmured something, and Harry could see everything, without his glasses. He could see the stars, he could see the strands of Teddy’s hair fading between black and white as he stood between Harry and Draco, he could see the gray of Draco’s eyes.

Sometimes, behind smudged spectacles, looking out at the world through glass, sometimes Harry could still see Draco clearer than anything, his head bent back toward the stars.

Then he looked at Harry and said, “It’s only temporary,” and the image faded back to gray.

* * *

Three weeks more of keeping and eye on Malfoy, and the Dark Mark flashed up against the sky.

An immediate cry went out to arrest and bring to justice the Death Eaters behind Protestwatch and Our Runed Fortune. They had been causing a stir, lately, and many had been listening, some for the secret program and underground newspaper, some violently against. But with the Dark Mark in the air, the rest who had been waiting to see what would happen realized five years after it ended was too soon to end a war, that Death Eaters shouldn’t have been allowed to live. Carthage Parris led the call for blood.

Three minutes after the news hit the Auror department, Harry made some calls on the mobile Hermione had given him one birthday. Then he Apparated into an alley by a rundown complex in a not so nice Muggle section of London, and ran to one of the tiny flats.

The dark-haired bloke from the Hogshead was behind the door when it opened.

“Who are you?” Harry demanded, and stepped inside.

The bloke backed up. “What—what do you want?”

“There’s a Dark Mark,” Harry said. “Outside Manchester. Where is Draco Malfoy?”

“Y-you’re Harry Potter,” the bloke stuttered. “We didn’t—I mean, we’re not—”

The bloke dissolved into a fit and might have mumbled something about Ghandi. Harry could already taste the blood in his mouth. He only realized after he swallowed that it was because he’d bitten his tongue. “Stop it,” he told the shaking man, and grabbed him by the shoulders. “I’m not going to hurt you; I’m only looking for Draco Malfoy. Just him. Where is he?”

“In . . . Down the corridor.” The man pointed, and slumped against the wall when Harry let go his hold.

Harry didn’t think about the darkness of the corridor as he strode down it. He thought about the end. Malfoy’s stupid happy sitting room, stupid Malfoy.

There are over a dozen people there when Harry burst into the room. They barely fit. It was too warm, too close, and Harry suddenly remembered that Christmas party at Andromeda’s, and wondered if that was the last time he’d seen so many people looking so intimate, and laughing so much.

But Harry couldn’t really see the rest of them. For a moment he was outside, alone, just his breath, under the stars, and Malfoy.

Harry said his name. He had to resist the urge to point. Yes, that is Draco Malfoy.

Malfoy looked up. He had been laughing, too, and there was pink on his cheeks. The laughter fell away as he registered Harry’s presence, but it left a smile on his face, bemused, but at the same time oddly pleased. “Well, Potter,” he said finally, when Harry didn’t say anything. “So glad you could—”

“We need to talk.” Harry jerked his head back toward the corridor. “Now.”

Malfoy stared at him a moment, his face going strangely blank, as if he could read everything that had happened in Harry’s eyes, and knew that Harry was bringing him out to turn him in. This is Draco Malfoy. But then Malfoy shrugged and handed his glass of wine to someone. He made his way through his little crowd, smiling as if he was going on a pleasant jaunt, and Harry remembered thousands of times at Hogwarts when Malfoy swaggered through the crowds in order to make a fool of himself.

He didn’t care. He didn’t care what anyone thought.

He should. “Malfoy.” Harry jerked his arm once Malfoy finally got close enough, and pulled him out into the long dark corridor. The dark-haired bloke’s eyes widened when he saw them, looking from one to the other.

“It’s alright,” Malfoy said, and the man scurried past them both and into the safety of the golden light. Malfoy nodded after him. “Can you believe you were worried over that?”

“You should be worried, Malfoy.” Harry wanted to shake him.

“He’s Nott’s brother. You might remember him from flights of cowardice such as—”

“You don’t have time,” Harry snapped.

The last time Harry was here was to rail at Malfoy about Potterwatch. “It was all silence,” Malfoy had said that last time, and walked into the dark. Harry closed his eyes for a moment.

“We’re having another meeting,” Malfoy said eventually, warily, waiting for Harry to talk. “The Hogshead is so drafty. We’re going to do a picket line. Have you heard of those? Muggles have them, only mine will

be so much better, because there'll be moving signs, and badges, and demonstrations . . . You remember the badges, don't you? Potter?"

"You need to get out." Harry's eyes opened.

Malfoy pressed his lips together. "Awfully cold outside."

"There was a Dark Mark cast in the sky near Manchester."

Malfoy went pale, but when he spoke, his tone was light. "You know, when it comes down to it, Voldemort had crap design sense Complete crap. My signs will be so much more sophisticated than his dirty old Mark. Then people will be able to judge we've gone our separate ways by our artistic differences."

"This is not funny."

"No," Malfoy agreed. He was bone white, but his voice was steady. "I suppose it really isn't." He swallowed something like a sigh. "What are you doing here, then? If not for a good laugh, I mean."

"You told me," Harry said. "You said I had to choose."

Malfoy's skin was beginning to look kind of gray, and it wasn't the dim light. He just nodded wearily. "I see. I do admit," he said after another moment, his lips twitching, the way his smiles always teased before they delivered. "I'll be glad to see Jimbo again. Do my wrists go in or out?"

He thrust his hands at Harry, bony wrists knocked together. His palms were open like a book, but they were white, the pages empty. Unwritten.

"No. No—I'm not going to arrest you. I'm here to—look, Malfoy." Harry's voice was suddenly harsh.

“You’re going to come with me.”

“What?” Malfoy’s fingers curled in on themselves and separated. “What are you—”

“They think you did it. I mean—they don’t know who, but they’ll find out you’re behind the wireless program, and—and all of that. They’ll find out and they’ll come for you. Carthage Parris is already shouting your name.”

“Carthy,” Malfoy said with dignity, “is a lunatic.”

“I know. I think he cast the Mark.”

Malfoy’s jaw worked. “You mean you—”

“I’ve been checking him out. The past couple of weeks. Some things don’t make sense. And you were right; he’s quite mad.”

“But why would—”

“Come on,” Harry snapped, impatient. “Think like a Slytherin, or have you forgotten how? He wants at the Death Eaters any way he can get. He’s just waiting for a way to prove to the public that they’re a threat, and you’ve done him a favor by bringing the lot of them together—”

“I didn’t.” Malfoy gulped. “I haven’t. Only the ones that were—that wouldn’t turn around a follow a new Dark Lord, if one came, because you were right, they come and they come and they come again. I never got any of those sorts on my side; they would ruin it; we’d have to start all over. We can afford—we don’t kill, or torture, or hunt. We’re rising above; we’re showing the wizarding world we’re not all—”

Harry shook him. He’d been talking so fast Harry hadn’t heard most of what he said. Harry shook him

again. “Listen to me,” he said. “I don’t think it was one of you. I said, I think it’s Parris. Listen to me.” Malfoy’s mouth was opening to spill again. “I believe you.”

Malfoy blinked and shut his mouth with a sharp click. Then: “Why?”

“There’s not time for that now. We just have to go. They’ll figure it out soon. You haven’t exactly been circumspect; I told you you should—”

“No.” Malfoy jerked out of his grasp.

“We have to go now,” Harry said.

Malfoy was slowly shaking his head. “I don’t think so. Very kind of you to offer, and everything.”

Harry had never really been good at resisting punching Malfoy when he really wanted to. It was getting harder by the moment. “This isn’t a trap,” he grit out.

“I know it’s not. Er, thanks for that. . . . I actually mean that.” Malfoy’s voice got weird when it was sincere, stiff and awkward, since it wasn’t like he usually talked that way. “It’s just . . . a bit pointless, isn’t it? If Carthy’s out for Death Eaters, and the Ministry and Aurors and everyone are behind him—they’ll just find someone else to pin it on, won’t they? And since the real Death Eaters—I mean, the ones that are still interested in Dark—are really good at hiding these days, mostly the people the Aurors will get are my friends. All in there.” Malfoy waved a vague hand back toward the living room.

The silence in the other room was heavy. Nott must have told them what Harry had said, about the Mark. Maybe they could even hear the two of them now.

“They’re not . . .” important, Harry had been going to say, but stopped at the look on Malfoy’s face. “They’ll be looking for you first,” Harry said finally. “It will be a while before they start to try to pin it on

the others. They have less evidence for them. You need to save yourself first, and then we can—”

Malfoy snorted, then rolled his eyes at Harry’s frustrated look. “Remember what you told me that one time? About including my friends in what was going on? Well, some people do that, Harry. And those people in there—my friends—they’ve been just as involved in everything I’ve been doing.”

Nott had helped him set up the frequency for Protestwatch, Malfoy had said. And since they were all following Malfoy (of all people. God, the irony), they were probably just as unconcerned as Malfoy about getting caught, assured by the conviction that they weren’t doing anything wrong. And they hadn’t been, it was true, but it would look bad—everyone who had been on Protestwatch, contributed to the Fortune. All of them.

“Take them with you,” Harry said finally.

Malfoy looked a little helpless, like he had at the victory feast at Hogwarts, like he had at Andromeda’s. Like he didn’t know where he belonged, and didn’t know who would help him, and like he wanted his mum. Harry wanted to shake him again, to tell him he couldn’t be silent; the silence was over. “Where would we go?” Malfoy asked. “We have no secret places—the Ministry made sure of that when all of us were tried. And who would harbor us?”

“Godric’s Hollow.”

“Whosit what?”

“It’s mine. It’s under Fidelius. Bring them all. Just come now.”

“But why—” Malfoy started.

“Why do you keep asking questions?”

“But your friends,” Malfoy said. “One of the has to be the Secret Keeper, right?”

“They know. I called them already. They’ll be with me on this.”

“The Order of the Phoenix—”

“We have to trust them.” Harry didn’t know where the various members of the Order stood on the current political situation. After all, it wasn’t exactly as though protecting Death Eaters was really the Order’s calling. But Malfoy had said to make a choice, and Harry had. He’d decided to fight, and for him fighting had always meant doing what was necessary at the time, and then dealing with consequences when they came.

He felt like he hadn’t done anything so necessary in a very long time.

Malfoy was shaking his head. “You don’t know—”

“You do what you have to,” Harry said, and for some reason this was what made Malfoy appear to consider it.

His eyes searched Harry’s. “Potter,” he said eventually.

“Now,” Harry said, and they went.

When Malfoy went back into his sitting room to tell the silent people gathered there what had happened and what they were going to do, all his hesitation was gone. He sent runners to Apparate out, contact other people in danger of being hunted down by Aurors who weren’t guilty of anything but following Malfoy’s example of dissemination of information. He set coordinates for another place to gather, where they could Apparate together to Godric’s Hollow. He sounded organized and authoritative, and his

hands, which Harry had always thought moved randomly when he talked, looked precise and strong.

Harry wondered if this was how he had looked when he was fighting Voldemort, and whether the lost boy Malfoy had been in the corridor was how Harry had looked since.

But Harry had made a choice, here, now. He knew what he had to do again, and it wasn't because he was the Chosen One, or because there was a Prophecy, or because he had a piece of Voldemort inside him. He was just Harry, and he was just helping someone he—just doing something he believed in.

Yes, this is Harry Potter, he thought, with a moue of twisted lips, then Apparated to the coordinates Malfoy had given all of them. They prepared to leave the meeting place in groups, so each could reveal the secret to one another. Harry held Malfoy's and Pansy Parkinson's hands so they could Side-Along first.

"Don't get any ideas, Pansy," Malfoy said, leaning around Harry to leer at Parkinson.

"Don't get any ideas, Draco," Parkinson said, and leered at Harry.

Then they arrived at Godric's Hollow, and Malfoy and Parkinson went back for more.

Harry had some more calls to make: the rest of the Order, and those he had called before arriving at Malfoy's: George, Ginny, and Hermione.

He was worried about that last. He knew what Ron would say.

"Obviously, you don't," Hermione said, when Harry Flooed. "We may disagree on a lot of little stuff, but Ron would never leave his friends in the cold when they need his help."

"Might if it's Malfoy." Ron appeared over Hermione's shoulder. "Or, oh, that one time with that locket,

and we were out in the middle of nowhere, and Harry had no idea what he was doing. I'd totally ditch both of you then."

"Shut up, Ronald," Hermione said.

"Harry was thinking it; he just wasn't going to say," Ron pointed out, feigning offense. His nose was mostly in Hermione's hair.

"Don't worry, Harry," Hermione said. "We'll be bringing help."

"And the Putter-Outer," Ron said, and didn't appear to have hard feelings, about this or Harry's doubt.

A few moments later, Harry pulled his head out of the Floo, and saw Malfoy standing there at the door. He was lounging, lazy against the frame. "Mates alright?" He raised a cool brow.

"They'll help."

"Granger and Weasel." Malfoy pursed his lips. "Well, well."

Harry hadn't heard that tone since Hogwarts. He felt a flash of panic, like he might be back there, like maybe nothing had changed, he made a choice and he'd chosen wrong—

Apparently his hands felt it too, because they tightened into fists. "Mr. and Mrs. Weasley," he grit out.

"I'm not going to change, Potter."

"I just meant maybe you didn't need to insult my friends."

“And I’m just letting you know that we’re going to keep it up. Everything. We’ll still run our wireless program, even though you tried to get me to stop it, even though you think it ruins everything about your Potterwatch. We’re still going to print our paper. We’re still going to be members of this society, Potter. We’re not going to stop living just to keep breathing.”

Harry relaxed, though he was puzzled. “I wouldn’t want you to.”

Malfoy nodded once. “I just thought . . . There will be some people who don’t think we all deserve to be Kissed on the spot, but they’ll wonder why we don’t just duck our heads and keep from being noticed. Why we don’t just keep silent.”

“Well,” Harry said, thinking this through. He shrugged. “You know what they say about silence.”

Malfoy’s lips twitched.

Harry pushed his glasses up. “We’ll just have to deal with it as it comes. You knew it wasn’t going to be easy. I’m not sure even all the members of the Order will be alright with this.”

“But you’re alright with it. Why?”

“I said we could cover that later. Now we have to—”

“We have time now. Answer me.”

“Or what?” Harry scoffed. “You’ll turn yourself in?”

Malfoy's eyes narrowed. He came forward. "You have no idea what I'm capable of."

Harry felt his breath quicken with Malfoy this close. Maybe because he never exactly stopped wanting to punch Malfoy; maybe he just naturally went on the defensive when Malfoy got close like this. Every muscle in Harry's body was tense. "You're the one that said I had to choose," Harry said testily.

"Yes, you've said that. You mean to say you think former Death Eaters should have full rights, and that the people being accused of having been Death Eater accomplices—who never were, by the way, like Zabini's mum—should be cleared, and—"

Harry was shaking his head. "No, I—"

"I knew there were other reasons." Malfoy was sneering. His voice was cruel. And under it all was hurt. "What are they?" he spat. "Why are you really doing this?"

"I'm sorry." Harry's voice was harsh, because he was sorry, and angry for the truth, and miserable because he didn't know what that truth was, and confused. "I don't really know what rights Death Eaters should have, or anything about Zabini's stupid mum. I didn't choose them."

Malfoy was in his face. His nose was scrunched and his pale jaw taut. He looked worse, angry; his skin drew tight so his angles seemed even sharper. "What did you—" he began.

"I chose you," Harry snapped.

"W-what?" Confusion flooded Malfoy's face.

Harry backed up and looked away. "I chose you. I don't care what you've done, or what you're doing; I just wanted . . . You couldn't go to Azkaban. I couldn't let them take you away."

“But . . . why?” The honesty of Malfoy’s bewilderment was so raw, he sounded lost again, and it made Harry even more angry.

“I don’t know! I don’t know, okay? I just know that when I look at you—I can see you.”

“Of course you can.” Harry could tell just from the tone of Malfoy’s voice that he was about to babble nonsensically. That’s what he did when he was hurt or confused or afraid. “Of course you can see, because you’re a specky; I always said you were, but no one would listen to me, and I had to say, ‘look, you, they’re right there on his face’—”

“No.” Harry took his glasses off and took a step forward, Malfoy’s uncertainty making him more certain. Malfoy looked like he wanted to take a step back. “I mean, when I look at you, I see you. You’re clear. Everything else blurs together, but you—you’re straight lines.”

Malfoy put his nose in the air. “I just have a very pronounced bone structure. It’s not my fault I stick out all over the place, Potter; you shouldn’t pick on people’s physical foibles—”

“Will you just shut up? I’m trying to get something out here.”

“Get what out?” Malfoy said, alarmed. “All you’ve got out is nonsense; I don’t understand what you’re saying!”

“I’m saying what you said, about me treading water, that’s true. But I look at you and—I know what I want. I know what to do. Sometimes I see you—do you remember that time? It was Christmas, and you were showing Teddy the stars, and you did that spell on my eyes. I’ve never . . . I’ve never seen so clearly in all my life as I did that night. And all I see—when the world is clear like that, when the sky is light, for once—all I see is you.”

“Oh.” Malfoy fell back a step. “Oh, no.”

“I just mean I know what I’m doing now.” Harry swallowed hard. “And I didn’t before.”

“That’s not what you mean.” Malfoy’s voice was back to being vicious. “You don’t know what you’re doing.”

Harry shook his head. “I can’t explain it; you just make me feel—”

“This is . . . I can’t do this now.” Malfoy wavered, looking slightly ill.

Harry looked away. “I’m not asking you to do anything. You’re the one that asked.”

“The timing is so very bad.”

“We don’t need timing,” Harry said wearily. “I don’t need anything. You asked, and I told you, and that’s all that—”

“Potter!” Malfoy’s voice was rising. “We’re on the run. From the law. We’re refugees. I’m the leader of a refugee camp, practically. I am not Ghandi. I’m—I’m Lawrence of Arabia; I’m—”

“Malfoy.” Harry put his hand on Malfoy’s shoulder and shook it. Malfoy flinched at the touch, and Harry let him go. “Stop it.”

“God, you can be so dense.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “You don’t need to worry about it; it’s not your problem. It’s not even a problem, really; it’s just—”

“I thought you were coming around to my way of thinking,” Malfoy said quickly. “You were so lost, and I thought . . . you needed something to fight for. It’s what you’re good at, and I thought I could use you to help us. I thought I was winning you over to us, our cause, I never realized—”

“Use me?”

“You were there.” Malfoy shrugged. “Seemed to me our needs coincided. I was doing both of us a favor.”

“Oh,” Harry said tightly. “All this time, I thought you’d gotten over your petty hatred of me. Just turns out there were bigger things on your mind?”

“I didn’t trick you! I never meant to make you—how could I have known? How could I have even guessed it was a possibility?”

“You couldn’t,” Harry said thickly. “I didn’t want you to. I didn’t want to. I never wanted . . . this.”

Harry had been thinking Malfoy was being cold, but that couldn’t be true, because Malfoy went cold now. His face went numb and his lips white. “Yes,” he hissed, “I think we’re both well aware you never wanted me.”

“That wasn’t what I—”

“What did you mean?” Malfoy demanded. “Something other than you just want to be normal, when no one ever can be, when no one ever is? Something other than that you need instructions on how to live your life, and that’s why you need to be normal—because now you have no Voldemort, you don’t know what you’re good for? Something other than that?”

Harry was silent.

Malfoy spun on his heel and left.

When Harry heard the door close, he turned around, pressing his forehead against the mantle. He heard himself make a choking sound, and didn't know why.

He didn't want to have to deal with this. Any of it. Stupid Malfoy's stupid assumptions and—and, and wanting to fuck Malfoy's stupid bony arse, punch his stupid mouth and bite it until it was red and bruised and wanting more—

They should have had happily ever afters. Him and Hermione and Ron. They deserved it. They shouldn't have grown apart, Harry should have had a family, Hermione and Ron shouldn't fight like they did, shouldn't have been losing babies. But shouldn't-have had to happen, and life was just like war, just like what he'd always done when fighting: you did what was necessary. You did what you had to.

Harry closed his eyes.

Malfoy was there, clear as ever, and Harry knew that would be the case with or without the damn glasses.

Malfoy tilted his head back toward the stars, and Harry knew what he wanted.

Harry opened his eyes and went to find Malfoy. Malfoy's compatriots, all the ex-Death Eaters and friends of, were still sorting out sleeping arrangements in the other rooms, a blur of noise in the background. Malfoy was standing in the kitchen, alone, looking out the window.

Malfoy didn't look over when Harry stepped to stand beside him, but didn't move away.

"You were right," Harry said. "This is really bad timing."

Malfoy's lips twitched, and he turned toward Harry a fraction. "Brighter people than you are have mentioned that."

"Yes." Harry's hand went up around Malfoy's neck. "You said I'm slow."

"Yes, you are, and I think—what are you doing?"

"This."

Harry leaned in, and Malfoy pushed him away. "No, you must have misunderstood. This is not—this, 'I see you' thing, this is not reciprocal!"

"Now who's afraid, and doesn't know what to do?" Harry stepped forward again, and Malfoy backed up, practically tripping over himself in haste, until he was back against the counter and Harry had him pinned there.

"No." Malfoy's breath was still coming quick. Harry could feel his chest moving against his, feel his strong hands gripping his arms tightly, neither pushing away nor pulling, feel his cock coming up against his thigh. "No," Malfoy breathed again, head turned from Harry, exposing the swift bird's wing beat of his pulse. "I know what I'm doing. I mean, I'm sure you're fine, Potter, very manly, but I don't . . ."

"Don't what?" Harry leaned in, mouth so close to Malfoy's ear Malfoy shuddered and his cock jumped.

"I don't . . . it's not a good idea," Malfoy said hoarsely.

"Here's what I think." Harry didn't move away. "I think you're doing just fine finding out who you are. Way better than me, anyway. But that doesn't mean a part of you won't always be that scared boy you were when Voldemort was in your house, when Voldemort was making you do things. I think a part of you will always be too scared to say whether this—" he pushed his hips hard up against

Malfoy—“whether this is Harry Potter.”

“No!” But Malfoy didn’t move.

“And you’re so focused on making your own choices this time around, you don’t realize you’re supposed to have that part of you, that’s small, afraid, uncertain. Everyone does.”

“I am not everyone!” Malfoy finally managed to shove Harry back. He stood there, chest heaving, fists clenched. His hair was all askew. “I’m me!” Harry wondered if Malfoy was going to thump his chest. “I’m me, and I have to do what I want. I have to be what I want, I have to be someone, or else I won’t be . . .”

“Anyone?” Harry guessed. “You don’t actually have to be Lawrence of Arabia, you know. Though that blond Muggle that played him in that film was—”

“You shut up!”

“Alright,” Harry said. “But you should know. I walked into that woods, and I knew Voldemort was going to kill me. And I kept going because it was the right thing to do. But another reason I did it was I didn’t know what else to do. Sure, I was supposed to have a choice, free will and that, but it didn’t look that way from where I was standing. It was just something I had to do, and I did it partly because I was afraid. I didn’t know how to do anything else. It’s always like that, Draco. It always is.”

Malfoy was looking at him with his sneer and his balled up fists and his too intense eyes. “I told you this is really bad timing,” he grit out finally, tone accusatory. “I told you.”

Harry stepped forward again, until his breath was tickling Malfoy’s hair again. “Whatever, Malfoy. You don’t have to—”

Harry cut off because Malfoy was kissing him. He didn’t know what to do with his hands, but he was through with not knowing what to do and so doing nothing. He guessed grabbing and holding on tightly

wasn’t a bad idea, at any rate.

Malfoy kept biting Harry’s lips, his tongue tight in Harry’s mouth, his hips grinding into Harry’s in a way that hurt when their bones banged and ached when their cocks rubbed.

It was really very good, until Malfoy pulled away and wiped his mouth. Then he leaned back in, forehead almost touching Harry’s, because it was obvious he didn’t want their eyes to meet.

“You’re alright,” Malfoy said, apparently feeling generous. “But we can only do this as long as I’m not in a cell with Jimbo. Then I go straight back into his arms; I’m warning you.”

“Okay, Malfoy,” Harry said. “I’ll do what I can to keep you away from him.” They turned and face the kitchen window again, because it had been a long night and dawn finally seemed to be approaching.

Harry reached down and grabbed Malfoy’s hand. He squeezed so tight he could feel the bones, so hard Malfoy should have been wincing, if he hadn’t been grinding just as hard back.

The morning light was gray.

REVIEW