Du Bullio

Author: The Ruby Moth

Pairing: Harry/Draco

Rating: NC-17 for m/m slash smut adult mature sexual content.

Warning: Spanking, first-time, rimming, anal, toy, voyeurism, mild bondage, explicit sex, self-wank, angst, brief Muggle female nudity (reference and imagery), bottom!Draco, misuse of bubbles, dubious consent, Slytherin plotting. (As opposed to Hufflepuff plotting, because, like, no, Slytherins are not 'nice', but manipulative towards self-preservation.)

Warning 2: Contains spanking! This is not a light, playful spank-kink fic, nor a Dark!fic. It is however, 'Psychological' with emotional impact.

Author's Note: Post-HBP/HBP-compliant, 7th Yr. Not a PWP, but SWS: SpankingWithSubstance.

Word count: 28806.

Betas: G. and Nance O'Neil. (Thank you! You are both so fast!)

Disclaimer: This story is based on characters and situations created and owned by JK Rowling, various publishers including but not limited to Bloomsbury Books, Scholastic Books and Raincoast Books, and Warner Bros., Inc. No money is being made and no copyright or trademark infringement is intended. Any resemblances of this fic to any others are coincidental.

Summary: Poor Draco. In the wake of Voldemort's defeat, Hogwarts is open for Draco's seventh year when he is given a second chance to take his N.E.W.T.s, but the Slytherins are desperate to regain their house pride. With the help of a forbidden spell, Draco shoulders the task of watching Harry Potter. Needless to say, things do not go as planned, and reality bubbles are popped.

Reality Bubble: A person's worldview, defined by how they perceive the world around them.

Status: Complete. Two parts.

Note: bubble = Latin, bulla/bullio (ebullio = boil, produce, create more of)

double or twin = Latin, du

Du Bullio

Part One

Draco stared at his breakfast, watching it squirm as the cereal slowly drowned in the milk, enraptured by the death-throes of the soggy pieces.

Grimly, he stabbed at one of them with his spoon, and imagined them shrieking for mercy. The big one here, with the large head; that could be Potter - his head was fat enough. But no, it resembled a messy helmet of hair… Granger, then. And the untidy little one about to go under for the last time - that was the Weasel. He held his spoon over it with morbid fascination, so that it couldn't surface for air. It went limp and finally stopped struggling under his spoon.

He scooped them all up in one spoonful and ate them, wishing he could dispose of the Golden Trio so effortlessly and messily.

Millicent was watching him, a brow raised. He stared back at her until she looked down and away. Silly bint. Although he supposed he had indulged in a little pre-Hogwarts behaviour there, for a moment. Wouldn't do to start acting un-Malfoy-like now. He allowed himself to sulk about it momentarily; Mother

had always let him play with his food. She'd found it endearing that he could enjoy the deaths of his grapes and sliced peaches, his peas and his carrots. He'd enjoyed enacting their grisly end before he devoured them. It burned anew that he could not actually actively kill or harm anyone in life - he'd made himself redundant, and it was fortunate indeed that Potter had killed Lord Voldemort, or Draco would have been next, along with his parents.

Look out, world; it's Draco Malfoy, vegetable killer.

With Father still in prison, and the Dark Lord dead, and Professor Snape constantly sulking in Potions at Remus Lupin returning to teach the Defense Against the Dark Arts, and Harry Potter as the renewed Hero Who Defeated You-Know-Who, the Slytherins were all on edge, and looked to him for leadership in these dark and troubled times.

Well, maybe not leadership, he acknowledged silently. A role model. An example.

He supposed he should look on the bright side: at least that oaf Slughorn had left.

"Are you all right, Draco?" Pansy asked solicitously beside him. "You seem pensive."

"It's nothing," Draco replied reassuringly. "Just plotting Potter's downfall."

Blaise snorted loudly from across the table. Draco glared up at him. "What's your problem?" Draco demanded.

Blaise shrugged. "That one's a bit old, don't you think? Potter's no longer the problem. He's untouchable. The problem is the Gryffindors themselves. They need to be taken down a peg or two."

Draco flushed at having to accept such a blatant put-down in front of his schoolmates, his brethren, his frie- Okay, not friends, so much, but supporters and worshippers. Although most of them hadn't been

very worshipful or supportive lately. Or at all, come to think of it.

Things were getting out of hand. He had to DO something. Curtly, he snapped, "If it weren't for Potter, the Gryffindorks would be eating our twigs while our brooms owned the pitch, so don't tell me he's not the source of our misery. Do I have to bring out the last twenty issues of Witch Weekly again to prove my point?"

Blaise didn't reply, but met his gaze coldly.

Crabbe cracked his meaty knuckles and said with his mouth full, "Want me and Goyle to take care of him?"

Draco shook his head. "Sadly, Vincent, there are less violent and overt ways we must stoop to achieve our end."

"Our end?" Crabbe frowned. "I thought you wanted Potter's end."

"Yeah, his rear end," muttered the vain little curly-haired fourth-year girl sitting two seats down from Pansy.

Draco was rather astonished. He hadn't known it had grown this bad. Draco knew now that he was losing them. Usually it was bad enough trying to keep Blaise and Theo from straying. As seventh-years, they were all too likely to incite an exodus amongst the younger years away from Draco. He made a note to hex her later. Her rear end; that would be fitting. Angrily, he turned on Crabbe. "We can't start any more fights. Even Snape can't keep us out of trouble if we do it again. You heard that old bitch the last time. She'll sabotage our Quidditch team by putting all our players in detention if we do."

"Oh, right," Crabbe said, remembering, his face falling.

"Do you have a plan?" Pansy asked him.

"I'm working on it."

"I already have one," Blaise said calmly.

Draco looked at him. Blaise looked back, his handsome face now allowing a measure of smug satisfaction to turn his usually cold features into something that was undoubtedly supposed to be attractive. Draco did not find it so. There had been a time when he'd thought he could fancy Blaise, but it had only lasted a few weeks back in fifth year, and these days... There was something about Blaise that had always worried at Draco; for such a dark, Italian countenance, he had such a chilly nature. He must have inherited it from his mother, the Black Widow.

Draco preferred dark-haired people; when it came to attraction, the idea of fancying lighter-haired people privately gave him the willies - they reminded him too much of his parents. And he'd die before succumbing to a fondness for redheads, like pitiful Zabini, here. Everyone knew Blaise was nursing a three-year crush on the mini-Weasley. Ah. He'd found his angle.

"Considering the Weaselette is now the property of the aforesaid Potter, I'd say that our objectives have dovetailed. We split them up, we both get what we want. You get the girl, and I get Potter in intense pain and suffering."

Goyle frowned at him. "Draco, we just offered to put him in pain and suffering and you didn't want it."

"Emotional torment is always more wounding and long-lasting," Draco explained without looking at Goyle. He watched Blaise's face.

Finally, Blaise nodded. "Very well. But not here; you know the Gryffs use those Extendable Ears."

"After lunch, then," Draco agreed.

Pansy gave a sigh of contentment and tucked a stray piece of hair behind her ear before leaning against his shoulder. "I've missed this," she said mournfully. "We haven't had a good caper or won something against them in a long time. Not since…" She fell quiet.

Long faces appeared around Draco, and he let out a breath. "I know. It's dreadful. I'm telling you, if we take down Potter, we bring down the whole lot. In one blow. He's the lynch-pin."

"Lynch-pin?" asked Crabbe.

Patiently, Draco replied, "Fulcrum point." Crabbe still looked mystified.

"Their leader. Take him out, the rest will fall."

Goyle and Crabbe looked relieved at his explanation. Draco began to wonder if he needed to trade them in for better henchmen. Or ditch them altogether. Cut them loose. If his bodyguards were this stupid, it continued to reflect poorly on him. But they'd stood by him this long, and since the Malfoy name no longer carried much weight, particularly at Hogwarts, he had to be careful. He didn't want to lose them to Zabini or Nott. The thought of getting a beating from Crabbe's ape-arms was not one to be taken lightly.

But Draco felt ill, now. If only Dumbledore hadn't turned up again, having faked his death. He owed Dumbledore too much though. Apparently the old coot had been using the Philosopher's Stone to keep himself alive, and had resurrected himself. Snape had been cleared of all charges, much to Potter's anger. Apparently, too, his father had delivered one of the means of the Dark Lord's destruction directly into Potter's hands, and had remained in Azkaban when he could have escaped. Now it was too late for Lucius to get away, as the Ministry had promptly clapped many Death Eaters in prison and created a more vigorous, watchful system with Aurors on guard-duty around the clock. Special wards had been created to confine unregistered Animagi. Poor Father. Although, Draco had to quietly admit to himself that he was far more in control of his own life without Lucius around. Particularly since Mother had gone into a catatonic shopping binge.

It all came back to Potter, regardless of how much the others might claim it didn't. He wondered if he was overly focused on Potter. Certainly Potter had been far too focused on him the previous year. He supposed they were all meant to be grateful that Potter had defeated the Dark Lord before the start of their seventh year.

Was he wrong? It really did all come down to Potter every time, didn't it? It was Potter's testimony that landed Father in Azkaban in the first place. And it was ironically Potter's testimony, along with Dumbledore's, that had helped keep Draco out of it, as well as his mother. Potter had witnessed his embarrassing failure on the Astronomy Tower that night, after watching him nearly complete his mission. His failure had ironically softened the Gryffindors towards him, including Potter… and hardened the Slytherins against him. Here they were, barely a month into the school year, late though the start had been at the end of September, and he was already losing the lesser years' respect.

The Hufflepuffs were still in a post-orgasmic haze of celebratory madness, the Ravenclaws were firmly hand-fasted to the Gryffindors, and the Gryffindors cast pitying yet forgiving eyes upon the Slytherins at every turn - it wasn't to be borne! The humiliation of having everyone looking down on them all the time, as if every snake in their house had been de-fanged, de-venomed and defeated in the wake of the Dark Lord's demise. It was too much. He had to do something, anything.

"You'd think," Draco muttered, staring at the drowned, bloated victims of his cereal pieces, "that McGonagall could relax her hostile attitude towards our Quidditch team, for once."

Pansy sighed and leaned away from him. Her voice sharper now, she said, "Draco, Blaise is right. You've got to stop going on and on about Potter. There's more in our future besides Potter."

Draco turned at looked at her, incredulous. "Did I say ANYTHING about Potter? DID I?" he asked, his voice rising dangerously.

The laughing coterie of Gryffindors stopped, and as one they all swivelled and looked over at Draco and the Slytherin table. Draco glared back at them. So did the others beside him.

Potter met his eye. And turned away.

Draco couldn't identify the sensation that tumbled through him at it. He felt dismissed. Ignored. Not even pitied right now. He wasn't even worth the effort, was he? He wasn't even Potter's enemy anymore, not really. He'd been robbed even of that. And although he was glad he hadn't actually killed the barmy old man, because Potter would have wanted to kill HIM if he had, it would have at least assured him the respect of an equal. Potter had killed the Dark Lord - there was no one to match him now but Dumbledore, who'd killed his own dark lord decades ago. Now Draco was probably considered pathetic, which was much how he actually felt these days.

But Blaise must have felt the same way, because Ginny Weasley had also turned away as Potter had, the couple dismissing them, and Blaise wore a thunderous look. He met Draco's eye and growled, "At lunch."

Draco nodded, knowingly.

"I'm in," Theodore Nott supplied, on the other side of Blaise.

Millicent snorted.

They all looked at her. Mildly, Draco asked, "Problem, Bulstrode?"

"Potter's Head Boy, and he's still their Team Captain. He's the hero of the hour - the year. And you may not be a prefect anymore, Draco, but his two lovey-doves Granger and Weasley still are, and you know how vigilant they've become. Ginny Weasley's mean with the hexes, and quicker to whip them out. So is Longbottom. They're seasoned now, with all the extra D.A.D.A tuition Potter had them practicing for Dumbledore's Army. You go spoiling for a fight, and we'll lose whatever chance we've got at lifting our reputation out of the mud. Yes, I said 'mud', Malfoy, considering the number of Muggle-borns who've decided it's a Muggle free-for-all with the defeat of -" She stopped.

But Blaise was fired up now, it seemed. He turned to her. "If you aren't with us, you're against us. Stay out of the way if you don't like it, and don't you dare turn traitor now. You're still a Slytherin."

Daphne Greengrass spoke up. "With most of our parents in prison, we're lucky to be at Hogwarts at all. Death Eater children, they call us. We've got to keep our noses clean. I won't have anything to do with this."

Pansy looked torn. "But we won't be doing anything major; we'd just be reaching for some self-respect again." Obviously the Slytherin girls' sense of self-preservation was strongly activated since the beginning of the school term.

"We can earn it fairly, and yet show them up," Daphne said, getting her wind up.

"Now, hold on," Draco said. "Whoever said anything about getting caught, here? Are we Hufflepuffs?! No! We're Slytherins; we're smarter than that. We can pull this off and no one will be the wiser. We can break them and make them believe it happened by accident. We'll humiliate them and make everyone think they did it to themselves."

Daphne shook her head. "With our parents gone, we don't have a choice. We've got to think about our future. This is bigger than school. It's our lives. We won't BE Slytherins when we leave Hogwarts at the end of the year."

Draco was angry at being contradicted, and particularly in such a sneaky way; Greengrass was missing the point. "This isn't about school itself, Greengrass," he snapped. "This is just a bit of fun; a jest to get on top. If you're living in fear, then you've let them win."

"Yeah? Well," Daphne retorted, flustered now, "I'm GLAD that Potter won! The Dark Lord was more frightening! If it means I'm no longer a Slytherin, then I'm glad! What do you think of that?" She got up, took up her bag and left the Great Hall, leaving them to watch her go.

Draco saw Potter watching her leave, as well. Everyone must have heard her, including the Gryffindors. Fresh humiliation went through him at knowing Potter had witnessed his loss of his hold over her.

"Lunch, Draco," Blaise said in a quieter tone, trying to get his attention. "Believe me, for what I have in mind, they'll never even know it was us."

But he merely nodded, for Greengrass had managed to leach any enjoyment or anticipation from the idea of taking down the Gryffindors. Except maybe Potter and his redheaded slut. He tried to understand what the appeal was of the little slag, for both Potter and Blaise, and other boys as well. He just couldn't see it.

The rest of the morning, Draco sat through both Charms and Transfiguration wondering why Potter would spend all of last year stalking him - and then stop, simply because he was 'no longer a threat', as Potter had put it when he'd stood upon the witness stand at his trial.

Draco couldn't help feeling relieved that Potter would speak for him; no one else would have, except for the Headmaster, and hearing Dumbledore also reiterating his point about Draco having actually hurt no one in the process, despite his attempts to do the Dark Lord's will under blackmail and threat of his and his parents' deaths, had only crushed Draco's ego further, knowing that it was true. He wasn't exactly a major player in the final part of the War. He'd even been allowed a new wand, after his had been broken when he'd been arrested. Draco wasn't sure what to think of that; certainly he was glad to have a wand again, but the reason for him being allowed one was because he was 'harmless'. Not exactly good for his reputation. The other Slyths considered him emasculated because of it. He'd already had to fight several impromptu duels with some of the sixth and fifth year Slytherins after lessons and supper, in the past three weeks. The look of kind pity in Snape's eye when he'd escorted him to the hospital wing suffering from several hexes the last time was unbearable enough.

Also, he'd hoped that Potter's excessive attention through sixth year had been indicative that the Boy Wonder was queer, or at least interested. It would have provided so much material for negotiations, blackmail and pointed commentary, but Potter had returned to ignoring him as before. Minor speculation on that point had to be avoided publicly, lest the other Slytherins turn it around on him, as the curly-haired little twit had at breakfast.

Merlin, he thought in silent, sudden rage in Potions; why did everyone assume that HE was the one who was bent?! Just because he dressed better than most, and took pride in keeping up his appearance! But it seemed that it was fashionable now to dress like a homeless creep, like Potter, with no attention to hygiene or tailored clothing. And Muggle dress was found more commonly beneath robes at school these days. Hogwarts really had gone downhill, he thought. So much for the dress code.

And now to add that touch of pity, as well… That was far more irritating than anything Potter had done in all their years here. Even when Potter had gone for him on the Quidditch pitch, or in the bathroom, at least it was SOMETHING. Not this icy wall of indifference. Damn it all.

Potter with his bloody scar, and his bloody friends, and his bloody girlfriend. Draco's lip curled as he expertly took notes while Snape extolled the virtues of common bog myrtle, found so prevalently in the Scottish wilderness.

Were the girls right? Was he being immature and failing to consider his future, to continue to acknowledge Potter's presence? The idea of N.E.W.T.s seemed trite in the wake of the Dark Lord's demise and the Ministry's new orgiastic endorsement of Potter, the Chosen One, and all things Muggle. The Wizarding world was entranced with Potter, who could do no wrong now, and the name of Malfoy was worse than mud. While Mudbloods sauntered through streets and halls that previously were the territory of purebloods… It all rankled deeply.

Oh, he was the first to admit that the pureblood lines needed new life and rejuvenation, but the thought of having to do it himself, by producing a new Malfoy heir through copulating with some Mudblood or even a half-blood girl was enough to turn his stomach. The falling numbers of younger Slytherin students was worrying, though. There were only three new Slytherin first years this year.

He wondered if Pansy would still be willing to marry him, now that he'd come of age and could take on the running of the Malfoy estate in his father's absence. He had to take care of Mother, too.

Draco sighed, sketching an expert drawing of bog myrtle beside his notes while examining the sprig of it on his desk he shared with Blaise, and popped one of the myrtle leaves into his mouth out of boredom. Chewing on the pungent leaf, he wondered if there was even a place for the Malfoys in the Wizarding world anymore.

Pure blood was no longer as valued, and the Dark Lord's own shocking half-blood status had done much to fire up the debate, making it a much-discussed issue. The word 'Mudblood' had been officially banned, making it as hard to repeat in public as the name of Voldemort. His father was languishing in prison, thanks to Potter and the Dark Lord, and his mother spent her days sitting in her bedchamber lost in her mirror, when she wasn't trying to get into social events that seemed cooler towards her these

days.

Draco realised his desperation in the aftermath of his near-miss with a prison sentence was possibly careening him towards courting disaster. But what could he do? He still had his pride, after all. Unlike some, he thought, shooting a dark look towards Potter, who thankfully had reverted to being unable to shine in Potions. He knew the remedial Potions lessons Snape had given Potter in fifth year couldn't have attributed to Potter's sudden success in sixth year, and he wondered if Slughorn had been helping him on the side, for some reason. He wouldn't put it past the fat git; Slughorn had been so enamoured of Potter it had all reeked of favouritism. At least he knew that Snape had never needed to coddle HIM; he'd always excelled at Potions on his own merits. The only reason his marks had suffered the previous year was because he'd been under understandable pressure. Despite the loss of trust issue, some of the pity now shown to him by professors and some adults, was more than useful…

He still found it hard, however, to meet the Headmaster's eye. The problem was, of course, that Dumbledore's twinkling and pitying eye was often upon him these days. Not that he was afraid of the old man's Legilimency; Aunt Bella had taught him well enough. It was his conscience that was shamed. He'd threatened him with murder, and had only been sorry that he'd not managed to do it himself. He couldn't understand why Dumbledore had let him back into Hogwarts after allowing the Death Eaters inside that night. Dumbledore had rattled on at his trial about something to do with second chances, but he knew that someone, somewhere must have paid someone else off. Maybe it had been his mother, although he doubted it. His instincts told him otherwise. She'd been far too distraught and anxious to plot effectively, during his trial and her own.

After a deliberately quiet lunch, during which he shared surreptitious and furtive glances with Blaise, he slipped away from the Great Hall to return to the common room, Blaise a few minutes behind him.

He sank down into the black settee, and waited for Blaise, allowing the light that filtered down from the lake's surface and was gleaming greenly through the tinted windows to soothe his spirits and stimulate some keenness for whatever Blaise had in mind.

When Blaise entered, Draco said, "So what's your plan?"

Theo came in, followed by Goyle and Crabbe, and added, "Do tell, Zabini. The girls are in a flap about this. This had better be good."

"What would you be willing to do, to ensure that Gryffindor house were to fall? Draco, is Ronald Weasley as susceptible to flattery as he is to discouragement? Your little Quidditch song rattled him enough; what else do you know about him? About his family?"

At mention of the Weasel King, Draco glared. "I don't need to know, do I? He's a git, and an arse-wipe. He has more siblings than is natural for a pureblood family to have in one house. They're dirt-poor and seem to be proud of it. And Father said Mr Weasley smuggles Muggle artifacts home and bewitches them. I've always said that the Head Weasel would be better off chucking his wand and joining them; he's such a Muggle-lover. What are you getting at?"

"A house divided cannot stand," said Blaise with a curious smile. "Remember what Binns said in fifth year about the early origins of goblin warfare? The most successful way to infiltrate an enemy's fort is to marry into it. If we are their allies, why would they see us as a threat? We already have the advantage, seeing as we are the defeated ones. Slytherin as a house is already in tatters; they'd never suspect that we are strong enough to rally ourselves at this point. So we go to them openly, and offer peace."

Draco sat up straighter. The others came closer.

"We set them against each other. We watch them, observe, and exploit their weak points. If a couple are going out, we break them up. If there is a close friendship, we encourage them to break it off by befriending them or causing them to befriend others. We sow dissension. And we cannot be discovered doing this. Our influence must be absolutely unknown. It will require patience and careful observation, constantly. It must be slow, but effective. It should take months, and if we try to go for too cheap and fast a victory, we'll lose. We can invade them, without needing to adopt Hufflepuff behaviour, or hypocritical Gryffindor sympathising or suspicious Ravenclaw scrutiny. We go to them as if we've surrendered to the inevitable. We can bring down the house of Gryffindor."

"Know thy enemy," Theodore said slowly, seeming to warm to this idea. "We start by watching them. Then target them carefully."

"Yes," Blaise agreed. "I'll be targeting Potter and his bird, along with Draco. You should go for Granger and Weasley, along with Parkinson. The sixth and seventh years are the most important; all the younger ones will look to them for the example - so we make sure the example they're setting is a dismal one.

The Golden Trio is the most important, as well as vulnerable, as now that the Weasel is with Granger, Potter's already on the outside. Ronald Weasley is easy: flatter him. Especially his Quidditch skills." There was a shared chuckle at this, as Draco chuckled loudest of all. "Most of the students missing this year are Slytherins; the Gryffindor house is full. We've got to divide and conquer. We have to make friends with some of them ourselves, in order to achieve this. No one but us here in this room must be aware of what exactly is going on, and why."

Draco chewed his bottom lip, thinking this over. Shrewdly, he remarked, "Gryffindors are notoriously arrogant. This makes them blind to many things. And their over-confidence is also a weakness. I believe Pansy might be able to seduce the Weasel; his absurd carry-on with Brown last year is legendary; he can't resist a tart, and Pansy's got more of an arsenal than Brown can dream of. Pansy could also befriend Granger - who is easily swayed by intellectual ability. Pansy is clever enough to swing that one, I think. Plus she's motivated; she fancies Weasley. Whatever she lacks in ability, she can make up for in flattery; Granger never gets enough recognition from anyone. She'll fall like a Stunned owl. And Finnigan and Thomas are mates - we get our girls to distract them from each other and their friendship will be broken. Everyone knows best mates and birds don't mix."

"Seduction, then," Theo said. "We erode them by infiltrating their house with Slytherin values, over time."

"It's our best bet," Blaise said. "This way, we get what we want. We gain trust, protection, security in the wake of losing our Death Eater parents, and recover from earning the taint of the Ministry's wardens checking on us all the time as 'lost children' on the verge of going Dark. And we cater to their egos. We make them think we've completely embraced their side, their way of seeing things in the wake of the Dark Lord's death, and the fall of our house. The best manipulation is achieved by making the manipulee believe they have the upper hand, the power."

Draco's lip curled. "Manipulee? Is that even a word?"

Blaise ignored him, and carried on. "Ginevra Weasley is mine. She's considered the spitfire, the firecracker. She's already started making the rounds of male students in Gryffindor - it shouldn't take much to appeal to her extroverted nature. I intend to take her down."

"What if we can't get Pansy to go for the Weasel? Granger can be frightening." Theo asked.

"She'll do it if I ask her to," Draco said absently. "Potter's mine."

Blaise shot him a look. "Yes, Draco, we know."

Draco scowled at this. "So, all we have to do is convince the girls that we've turned and seen the light, and no longer harbour any desire to hurt Slytherin chances of remaining afloat this year, by making nice with the Gryffindors. I like it. They'll be unwitting accomplices. And no Slytherin can remain a Hufflepuff for long; they'll get bored eventually, and we'll have them back."

"I'll soften up Bulstrode," Theo said.

"That butch nightmare? Good luck with that," Draco sneered.

"Agreed, Theodore," Blaise said. "I'll talk to Greengrass and Davis."

"There is one other thing," Draco drawled. "Exactly what do you have in mind for gathering information? We can't just walk up and ask them to accept our hand in friendship; they'll never buy it. Trust me, I know. We need to watch. We'll need to find out their routines, their preferences and habits. We've never actually studied them so closely. And we'll never get into the lion's den; we'll need to observe them outside of class. And we can't do that if we aren't already in with them. Seems to me we have a problem, there."

Blaise smirked now. "We watch them without their knowledge. I have found the perfect means to do it."

Draco found his interest pricking up at this. "How?"

"Potter's got his Invisibility Cloak, right? He can go anywhere, watch anyone, and access any room. It's time we turned the tables on him. We nullify Potter, and gain the same access ourselves, without fear of

being found out - or worse, revealed. They cannot know that our objective is to bring them down, rather than actually befriend them."

Draco waved his hand impatiently. "Yes, I think we've got the gist of that, Blaise. How are we going to do this? What means are you talking about?"

Blaise went to the bookshelf across the room and pulled out a thin book. "I was reading Prefects Who Gained Power, and I came across a fascinating entry." He leafed through the pages, and read aloud, "Thomas Peeper: Inventor of the Double-Bubble Spell. Tommy Peeper, a fifth year Slytherin prefect at Hogwarts in 1926, created a spell to spy on the Ravenclaw girls' dormitory; a modification of the Bubble Spell, which causes golden bubbles to pour from one's wand. To cast this charm, point your wand and say, Bullio."

Blaise demonstrated, and from the tip of his wand a large golden bubble popped out. Obviously, he'd already practiced this beforehand. "Then, point your wand at the bubble and say, Du Bullio, like so. This causes the bubble to split off into a second, and leaves behind a reflection of whatever is in the second bubble to mirror into the first, so that you can push the second bubble wherever you wish it to go. Direct the second bubble by pushing it with your intentions and your wand while staring into the reflection you see within the first bubble, in order to look into places you can't otherwise see into. Use your wand like a conductor's baton, directing an orchestra, to move the second bubble."

Blaise looked back to the page. "The possible positive uses of this charm were overshadowed by the number of male Slytherins, and boys from the other houses, who popularised it by using it to spy on girls. Peeper later went on to invent a popular line of investigative spells, which were taken up by the Ministry's Auror Department due to their usefulness in intelligence-gathering and surveillance. The Double-Bubble Spell is banned from use at Hogwarts, because of the intended usage of peeping on others and the temptation it represents to misuse it in this fashion. It was labelled a Dark Arts spell ten years ago when the Ministry decided to crack down on the misuse of spells for dark purposes after the formation of the Death Eaters."

"Not very smart, to explain the spell like that, I must say," Theo remarked. "Anyone can use it."

"It's such a simple spell," Blaise contradicted. "The brilliance of it was that it was so very simple. Anyone can cast the Bubble Spell. Flitwick does it every Christmas-time. Apparently the bubbles can't be popped; only Finite works on them, and who's going to suspect a floating soap bubble, even a golden one?"

"Cor," breathed Goyle. "That would be a nice one for watching lasses. Like when they're showering or whatever."

"Yes, they'd never notice one more bubble amidst the others," agreed Blaise.

Crabbe was beaming cheerfully at this thought, no doubt at the images it conjured for him.

"Can the bubble go through keyholes?" Draco demanded. "And beneath doors?"

Blaise nodded. "It can squeeze down flatter than parchment, apparently. The bubble's surface is so thin, it can be crumpled into nothing and then pop back into shape. Simply direct it into someone's pocket, clothing or bag, and voila: Instant I-spy." He grabbed the second bubble and curled his fist around it, then let go. The bubble seemed unharmed.

"I like it," Draco announced. "It's perfect."

"What's perfect?" came Pansy's annoying voice as she entered the common room with the girls behind her.

Blaise quickly whispered Finite twice, and the bubbles both disappeared.

"Pansy, love," Draco grinned. "We've decided you and Greengrass are right. Bulstrode? I owe you an apology. You have the right of it after all. We've decided to join the Hufflepuffs and the Ravenclaws in

their unabashed adoration of the Gryffindors. It's for the good of our house, after all… And, Pansy, you know that little crush you've got on Weasley…?"

It felt good to plot once more, and Draco spent the rest of the afternoon in a remarkably good mood. It seemed all the Slytherins were in good cheer, in fact, and it began to unsettle the other houses. Draco wondered how they would react once they started befriending them, and he had to suppress a dark laugh that threatened his composure at this thought. It wasn't as if they were plotting anything terrible; just a bit of a ruckus amidst the Gryffs. They could do with some stirring up. And it would be oh so vindicating to see some of those nauseating couples broken up, with the way they carried on, looking down their noses at them all.

But later that evening, Blaise sidled up to him and said, "Draco, a word?"

Draco regarded him, but agreeably lowered his voice. They were in their dormitory, but he would take Blaise's cue, of course. "What is it? A snag? An obstacle? Can't break the Weasley girl's heart?"

Blaise darkened, his brows coming together menacingly. "You know what I think of that tramp, so shut it, Malfoy. I'm worried about YOU. Are you going to be able to keep up your performance for the next few months? You'll have to make nice with the Weasel, think of that. And Granger - no more mocking her teeth or her hair… however mock-worthy they remain or how great the temptation to do it. No more pushing around the first-years. Can you do this? Really?"

"Of course I can," Draco huffed indignantly. "Malfoys are consummate actors; we have to be."

Blaise looked back at him with near-accusation in his eyes. "Can you stop yourself from fighting with Potter, or attempting to get a rise out of him?"

"Not to worry, Zabini. It will be Potter's prejudice, temper and violent nature that will be the only hitch. And that's easily avoided so long as I cater to his hero side. He has a 'saving people' thing. Everyone knows that. Even the Dark Lord knew it. Shouldn't be hard to appeal to it, seeing as he sees himself as responsible for me here at school, what with his testifying on my behalf. No, you concentrate your efforts on the girl, and leave Potter to me. I know how he works, probably better than most."

Blaise looked doubtful now. "Fine. But just remember, there's no shame in turning and running if he gets… violent, as you say. Don't rise to it yourself, like you usually do."

Draco narrowed his eyes. "Exactly what are you implying?"

"When the lion roars, 'tis prudent to leave."

"That's not even a proper saying! You just made that up," Draco scoffed.

"At least I'm capable of making up spontaneous aphorisms, Draco. Your mental faculties have been completely impaired by your fixation on Potter."

Blaise held up a hand as Draco opened his mouth to tear Blaise a new arsehole for DARING to - "Hold on, just, look. See how upset you are at the mere mention of it? This is what I'm talking about. You'll need to play it cool. As cool as you did last year, when you were sneaking around without confiding in anyone who might have been able to help you."

He quickly held up a hand again as Draco nearly burst with fury at this. "Draco, I promise, I'm not picking at you. I'm just warning you. I know how hard it is for you to contain yourself when it's Potter. You'll have to be - god help you - 'nice' to him. Friendly. His new best mate. Let him know how grateful you are that he saved you, now that you can see how much better off you are. Can you do it? Can you swallow your rage and your pride enough to play the smarmy sycophantic fan for him? Treat him like your hero? Remember, it's going to take both of us working on Weasley and Potter to split them up. Can you be his caring friend in the wake of Ronald's fixation on Granger, and then Pansy? You'll have to start it slow, and work into it. Can you do that?"

Draco licked his lips, relishing the opportunity to get to Potter this way. "You bet I can."

Blaise drew a breath and said, "I'll lay down fifty Galleons you can't."

Draco found his eyelids fluttering in shock at this, as he assimilated what Blaise had thrown down before him. Holy Merlin's balls - the necklace alone last year had put him out of pocket, and he was sorely tried in terms of his allowance lately, since Mother had been trying to buy her way back into society's good graces. It was sad, because he knew Father would have been able to do it quicker and with half the wealth she was squandering on doing so. But damn Zabini for knowing he couldn't back down now.

He swallowed, and straightened. "Fine. Fifty it is. Shouldn't be hard, seeing as everyone else is already in love with him; the Golden Boy, Hero of Hogwarts, the stupid, Muggle-loving, four-eyed -"

"Draco," Blaise said sharply. "That will have to stop, as well. You'll have to learn to stop saying it aloud to other people, behind his back."

"Well, yes, but… Oh, buggeration," Draco swore with feeling, realising Blaise was right.

Blaise clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Buck up, mate. Buck up, and get ready to pucker up. You're going to be kissing some serious Gryffindor arse, and it isn't going to be easy."

Draco scowled, feeling ill. "This was your idea, remember!" he warned.

"Yes, it was," Blaise agreed calmly.

"If this goes bad, I'm laying it entirely at your feet."

"And I'll be fifty Galleons richer."

"Like you need it," Draco muttered under his breath.

Theodore Nott came up to them. "There's one thing that's bothering me. How are we supposed to distract the Gryffindor chums from their girls?"

Blaise smiled; it was a wolf's smile. He went to his bedside chest of drawers and pulled open of the drawers, to pick up a magazine. Bringing it back to them, he said, "With these."

Theo took the magazine. "Playboy?"

"Porn," Blaise said, handing it to Theodore. "Our secret weapon. We distract them with porno magazines."

"Why aren't the pictures moving?" Draco asked, wondering how porn was supposed to endear them to Gryffindors.

"Muggle porn," Blaise added.

Theo frowned. "Why?"

Draco caught on. "The novelty," he said.

"Right," Blaise explained, "because there's nothing that can break up a relationship faster than a bloke looking at Muggle porn instead of his girlfriend. He'll be interested in spite of himself, and the girls will be outraged. Also, have a look at the Muggle woman. Take a closer look."

Crabbe and Goyle shuffled up now too. All five of them stood around the magazine Theo held, and Draco experienced a momentary feeling of mislaid reality; he couldn't believe he'd gone from being on the run with Snape to sitting in a cell awaiting trial, to returning to Hogwarts in shame, back to here at Hogwarts, staring at Muggle porn with his Slytherin dorm mates.

"What, exactly, are we supposed to be looking at?" Draco asked Blaise, looking up from the nude female, her tits exposed artfully, the photograph woefully still and static.

Theo gave Draco a funny look. "The wench, Malfoy. Don't tell me you're not into them?"

"Of course I am," Draco snapped. "Don't be thick. I'm referring to the attributes of this particular wench. What's so special about -" He craned his neck, twisting it to the left to read the caption on the mag. "Miss December?"

"Doesn't she remind you of anyone?" Blaise grinned.

There was much tilting of heads and staring at the naked woman.

Finally, Goyle shook his head, and Crabbe did too. "Not really," Theo said slowly.

Draco began to feel very uncomfortable. "Hold on," he said slowly.

The lady had piercing light green eyes, black hair, and red lips. Her skin was pale and soft-looking, and

the proportion of her body seemed lithe and slender but compact in build.

If Draco had to guess, it might be Potter, after having taken a gender-switching potion of some kind. Those were hard to brew, and even harder to buy.

"Look at her hairstyle," Blaise said, rolling his eyes. "Look at her! Doesn't she look like a girl we know? Nott, you show this to Weasley, and you'll be subliminally preparing him for Pansy."

Oh.

Pansy. Of course.

Draco swallowed, hard.

He could see it now; ever since Pansy's makeover, she'd been trying to go for the slinky look. Mostly to catch Draco's attention, of course; or so she'd claimed.... Draco tried to remember what else she'd been babbling about that day…

Draco recovered swiftly. "Well done, Blaise. Let's not forget the added bonus of using the excuse of the articles within the mag, as well. That racy, prohibited curiosity for Muggle ways, and Muggle girls… Nice.

And, as you say, she's a dead-ringer for Pansy. Very smooth."

Blaise gave Draco a look at his sudden endorsement of Muggles, and Draco ignored him.

But Blaise said snidely, "What's wrong, Draco? Are you worried about losing Pansy? I thought you were tired of her not putting out. Are you going to have problems with her seducing the Weasel King?"

Draco shrugged. "Not really." He stared down at the nude Muggle woman. "I never cared for Pansy's makeover, anyway."

And it was true, because it wasn't the fact that Pansy was off to the Weasel, whom she had always harboured a bit of a crush on, or that the Muggle woman looked like her. It was the fact that he honestly wasn't all that attracted to the Muggle woman OR Pansy in the least.

He couldn't stop looking at the photograph. But there was something wrong about the Muggle woman's eyes. He couldn't put his finger on it though. And her mouth was all wrongly-shaped. Her nose was wrong. She was just…wrong.

Later, in bed and behind his own curtain that he had drawn closed, Draco considered his wand, holding it in his hand.

He couldn't stop seeing the Muggle woman's eyes in the magazine.

And Potter's swam into his mind's eye, in retrospect. Unbidden. Unasked.

Potter's green eyes…

That was what was wrong, he realised with a flash of clarity. The Muggle woman's eyes weren't green ENOUGH. They were too light, and flat. They didn't have that spark in them. And her lips were the wrong SHAPE. And her nose wasn't Potterish. And her body wasn't toned enough. Both the Muggle woman and Pansy currently looked like grotesque female caricatures of the real thing: Potter.

The truly horrifying part of all of this, Draco thought, was that Pansy had told him that she'd gone for Spelling her eyes green and cutting her hair and going 'raven black' was so that she'd be more than a match for Potter… Who apparently had garnered some of the attention of the boys at Hogwarts who veered towards fancying other boys… She'd taken it as an affront that boys would go for Potter over the girls, and it was her way of getting back at him. To prove girls were more attractive or something.

Draco had to suppress himself from telling her that she looked more like Cho Chang than Potter. He'd privately laughed at her at the time, thinking she'd only succeeded in making herself resemble a rather fake cat with her eyes Spelled. Her hair looked like a wig. But now, Draco couldn't help but think that this entire thing had backfired, somewhere along the line.

On him, no less. Because of Potter, who he had to befriend if they were to take down the Gryffindors.

This thought disturbed Draco greatly, and he decided to put it out of his mind. Flicking his wand, he said quietly, "Bullio."

A large golden bubble appeared, and Draco flicked his wand again, saying, "Du Bullio."

The bubble squeezed in half, and divided into two. As he looked into the first large bubble - which somehow had retained its original size, which was on a par with the insane, alcoholic Divination professor's crystal balls - he could clearly see the interior of his bed and the curtains surrounding him. With some experimental flicking and wrist movement, he realised it was simplicity itself to make the second tiny bubble dart about, giving him different views and angles to see in the larger one. The little one was barely an inch across. It was perfect.

Draco smiled predatorily to himself. This spell was sheer brilliance. Tommy Peeper was a genius. He almost chortled to himself at finally having an equal footing with Potter and his damned cloak.

He settled back in bed against his pillow, and sent the small golden bubble darting out of his curtains to zoom off through the dormitory, and out into the common room. Squeezing it through the keyhole, he directed the bubble to fly along the ceiling and the arches, going up the stairs and exploring through the castle.

He was delighted to notice that he could even hear sounds emitting from the large bubble he was viewing. Portraits snored, and spoke. He could hear everything!

He saw prefects wandering the corridors, and Snape, who was stalking with his robes billowing out behind him, seemingly intent on catching someone out of bed if he could.

With Potter as Head Boy, it was unlikely Snape would be able to take Potter to task. It was another downside to being back at Hogwarts. Everyone seemed avid to keep Slytherins in their places these days.

He knew Snape had been furious after he'd discovered that Dumbledore had faked his death; Snape had been very upset after the death of the old man. Draco had begun to suspect Snape liked him, which was at odds with his actions, until Draco had discovered Snape's position as a true spy for Dumbledore's Order of the Phoenix. Apparently, that testimony alone had been enough to clear Snape, on Dumbledore's word.

Draco paused as he saw Madam Pince walk to meet Mr Filch and suddenly take his hand and smile at him. Draco felt his gorge rise, and quickly moved past them. When the hell had those two got together? It was too revolting to contemplate.

Potter. Where was Potter? He sighed with frustration, and sent the bubble zipping upwards, bypassing the tedious moving staircases, and explored up to the Gryffindors' common room. The fat lady in the portrait didn't bat an eyelash at seeing the bubble float up beside her and then slip into the crack in the wall.

Pushing, Draco saw nothing but darkness in his large bubble where he sat in his bed, and momentarily experienced disorientation, before regaining the sight of a large room decorated garishly in red and gold tapestries. He pulled a face, taking in the occupants of the common room. Granger and Weasley sat together by a fireplace, apparently through with their prefect rounds, and Potter and the littlest Weasley were seated on a sofa closer to the middle of the room. Thankfully, none of them were snogging or feeling each other up.

He kept the bubble hovering over them, up by the ceiling, and peered down at them.

They were talking about 'Gred and Forge', who Draco recalled were the Weasley twins. The conversation was feel-good small talk, terrifyingly banal and boring, and he wondered if Gryffindors, particularly Potter and his cohorts, were really this simple-minded. If so, he was going to have a very tedious time over the next few months.

To his relief, Potter stood and stretched soon afterwards, and announced he was going to have a bath

before bed.

However, anger filled Draco afresh at this. He could no longer use the Prefects' bathroom on the fifth floor, and the attempts he'd made to sneak into it had resulted in people catching him, as they were already inside, and he had no mind to give them a free show. He preferred to bathe alone. The bath was hardly a suitable replacement for the ones at home, but it sufficed. The one downstairs here in the dorm was useless, cramped and nowhere near as nice.

With glee, he realised this was what he'd been waiting for. To be able to see Potter in any number of questionable or compromising situations; for who knew what he might be able to catch him at? He wondered if Potter would cheat on the Weasley girl; that would be a goldmine of blackmail material in itself. But if not, then maybe he could befriend Potter and then enjoy the perks of being one of the Head Boy's friends…and be able to use it with him. Or when he wasn't there. Either suited Draco, so long as he got the password.

He waited until Potter reappeared from the Gryffindor boys' dorm with his towel and bathrobe and sent the bubble following Potter out of the common room and down the stairs, yawning as he watched Potter make his way to the fifth floor and pass Gregory the Smarmy's statue.

Inside the bathroom, Potter dropped his robe and towel, and began to take off his clothes, starting with his long-sleeved sweatshirt. As Potter's back was revealed, Draco nearly swallowed his tongue as he realised Potter was - chiselled, toned, limber and lithe. Potter removed his shoes, carefully, and set them beside his shirt.

Draco found himself watching intently, abruptly and acutely aware of every move Potter made. He was getting angry again. He'd thought Potter had remained skinny, but now he saw that the annoying git had gained muscle, and trim too, not that bulky, massive way. Just right. Potter was… This was just his luck, wasn't it, he thought bitterly. Potter was looking good.

When had this happened?

Those green eyes were the right colour, and his nose was just right - it didn't look malformed like that Muggle female's. And his lips were red and entirely too wet. Why did Potter have to lick his lips all the time? Did he have a salivation problem? Draco chuckled silently to himself at the thought of Potter drooling over the Weasley girl's questionable assets, and was brought back to the moment with a thump when Potter suddenly dropped his jeans and bared his arse.

A curious jolt of heat twisted in Draco's belly at the sight.

By Merlin's hairy balls, Potter's arse was… it was perfect. Nicer than any girl's he'd seen before, whether in porno mags or in the flesh. The sight of Potter bent at the waist removing his socks was too much; he found he was practically panting. Far from being the revolting or dismaying sight he would have expected, he found Potter's buttocks were round, perfect, twin mounds of fondle-able flesh. His hands were hungry to reach out and grab them, and spread them apart. The need was almost painful.

Draco felt dizzy. His whole world had been up-ended.

Potter was undressing; he was naked, and Draco was watching him do it, and he couldn't tear his eyes away from the bubble vision showing it all, and Potter was attractive. Devastatingly so. Now he had something more compelling to hate Potter for. He had to add the word 'gorgeous' to his vocabulary of Potter descriptives. At least the word 'arse' was still appropriate…

And then Potter stood and padded away with his bathrobe and towel in hand to the edge of the bath. Draco quickly zoomed his bubble after the naked Potter and floated past him to turn about to see him standing by the edge of the bath, dropping his robe and towel beside him.

The dark hair between Potter's legs was less unruly somehow than the messy head of hair he had, but his cock was as red as his lips, maybe a little darker, and suddenly Draco found he was the one salivating at the idea of placing Potter's cock between his lips. And his thighs, dear god his thighs…

Without thinking, he sent the bubble closer to mingle with the others above the water, as the bubbles surged on the surface as the taps ran hot, creating plenty of foam. He felt vaguely safe to know his

bubble was indistinguishable amongst the others.

Potter climbed down into the water, his white skin gleaming in the light. Draco was unexpectedly aware he had an erection that was throbbing in his pants.

Cursing under his breath, he fumbled with his left hand to ease the painfully constricted position of his hard prick beneath his clothing, staring at the vision in the large bubble hovering above him.

He watched bewitched as Potter removed his glasses to put them by the side of the bath and then slipped down into the water, totally submerged, only to re-emerge a few moments later in a splash of droplets around him. Draco couldn't believe that seeing Potter wet and naked could arouse such an intense need to wank.

He wanted to get off desperately, but the thought that he'd be attempting to befriend the idiot sooner than he would've liked was rather off-putting.

Draco was still stunned. How had Potter become such an attractive creature? And why did it have to be Potter; why not someone more approachable, attainable; suitable even? Why was he suddenly gay for Potter?

Potter was leaning back against the side of the bath, his head tipped back, baring his wet throat, and letting his arms go out to either side of him, and Draco was struck suddenly by his pose - it was similar to that of a sacrificial victim or that of a martyr's surrender. Potter was only relaxing, and had no idea what he looked like, Draco knew. But it was too arousing.

He was trembling as he realised he wanted to get in the water and wade over to him, bite his neck,

ravish his helpless body and suck that red cock into his mouth until Potter shot his load down his throat.

Before he realised he had done it, he'd flicked the bubble forwards, skimming over the foam to Potter, and it nearly bumped into his chest. The abrupt close-up of Potter's left nipple, looking for all the world like a tiny, chewable morsel of a cherry sweet, was too much. He gasped and bit his lips, reaching up his other hand to touch his own nipple through the material of his robe.

But nothing could have prepared him for the shock of now seeing Potter's own left hand lazily trace a trail up to his own nipple and pinch it hard, almost absently, and Draco felt it as keenly as if it had been his that had been pinched; he started, and found he was gripping his wand so tightly he was in danger of snapping it himself. He forced himself to take a deep breath, and relax his hold.

Backing the tiny golden bubble away so that he could watch all of Potter's unsuspecting performance, he settled the indecision and agitation in his mind for once and for all and brought out his own desperate cock, pushing his pants down in irritation to free it.

Touch yourself, Draco thought, palming his own prick. Do it, you filthy boy. You know you want to. As if Potter had heard him - which Draco knew was impossible - Potter abruptly put his hand in the water and let out a groan. Draco wanted to growl in frustration that he couldn't see Potter's hand wanking his own cock, but it was unmistakably exactly what he was doing, from the way Potter's eyes rolled up in the back of his head.

Potter's teeth were chewing his lower lip now, making it slightly swollen and red, and Draco nearly cried at the unfairness of his long-standing enemy possessing such an unfairly pretty pair of lips. It was unjust. The sheer injustice of it all was overwhelming.

Potter was working himself with long, hard strokes, he could tell.

His own hand was working frantically on his cock, imagining it was Potter's, touching his own beneath the water, and he resolved to come when Potter did.

It didn't take long, and he felt a bloom of heat cover him as he saw Potter moan open-mouthed now, and

suddenly stiffen, jerking his hips in the water, and Draco's own cock was abruptly covering his hand with come, the pleasure stabbing through him and taking him by surprise.

Draco gulped and licked his own parched lips, feeling his breathing coming far too short.

Shaken, a part of him wanted to stop watching, and try to forget everything that had just happened. Another part of him couldn't resist watching the vision before him keep unfolding, and he watched eagerly as Potter soaped himself up, apparently happy and satisfied now after his solitary wank, his own cheeks reddened and his eyes somewhat sparkly, if a little dreamy with the accompanying expression of afterglow he wore.

Oh god - he'd seen Potter's come-face. He'd watched him wank. He was witnessing Potter's afterglow.

Draco wondered if he'd lost his mind, to be watching him. It had only been an impulse; he hadn't expected this - this monumental cock-up, this foreboding development.

How could he possibly befriend Potter if all he could think about when he saw him next was how his mouth would taste, and if his come was as creamy, bitter and rich as his own? He brought his hand to his mouth and licked at it, smelling the thick odour of his own spunk and ended up cleaning off his fingers and his whole hand, wishing he could lick it off of Potter's wet, naked skin.

When Potter had dallied about in the bath for a while, he lay back once more with his eyes closed, and a thought occurred to Draco. He could study him… up close. He sent the bubble floating closer, right next to Potter's face, and studied the long sooty lashes, the strong jaw, the almost delicate thinness of his face, and the way his hair didn't look so messy when it was wet - it looked just like anyone's hair would when wet, and abruptly Draco realised that his lips were perfect, just like his arse was, and his cock, and terrified at how far he'd let this go on, at how far he'd allowed himself to explore this unexpected viewing, he whispered Finite.

The large golden bubble before him went dark, and he whispered Finite again, somehow relieved and yet disappointed to see it disappear.

It had been actually rather frightening to see Potter up so close, and intimately. Now he knew what it looked like to be so very, very close to him.

A horrible ache began in the region of his chest, and he knew he would never, ever be able to be that close to Potter in life.

He'd never know what Potter tasted like, what his nipples felt like under his tongue, what that cock felt like in his mouth. What it would be like to have Potter touch him. The clenching sensation in his chest squeezed harder and he grew angry with himself now.

Why was he tormenting himself about something that could never be? He'd never wanted it before tonight. Had he? Draco had to wonder. He'd always watched Potter; for years, now. Had he really wanted this all along? He couldn't see Potter welcoming him with open arms of friendship if he also threw in his own suggestions for casual shags in between classes… Draco sighed, realising it really was a pathetic wish indeed.

Potter hated him. He always had. Since the first day they'd met, Potter had looked down on him, judged him, seen him as lacking, never good enough to be his friend. Why did he assume now would be any different? There was as much a chance Potter would want his friendship as he'd want his cock anywhere near Draco's mouth. Which was not at all.

It occurred to him that he could have sent the bubble down into the water and watched Potter wanking, and cursed himself for not thinking of it at the time. But another part of his mind knew he'd never be able to rest if he'd actually seen it with his own eyes. He found it hard to fall asleep as it was, although he tried very hard indeed, and his sleep was troubled with images of Potter's mouth, his red lips. And the gloriousness of Potter's dusky cock between his pale, slender, strong thighs.

The next morning, he was quiet and grouchy, finding himself snapping at Crabbe and Goyle over nothing, little insignificant things. They didn't respond, of course, any more than they ever had through the years they'd stayed by his side, and he found himself worrying that he was even considering cutting them loose so he could… befriend Potter.

Which was what he was going to do, just to bring down Gryffindor house. And Potter.

He wondered if it was worth it, suddenly. The memory of the experience of witnessing Potter in the bath the night before was sobering, and he wondered if he was courting disaster to play with Potter like this.

He was sullen through breakfast, and all through his classes. He steadfastly tried to ignore Potter's presence, and even when Blaise nudged him finally in Potions that afternoon, he couldn't bring himself to care.

"What is wrong with you?" Blaise whispered at him when Snape's back was turned. "You're not backing out are you? What, your hatred for him runs so deep you can't even be bothered to try? There're fifty Galleons at stake, remember?"

Draco clenched his teeth. Deep down, he knew he was a coward. He knew he couldn't face what was going to happen. Not now that he knew he was attracted to Potter. It was a colossal mistake to even think of going forward with the plan now. He was going to panic when it came time to try to extend an offer of peace to Potter. He just knew it.

"I knew you couldn't do it," Blaise muttered in disgust now. "Just stay out of the way, all right? We're still going through with it, even if you aren't."

"I'm in," Draco insisted, furiously. "But this is a huge fucking mistake and you know it. We bring them down, they're going to know we were playing them all along and SOME of us will pay harder than others."

Coldly, Blaise said, "Lily-livered, chicken-hearted bastard. You act like everyone else is too good for you, and no one suffers but yourself. You think you're the only one with something at stake?"

Furious, impotent, Draco stared back at Blaise, wondering what the hell had got Blaise's dander up. Surely he was overreacting. Why was - oh. The Weaselette. Of course. This whole plan was created so that Blaise could score the redhead once, and settle it with her. Draco knew now they'd all been taken: Blaise's entire scheme was geared towards exactly that, with the rest of them being dragged along for

the ride. Why had he let his guard down? They'd all been used, including him, and now he knew he was the chump.

"Fuck off, Zabini," Draco said, feeling testy and tired and off-balance.

"Is there a problem, Mr Malfoy?" Snape asked calmly, his brow raised at them.

Draco jerked upright in his seat. "No, sir. No problem. None whatsoever," he said through gritted teeth.

He dared a glance at Granger and Potter, and saw that unfortunately they were staring at him along with everyone else in the room. Luckily though, the situation was normal enough that he wasn't being assailed with the memory of Potter's bath and wank session the previous night.

Until now, he groaned inwardly. He had to think of it now, didn't he? All that hard, naked flesh. Wet, and gleaming. Draco swallowed.

Unable to stop himself, he flicked a glance at Potter again, and saw that Potter was bent over his own parchment, taking notes diligently. His hair was dark and tufted, and for the first time, Draco realised it wasn't messy; it was tousled. Potter wasn't annoying; that wasn't why he needed to look at him. He was magnetic, in his own shuffling, unassuming way. It wasn't an act at all; Potter wasn't putting up a mask of false humility, interspersed with swagger. He was simply oblivious to the impact he had on people around him. And Potter's mouth wasn't irritating; it was -

Kissable.

He felt like he was seeing Potter for the first time. Maybe he was.

Potter was his age, two months shy of it even, and yet he'd defeated the Dark Lord, saved everyone, suffered loss like most couldn't imagine, and there he sat, just another student along with all the rest of them gathered in Potions, scribbling notes and sucking his lower lip in concentration, those stupid glasses reflecting the light off their lenses.

Bloody hell, Draco thought, as he felt his cock twitch in his pants at the sight of Potter's lip between his teeth. This was not the most convenient time to get hard. Especially not over Potter.

But he felt instinctively that it should be his teeth nibbling on that lower lip. And Potter's body was no longer a mystery to him, and he could see him, as surely as if Potter were naked once again. He knew now why Potter's shoulders were shaped they were they were beneath his robes. He knew how Potter's arse curved, as he sat there in his seat. There wasn't any part of Potter that did not hold some heated fascination, and he felt as though his eyes had been glued in Potter's direction.

At that moment, Potter looked over at him and licked his lips once, and Draco caught himself, looking away quickly, silently cursing his own stupidity to stare at Potter in broad daylight without the screen of a bubble to hide behind. And now he was hard. Not just from Potter looking at him, but from Potter Being There.

He started to panic, wondering if he could wait until the rest of them left the classroom without risking Snape's questions if he remained behind. He didn't want to go traipsing through the halls with a stiff one that was hard enough to out him as gay for Potter before all to see, especially one that Potter had caused simply by innocuously sitting in his seat licking his lips. Just the notion of following behind Potter to watch that covered backside proceed before him was too much. He bit the inside of his cheek, painfully, to try to calm himself down, and only suffered a wince and the taste of iron in his mouth for his trouble, with no leniency from his errant dick whatsoever.

Potions took a long time to come to an end, and by the time Draco had managed to leave for his next lesson, he'd allowed Potter and the others to leave before him. He even managed to avoid Snape, who was watching him with a look of curiosity and concern.

The bastard had better not test his Occlumency just now, Draco thought; not in the mood for one of

Snape's twisted ideas of a heart-to-heart.

He really wished he hadn't seen Potter naked.

"Malfoy? Hey, Malfoy!"

Unfortunately, Potter was striding down the corridors back towards him, where they had just come from the corridor leading back to Potions. Draco stopped dead and stared. Why would Potter want to speak to him? Now?

"Malfoy!" Potter called, a look of determination on his face.

Draco panicked. He didn't think Potter had been aware he was being watched. Had someone ratted on him? Had one of the Slytherin girls turned and betrayed them for the 'good of their house'? Had Pansy thrown herself at the Weasel King in desperation and he hadn't heard yet? He glanced behind him, over his shoulder. The coast was clear.

"Malfoy!" Potter's voice took a note of urgency and he sped up towards him, even as Draco stood rooted to the floor with indecision and fear.

He saw the familiar glint of hardness in Potter's green eyes now as he walked quickly towards him, and wished he hadn't allowed Crabbe and Goyle to go on ahead, although what those two lummoxes could do against the Hero Who Defeated You-Know-Who, Draco suddenly knew would be far from helpful.

Potter's face hardened, and the set of his jaw made Draco's own teeth ache to see it.

Damn. It was obvious Potter was angry. He must know about their plot, maybe even about the Double-Bubble Spell.

Draco turned and ran.

~*~

Du Bullio

Part Two

~*~

"So, what happened?"

"I got away. He gave up the pursuit. I gave him the slip by taking the long way around, by the Astronomy Tower. That's why I missed class."

"No, I mean, what happened before he gave up."

"We exchanged a few hexes, which I dodged and unfortunately he dodged too."

"Draco," Blaise sighed, leaning over and placing his forehead in his hand. "This was your opportunity to talk to him! You could have talked things over; buried the hatchet - befriended him! This was your one chance to do it, seeing as he had approached YOU!"

Draco paused, as this possibility had honestly not occurred to him. "Oh. Right."

"You've been keyed up enough about how to approach him, and there he was doing it for you so you didn't even have to suffer the loss of face of having to do it yourself!"

"Well- well… if he'd been coming after you, you would have run too! You didn't see him! You weren't there! He was spoiling for a fight, I tell you! He was wearing his heroic, indignant rage face!"

"Running only made you look guilty."

"I am guilty! How was I supposed to know he didn't know that?!"

"But now you've removed all doubt! Now he knows you have a guilty conscience. Now he'll be even harder to talk to, because he'll be expecting you're up to something."

Draco hesitated, knowing Blaise was right; damn him. Weakly, he retorted, "The only time Potter has ever gone for me like that was to initiate physical violence. I had no way of knowing that he wasn't going to again, this time!" He muttered in a lower voice, "Not to mention he's a complete Philistine, and a Muggle, to always do away with magic and use his fists like a common brawler. It's no wonder I need Crabbe and Goyle as backup with Scarhead always trying to jump me like some kind of psychopathic maniac. I'm telling you, Zabini, the sodding git is insane - he's unhinged! He carved me into pieces! He sliced me up with that curse in the bathroom last year, remember?! Besides, he killed the Dark Lord."

Blaise stopped at his reminder of Potter's reason for his newly established hero status, and nodded. "That's true enough." He breathed out in exasperation. "He is a bit raving."

"A bit?"

Blaise ignored Draco's derisive scoff. "It will be twice as hard now for you to try to get close enough to initiate any sort of peaceful negotiation," he pointed out. "How is it going with your investigation into the Potter-Weasley relations?"

Draco's mind inadvertently conjured the vision of a naked, dripping wet Potter, rising out of the bath-foam like Venus on gender-switch potion and a black hairdo, with his red lips and his dark red cock, Moaning Myrtle fainting at the sight while the mermaid sighed appreciatively and Draco pushed towards him through the bubbles to -

Draco cleared his throat. "Incredibly boring, to tell the truth. They sit in their common room chatting about various Weasley family members. It was vile. And boring. I nearly fell asleep watching them last night."

Blaise gave him a sharp look at this. "Draco, any kind of personal information will be useful. You can't afford to ignore anything, no matter how trivial it might be."

"Then you watch them! Their stupid, idiotic twittering about nothing but Weasleys is the height of irritation. You can't ask me to listen to it night after night. And I'm not looking forward to watching the Weasel suck face with Granger, either." Draco shuddered, allowing himself the private fear that he really wouldn't want to see Potter snog the Weasel's sister either…

A thought occurred to Draco. "You just want to know more about Ginny. Why don't YOU take on the watching of the bird, and I'll concentrate on Potter? I'll find out if there're any opportunities to approach him when he's not able to easily take to the warpath after me. Maybe when he's vulnerable. Taking a bath or something."

Blaise raised one brow at him, but only said, "Very well."

"What were YOU doing last night, anyway? Why weren't you watching them?"

"I was," Blaise said. "Didn't you see my bubble? I saw yours."

Draco mentally kicked himself for believing he'd been the only Slytherin observing the Gryffindors last

night.

"No," he said. "I was only doing what YOU suggested I do, you know. Hex and run. When the lion roars, and all that. If I end up in the hospital wing, it's your fault, Blaise, and our bet is off. No Galleons."

Blaise considered him, and Draco knew his point was made. He'd ended up in Madam Pomfrey's care far too often over the years because of Saint Potter.

"All right, fine," said Blaise.

A horrendous shrieking sound came from the common room, and Draco sighed.

Blaise grinned. "The girls have returned. I want to hear what they're up to."

Blaise and Draco entered the common room to hear Pansy saying loudly and excitedly, "…and she's really smart, you know, for a Muggle-born, and she was SO nice - she even complimented my hair." Pansy was giggling. "We're going to meet in the library after she's done her rounds tonight; she said she wants to show me something. I told her I'd bring the full incantation for the Hair-Straightening Charm I use." It was horrific to see. She'd been reduced to a Granger fan-girl.

There was a look of satisfaction on Blaise's face, and Draco felt nauseous.

"Excellent. Well done, Parkinson," Blaise said. "I'm proud of you."

"Yes, yes, well done, Pansy," Draco said, trying to cover his reaction and failing.

Crabbe heard this though and seemed eager to share his successes for the day. "I passed some first-year Hufflepuffs and I didn't push them into the wall," he said hopefully.

"I helped Dean Thomas levitate a large board across the hall to the Art Room," Goyle chimed in.

"Large board?" Draco asked with a frown.

"He's an artist. Canvas," Blaise said in an undertone. Louder, he said, "Great work, Goyle. What about you, Nott? Did you show Weasley the magazine?"

Theodore grinned, showing the downside of pureblood dental repercussions in the family lines. "It was smooth, Zabini. Without a hiccup. You'd have loved it. I pulled it out, opened it up, let Miss December do her thing, and before I knew it, Weasley was standing over my shoulder drooling. Oddly enough, so was Granger."

"Where were you all? Where were Granger and Weasley during this charming interlude?" Draco asked.

"With me," Pansy said proudly. "We hit it off immediately, once I told her that I'd always been secretly intimidated by her huge mind. She really IS quite intelligent, you know. She's the smartest girl in our year, in the school even. And I found out something else, too," she added, a more Slytherin glint entering her eyes. "She's only been going with Ronald for a few months; she wasn't too happy with Brown's interference last year and now she's happy to have someone to help her keep him in line. I told her she should have been in Ravenclaw, and she practically melted on the spot."

Into what, Draco wondered, feeling as though he'd stepped into a nightmare.

"I think she likes dark-haired women, and red-haired men," Pansy said with a simper. "She's very open-minded. I can't imagine what she wants to show me, later."

Nott chuckled darkly. "Her knickers, maybe?"

The others laughed and Pansy did too, blushing.

Oh god. Draco felt seriously ill now. Pansy - in a threesome with the Weasel and Granger? It was too horrible to contemplate.

They were turning into Hufflepuffish Gryffindor-fans, and liking it.

"How did YOU help him levitate the board?" Draco asked Goyle, trying to turn his thoughts forcibly from the horror of Pansy's new triangular relationship. Goyle had never quite mastered Wingardium Leviosa to Flitwick's satisfaction.

"I'm strong, you know," Goyle said in a wounded tone.

"Ah, I see. Right. Well done, Greg," Draco said quickly, nodding his approval. He suppressed a sigh. He turned to Blaise. "Don't you think we're all moving a little fast? I thought you said we needed to take it slow; ease ourselves into their confidence?"

Blaise looked shifty. "Well, we're not all as unwilling to get along with them as you are, Draco. We're willing to do whatever it takes to regain our house pride." He turned away from Draco and stepped towards Bulstrode, Davis and Greengrass, who were talking together in whispers. "What about you, girls?"

"We've already got study periods with the Gryffindors," said Greengrass with a nervous glance at Draco. "It was easy to start a conversation with them about… things." Davis began giggling and Greengrass joined her.

Blaise smiled at them. "Good job. Keep it up."

Draco's nausea intensified. "Wonderful," he said.

"What about you, Draco? How's it going with you? Are you making up with Potter?" Pansy asked, point-blank.

Draco realised it would not go down well to reveal he'd run from Potter earlier that afternoon, throwing desperate hexes over his shoulder while shrieking like a girl. He glanced nervously at Blaise, hoping he wouldn't mention it.

He straightened, and lifted his chin. "Potter's a tougher one to crack. Can't expect him to give up a lifetime of Slytherin hatred overnight, you know. I'm working on it."

Pansy gave him a strange look and then abruptly turned back to the other girls, whispering about… things.

"I think this calls for a toast," Blaise said. "I talked with Finnigan today, and he said that he'd be willing to trade me a bottle of firewhisky for five Muggle issues of Playboy. I told him they were worth more than a bottle, seeing as they're vintage classics, and he agreed to accept one for now, and that he'd give me a crate later on this week. I'll get the bottle, shall I?"

Eagerly, the other Slytherins expressed delight at this, though some of the gathered younger Slytherins groaned in disappointment.

Draco knew Snape was fairly lenient about them imbibing occasionally, so long as it was late, and they stayed within the Slytherin dungeons, and didn't give it to any of the younger students.

He didn't feel much like celebrating. He sank down in the black settee and glowered at the fireplace. He supposed he was safe too, so long as he remained in Slytherin territory.

He doubted even Potter with his Invisibility Cloak could penetrate the Slytherin dungeons if he didn't have the password.

Draco felt a renewed spark of interest at the thought of being able to spy on Potter whenever he wanted. He wished he could retreat to his bed, close the curtains, cast the Silencing Charm and use the Double-Bubble Spell right now. But it would be impolitic to remove himself before the toast, in any case.

As the others spoke together in cheerful voices, Draco wondered if it had been worth it to agree to go along with this plan of Blaise's. He wondered too if Blaise had thought it through far enough, as well. Ginevra Weasley was indeed a firecracker. Blaise was the ice man - but it wouldn't take much to cause an explosive reaction if the two of them got together, whether for fighting or shagging, and Blaise would probably come off the worst when it came down to it. He'd not forgotten the little Weasley's Bat-Bogey, nor her staunch defense of Potter.

Was Blaise being incredibly thick to imagine he had a chance with Ginny Weasley? Knowing how volatile and possessive Potter was, he couldn't imagine Blaise being welcomed into Potter and Weasley's relationship like Pansy had been by Granger. Everyone knew Granger wore the trousers in that one; but Potter was entirely different. He was fiercely possessive. Draco quickly suppressed the tiny thrill that thought gave him.

He was jolted from his thoughts when Pansy put a hand on his shoulder and held a shot glass with a dram of firewhisky before him. Ah well, if he couldn't beat them, he could join them. Getting roaring drunk to drown his sorrows didn't sound like such a bad idea now.

The evening passed in a blur of alcohol, laughter, Pansy cooing in his ear, Blaise's smug face wavering before him irritatingly, and the knowledge of babbling happily to anyone who would listen to him, and ended with him falling unconscious in his bed.

But nothing could have prepared him for the shock that awaited him when he dragged his moderately hung-over body into the Great Hall the next day.

The houses were all… mixed up. Slytherins were scattered across the tables, talking with other students from other houses. Draco stood with his mouth open before he remembered he was doing it and shut it with a clop. The teachers were beaming; Dumbledore worst of all. Even Snape wore an expression notably devoid of disapproval, which in itself frightened Draco the most. Snape ought to be scowling, not accepting this heinous turn of events.

Draco began to suspect something was afoot, and that he'd been had. Were Blaise and the others already in cahoots with the Gryffindors? Had his own house turned on him? Had they planned this beforehand? How much had the girls known? He wondered if Blaise's little plot had only been devised that night before so that he'd be brought into it far enough to allow the others to do what they all really wanted, all along. Perhaps to achieve that 'house unity' that the Sorting Hat had been whittering on about?

He considered the mess in front of him, the thought of breakfast erased from his mind due to the hangover and now the thought of Slytherin being absorbed into the other houses. There was no Slytherin house now. Feeling ill, and a little betrayed and afraid, he spun on his heel and promptly left.

He was outnumbered, damn it! And he wasn't paranoid in the slightest, not after what he'd just seen. It was Friday, and he could get through the lessons and then sequester himself in his dorm for the weekend, and hope that it died down enough to allow some normalcy to return for the week after. No Slytherin could remain a Hufflepuff for long…could they?

But it was worse than he'd feared, and the mix-up continued throughout every class, whether shared with Gryffindors or not. It seemed they'd all been worried about Draco's reaction, and once he'd been onboard with Blaise's 'plan', they could indulge in their desire to mingle. Perhaps he'd been partly responsible for pushing them towards it, since he'd been aware that his house had been suffering in the wake of the Dark Lord's defeat and done nothing, and he'd been the one to actively turn on Hogwarts the year before.

Draco felt sicker at the thought, pushing around his dinner on his plate that night, sitting at the Slytherin table alone, the spillover of mixed-up students causing a cluster of them all to fill up most of the table, pointedly letting him have a few seats of space at the end from them all.

Maybe they felt he'd betrayed them by allowing the Death Eaters into the school. Maybe they considered that he'd gone too far, and he couldn't be talked around, seeing as he was a Malfoy and a Slytherin to the core. Draco felt very alone, and although he'd skipped breakfast and barely eaten any lunch, he couldn't face the idea of swallowing food right then.

That was when his fortune took an even worse turn, however, for his reverie of misery and anxiety was

broken by a voice across from him.

"Malfoy. Mind if join you?"

Draco looked up before he could help it, and saw Potter sliding into place before him with his own plate of food, setting down his cup.

Draco felt frozen, trapped. Was Potter about to give him some sort of ridiculously insulting lecture on morality and house unification? He wasn't eating anyway, so at least he wouldn't have to worry about the fact that his mouth was suddenly too dry to even attempt it, and his heart was hammering in his chest, and he was experiencing that all too familiar fight or flight sensation he associated with Potter these days. Not to mention that Potter was looking just as good fully clothed as he did when he was starkers. Which did not help Draco's composure to recall at that precise instant.

He frowned at Potter, wondering what he was expected to do. He couldn't just hex him; not without cause. And if he told him to get lost, that would start a fight for sure. Without any of his house left to back him up, Draco felt exposed and inadequately prepared for a violent encounter. It would all too easily end up as it had the day before, with him running for it.

"What do you want, Potter?" he snapped, allowing himself at least the release of vitriol in his words.

Potter was unfazed. "I tried to talk to you yesterday but you acted like I was going to fight with you. I only want to talk, Malfoy; that's all, I swear."

Draco felt something horribly akin to hope flare up inside of him, and feeling off-balance now, he snatched up his fork to have something to fidget with. To occupy his hands. Certainly not to avoid looking at Potter, who was far too close, with those red lips and perceptive green eyes looking right into him.

"So talk," Draco ordered gruffly, wondering why he was giving him the chance. He didn't want Potter to be his friend now that he knew they'd tricked him into this house unity thing, did he? Particularly since there was apparently no controlling the desire to see Potter naked again as soon as possible.

He still hated the showy, glory-seeking, attention-stealing bastard.

"Everyone seems to think Hogwarts will be better off if the houses are brought together," Potter said, a measure of strain in his voice. If Draco didn't know better, he'd say Potter sounded nervous or something. "But your friends all said you wouldn't go for it. They said you had though, yesterday, and I just wanted to talk it over with you. That's all I wanted yesterday after Potions."

Draco gave him a withering expression. "Contrary to what everyone seems to believe," he said, allowing his words to drip acid, "my N.E.W.T.s are just as important to me as they are to anyone else. I do have better things to do with my time than worry about Quidditch and petty school rivalries. I only wanted to shake things up a little. I had no idea they had already migrated out of Slytherin altogether, the sneaky bastards."

Potter looked even more uncomfortable. "But they're still Slytherins," he said, a near entreaty in his tone. "They want to be proud of being Slytherins, rather than pariahs."

"By behaving like Hufflepuffs? Yes, that makes a world of a difference, doesn't it?" Draco commented.

"If you started behaving like one, I'd probably be doing you a favour to off you," Potter smiled. "I don't expect you to. No one does. But Dumbledore seems to think-"

"What?!" Draco burst out, fresh rage sweeping over him at this. "He's responsible for this?"

"You know how he's always gone on about it," Potter admitted, his own voice slipping into a vaguely cynical note. "Why do you think Snape isn't up in arms about it, bringing down the roof around our ears at what's happened?"

Draco threw a dark look of rage at the teachers' tables, and saw Snape, McGonagall and the Headmaster all looking in his and Potter's direction. Disgusted, Draco turned to face Potter. "Fine. But don't expect

me to join your fan club or beg for your autograph."

"I get enough of that from the others," Potter muttered. "I'll thank you not to, okay?"

"And don't expect me to start hugging Weasels, either."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Potter said. Then added slyly, "Although the others will be doing enough of that themselves."

"Shut up, already," Draco said gloomily. "You're making me sicker than I already am."

Potter grinned at him. "So, er, are you… all right with this then? For now?"

"Fuck no!" Draco said lowly. "Are you braindead?! There I was, happy to finally have something to do that wasn't related to Crucio and a painful death at the hands of the Dark Lord, prison in Azkaban beside Father, or the constant belittling of Slytherin house or the Malfoy name! It was supposed to be fun!"

"Yeah, real fun," Potter agreed with a glance down the table at the other students, who all seemed to be getting along quite fine despite their different houses. "There's nothing quite so fun as destroying Gryffindor."

"It would have been," Draco sulked. "Better that than constantly having to endure the pity and scorn of everyone after last year's bungled end."

Potter gave him a curious look. "Pansy Parkinson said you were going to befriend me. She said you'd never bothered before because of something that happened in our first year. I assumed she was talking about the train. That first day."

"It was only to lull you into a false sense of security so that we could undermine your house, don't

worry," Draco assured him. "I wouldn't dream of expecting you to sully your reputation. You know, by insisting you accept an indefinite friendship with a Malfoy." Draco heard the bitterness in his voice and wished he had covered it better.

Indeed, for Potter was regarding him with a sharper gaze now. "Do we have a truce, at least?"

"A cease-fire? No more hexes in the halls? Sure. But don't expect me to go panting at your feet like the rest of them, hoping for some scraps of reflected glory," Draco informed him haughtily, wanting there to be no mistake about his agenda. He was abruptly thrown by hearing the echo of his own words however, as he realised that he'd already crossed that dangerous threshold of imagining himself panting at Potter's feet the night he'd watched him bathe. And the thought of being there wasn't at all bad.

But Potter's face shuttered at this, and he said tightly, "Don't worry, Malfoy. That's the last thing I want. Wouldn't want you dirtying your pureblood knees, after all. They were only good for groveling before Voldemort. I get that, loud and clear."

Potter got up and took his plate and cup with him, and returned to the Gryffindor table where Pansy was sitting attached at the hip to Granger, with the Weasel uncomfortably sitting on Granger's other side. He was thrown by the sudden shaft of pity he felt for Weasley; what man can possibly refuse having two women for the price of one? That was as far as his pity extended, however, and was then assailed by the painful knowledge that he really hoped Blaise would score with Girl Weasley, thus freeing up Potter for…others.

He didn't want that. Did he? Of course not.

He swallowed down a bite of food, trying to swallow his despair along with it, hating himself for feeling that painful clench in the region of his heart at the idea that Potter would go for a girl, seeing as he was straight. First Chang, and then the Weaselette. It was useless to speculate on whether there was any chance of bagging Potter for himself. Particularly since Potter probably wouldn't believe his sincerity in any case, now.

His pity for the Weasel ended abruptly as he heard the words 'ferret' and 'git' said much too loudly, from Ron Weasley's direction, and he strained to listen even as he saw Granger elbow him sharply and

whisper dangerously at him.

Bastard, seethed Draco. He hoped Pansy devoured him whole and spat out the bones. Pansy wasn't easy to handle. If Weasley was anywhere near as bad in bed as he was in Quidditch, he wouldn't last long.

The thought that Potter excelled at Quidditch and was Team Captain was a bit worrisome. Had he missed out, on not taking the chance to suck up to Potter? He doubted it.

Was he better off though, not having to be Potter's friend? It would have been too difficult, having to be so close to him and never close enough.

Draco wondered if he'd in fact got what he'd really wanted. He didn't have to carry on some sort of misbegotten pretense of a friendship with Potter, and he didn't have to join in the absurd, stomach-turning house unity project. He didn't even have to deal with Potter's presence at all. The idea of no duels or hexing was sort of appealing, considering Potter's rather formidable abilities, and that was good for Draco's continued health. He could concentrate on his exams and leave with a clear conscience, having taken full advantage of Dumbledore's compassion and second chance he'd offered him. He'd already promised the old man at the start of term that he was fully aware of the consequences if he chose to follow in his father's footsteps. He'd assured him he wouldn't waste his opportunity to right the wrongs Lucius had caused. Plus there was the shameful little matter of having threatened the old man before. The thought still made Draco cringe.

No, he'd escaped mostly unscathed and was lucky that he'd been able to erase the Dark Mark from his arm, even if he hadn't yet managed to erase it completely from his reputation at Hogwarts with the other students and teachers. He was very lucky.

Why did he feel like going to the disused girls' bathroom and having a good cry with Moaning Myrtle?

To date, he'd lost more and gained nothing. At least his parents were still alive, he thought morosely. At least the Dark Lord was dead. But what did he really have to look forward to once he left Hogwarts at the year's end? A lifetime of lying about at home while his mother rotted upstairs? The company of house-elves to endure, interrupted only by flying visits from Pansy in her horrible threesome with the Mudblood and the Weasel? The occasional visit from Potter, if he even rated such an honour, to ensure

he wasn't feeling suicidal?

He picked at his food and half-heartedly ate some of it, knowing if he kept starving himself he'd be doing himself no favours. After the dismal time he'd spent with Snape after the flight from Hogwarts in the summer, he'd felt insecure about having regular meals.

Now he felt even worse, as well. To hear from Potter, of all people, that his own house had to trick him into going along with the plan to erode Gryffindor house. And just so that they could join in the overall erosion plan of unifying the houses anyway. If only he'd known that they all had wanted it so badly, he'd have had no choice but to let them. Why did it matter what he thought?

Later that evening, Professor Snape cornered him in the corridor. "How are you holding up, Mr Malfoy?"

"Brilliant. Marvelous. Never been better," Draco said viciously.

"Hm. You might want to be aware that Potter's on to you. I'm sorry to…burst your bubble, as it were, but the Headmaster has temporarily lifted the ban on the Double-Bubble Spell, at the request of Mr Zabini, so that the - plan - might be allowed to take its course. But only until the unification of the houses is complete. I will confess I did not think it would be accomplished so quickly. However, you should know that Potter is aware of it, and has been informed by Blaise Zabini as to exactly what was agreed upon by yourself and the other seventh-years."

"The traitors! Those- those rats!" Draco was aghast.

Snape's eyes narrowed. "Perhaps. But then, they have grown tired of your constant obsession with Potter, as well. You'd do well yourself to question why your entire attention is centred upon Potter's existence. It creates quite the impression in minds less easily deceived by constant denial and over-stated enmity."

Snape moved past him and left him standing alone by the wall, wondering exactly what in Merlin's name Snape was actually telling him. As Snape walked away, he said, "I'd watch what I drink over the next few

days, if I were you, Mr Malfoy." He turned the corner and was gone.

An ominous sense of foreboding came over him. Watch what he drank? Why? Abruptly he wondered what else might have been in the firewhisky last night.

Angrily, he stalked back down to the dungeons, intending to have it out with Blaise, once and for all.

But when he reached the Slytherin common room, and ordered a second year girl to tell him where Zabini was, she couldn't tell him. And Blaise wasn't in their dorm. He threw himself onto his bed in frustration. No doubt he was off ogling the mini-Weasel of his dreams.

Which reminded him that he could be ogling someone himself, right about now. Maybe it would make him feel better, to have that twin triumph of knowing he could observe Potter in secret as well as observe him - well, at all. Or was he just tormenting himself with something he could never have? Knowing he was safe to use the Double-Bubble Spell though was quite tantalising. Regardless of whether Potter knew he had it or not. He drew the curtains and whispered both parts of the spell, and then lay back, getting comfortable while sending his little spy bubble out to have a look around the castle.

He checked the Astronomy Tower first, ignoring his pang of guilt and shame while he did so, noting that there were quite a few couples up there but no one he wanted to bother watching or listening in on.

He saw McGonagall talking with his head of house, and they seemed cool but agreeable, and he snorted as he realised that Snape was as treacherous as any of them, to have thrown in his lot with Dumbledore in the first place, and to go along with this madcap unity scene.

Draco carefully ignored the little sarcastic voice in the back of his mind that he was only upset about it because he couldn't have Potter. The rest of it didn't actually concern him in the least, seeing as he wasn't even on the Quidditch team this year, and therefore couldn't complain that the proper team spirit would be lacking if they were all best mates now.

When his bubble finally reached the Gryffindors' common room and squeezed inside, he saw that Potter and Girl Weasley were sitting together on the sofa, but there was no one else present. He floated the

bubble up to the ceiling above them, hoping Potter wouldn't catch sight of it over his head. And then he listened.

"- don't know why you can't just tell them," Ginny was saying. "Ron would be all right with it, and so would Hermione."

"Right, like they'd understand something like THAT," Potter scoffed. "It's already bad enough with them accusing me of being obsessed with him all through last year. And I've tried explaining it over and over again; I knew he was a Death Eater, and I knew he had the Mark. I knew he was up to something, and they wouldn't listen to me."

"But they admitted they were wrong, Harry. You can't just shut them out now. They know something's up. And you can bet that Pansy will tell them if you don't. Pansy's already crushing on both of them; you think she's not going to confide every single secret she has?"

Draco swallowed hard, realising she was right. He knew they were talking about him. Potter had been so keen to catch him out last year. It had been severely worrying at times. God, it was bad… Exactly how many compromising secrets could she reveal to them about him, for instance?

Potter sounded glum. "Yeah, but she cares about him. She'd only say anything if she thought it was in his best interests. She told me so earlier, when Blaise was here."

Blaise was in their common room?! Draco was astounded. He didn't think he'd got that far.

Ginny plucked at a piece of nonexistent fluff on her knee. "Are you sure you don't mind, Harry? About him and me?"

"Why would I? Ginny, for god's sake, I know how you feel; why would I mind, now that you've finally got him? Are you sure you're not the one upset about what I'm about to do?"

Draco sucked in a breath. The Weaselette already had Blaise? What the hell? She wanted Blaise? She and Potter were no longer together? Just how deep did Blaise's plan go, anyway? How long had he been plotting this with Dumbledore and everyone else?! How much did the teachers know? He was willing to bet not that much. He couldn't believe that he'd been out-Slytherined by Gryffindors and his own dorm mates.

It made sense though in a strange way, Draco reflected. How could Blaise and Pansy and the others cavort with Gryffindors if they thought he would be upset over it? They'd had to get him on board with the plan for accepting house unity before they could openly pursue their individual relationships.

"I love you, Harry, you know that," Ginny said, with all the tone of an apology wrapped up into it.

Potter cut her off. "I know, Ginny, I know. Like a brother," he said.

She laughed, having just finished repeating the same three words in tandem with him.

"Look, Harry, it's not that. I just know it must be quite a shock to find out this way, is all. They're claiming that he wants you, and that his happiness is entirely in your hands. How do we know he wasn't in on this whole thing from the beginning?"

"Because if he was, he wouldn't have run from me," Potter pointed out. "I'm just- I'm nervous about going through with this if it isn't really what he wants."

Draco nearly whimpered. They were talking about HIM, he was certain. But what had Blaise and the other traitorous bitches told Potter he wanted?!

"It's hard to lie under Veritaserum, Harry," Ginny remarked dryly.

"I knew it," Draco snarled under his breath. "Fucking bastards. I'll hex them. I'll hex all their rears," he

continued, realising he hadn't yet hexed the backside of the curly-haired one next door. "Boils, or, or-"

"It's a little shocking to take it all at once," Harry admitted. "But I can do it."

"Are you sure? Are you sure you even want to?" Ginny asked.

"If you'd asked me that at the beginning of summer, I'd have said no," Potter said quietly. "But I've had loads of time to think. And being back here, with everything else over and done, it puts it in a different light, I guess. Seeing him again, here at school, it's different. I was at his trial, you know that. It was hard. I just wanted to see him safe, you know? I didn't think he deserved what they were going to do to him. They were going to punish him as a scapegoat. Him and his mum."

"That's hardly reassuring," Ginny said worriedly. "Wanting him safe isn't the same as wanting him, in the way he wants you. If you aren't into it, you shouldn't do it."

Potter licked his lips. Draco tried to pretend he hadn't seen it, and concentrated on catching what Potter said in response. "I AM into it, that's the shocking part. I think I want it more than he does, to be honest. I mean, if he can only say it under Veritaserum, and drunk out of his mind, what does it say about me that I'd… well." Potter fell silent, troubled.

Draco was holding his breath. What was it he was supposed to want? And should he be worried that Potter would want it too while sober?

"He must have been dreaming about it for a while, for it to be stored in his subconscious in such detail like that," Ginny mused.

Damn, Draco thought. If only he'd thought to listen in sooner, he might have learned what it was Blaise and the others had told him. The thought that Potter knew what he'd drunkenly confessed under a dose of the truth potion and he didn't; it was incredibly worrying. It was terrifying.

"I wondered why he didn't want friendship," Potter said thoughtfully. "I thought it was because he hated me, but I wonder if he even really does anymore. Maybe he just believes that he does, you know?"

Wryly, Ginny said, "It's funny, because that's exactly what I thought about Blaise. He's all cold and hard, until he's with me and then suddenly he's melting and there's all that hot-blooded Italian lust and romantic declarations." She chuckled. "He wants to show me Rome, and Venice. And Florence. You should hear him; it's unbelievable. He wants to show me art and opera. It's so sweet."

Draco found it hard to believe his ears. The ice man melteth, he thought. But hot-blooded? Blaise? Romantic? Hardly. And Blaise wasn't even a proper Italian, having spent so many years in Wizarding England, he thought in some sarcasm.

He was still reeling from hearing that Potter wanted to do something with him. Something he apparently had wanted for a while, and had no idea what it was. He had a horrible suspicion it had something to do with the Prefect's bath. And Potter's cock. Oh hell, he thought. Potter knew he wanted his cock. That must be it.

"Ginny?" Potter said, sounding strained and uncomfortable. "Don't tell anyone, okay? I think I really, really, really want this. I think I have for a while. I think this is what all our fights have been leading up to. He's been practically pushing me to do it. All along. I mean, he's attractive. Everyone knows that. But I think I've always thought so, even before I knew there was a word for it. It's one thing to know it, but quite another to say it aloud, you know?"

"Harry, you shouldn't worry about what other people will think. And I really don't think Hermione would be all that surprised. I think she's suspected for a while. About both of you."

Potter shifted in place. "That is - rather embarrassing, actually." He ran a hand through his hair and chuckled once, sounding very awkward.

"Oh, don't worry about it," Ginny said, wobbling his leg back and forth with a hand on his knee in some gesture of reassurance. "She's involved in a bisexual threesome. I hardly think that you having a gay affair with Malfoy is going to shock her at all. Especially since she's known you've fancied him for ages."

"She is scary," Potter agreed. "Even I didn't know I'd fancied him for ages. Not until we got back here at the start of school, anyway."

Draco could barely hear them for the loud thumping of his heartbeat in his ears. All he could hear was 'gay affair with Malfoy'… 'I'd fancied him for ages'…'Potter's fancied me for ages'…and 'Potter fancies me'.

He took a shaky breath and looked back at the bubble.

"- it though, because I don't know if I can do that to someone. Even Malfoy," Potter was saying.

Ginny was laughing silently. "Harry, we did that and more, don't you remember?"

"Not all at the same time," Potter grinned. "And I thought I was going to pass out when you first suggested it at the Burrow that night. Ron would kill me if he knew."

"Ronniekins will never know," Ginny assured him with a wicked tone. "And neither will Mum or Dad, I promise. Don't worry about Ron coping with you and Draco, either, all right? Pansy will bring him around."

Potter made a choking sound, as of extreme disbelief.

Ginny laughed again and then said, "Really, Harry. If making him happy makes YOU happy, why shouldn't you do it?"

Potter seemed to be lost in thought.

"Blaise is waiting for us, so all you have to do is give him your answer and it's done."

But what?! Draco wanted to yell. What would be done?!

"Harry," Ginny said, pushing his leg once more. "You're a natural at it. Trust me, I should know."

Harry let out a nervous chuff of laughter. "Thanks, Gin. That's… great to hear."

"Besides, until you sort this out with him, the rest of us can't really enjoy this whole unification thing, Harry," she said in a reasonable voice. Draco had to admire her skill in manipulating Potter's conscience and guilt complex. "How can I go see Blaise in their dorm if Malfoy's standing there staring balefully at me for being a Weasel, or a slag or whatever? Not to mention poor Pansy, who's been waiting a month now to be able to try to approach Hermione. We owe it to everyone to let them choose their own brand of happiness."

"Somehow, I don't think this is what Dumbledore or the Sorting Hat had in mind," Potter said dryly.

"What they don't know won't hurt them," Ginny commented. "Besides, it's mostly snogging and such, right?"

"Not for me," Potter retorted hotly. "My god, did you HEAR what Blaise said?! I can't believe what a kinky bastard Malfoy is. Even if just in his subconscious."

Draco began to sweat. He felt hunted, trapped…against the wall. To be stalked by Harry Potter, not for the purpose of a beating or hexing, not to cut him up or break his nose, which recollection Draco twitched at upon remembering because he knew he owed Potter for that one. That slashing hex notwithstanding. All their fights suddenly seemed trite and immature. Had they been sublimating?

To be chased. Not to be hunted down for a fight, but for some kinky scenario that even Potter found overwhelming to contemplate, despite having deflowered Miss Weasley? He wasn't sure if he wanted to

run, or not. Once again, he was in the strange position of knowing that if he just let it happen, he'd get what he wanted. If his drunken confession had any true bearing on his inner desires, that is.

He tried hard to search through his feelings and identify anything kinky. Blowjobs? Shagging? Not having had a lot of practice with any of these, he wasn't sure he could determine their relative kinkiness level. In fact, he wondered if Potter knew he was a virgin. Embarrassing as it was to still be one, at his age. He'd just turned seventeen, and had hoped Pansy would give it up sooner than sixth year, and then the Dark Lord had given him that damned impossible mission, and Pansy had twittered on about wanting to save the best part for her marriage night. He'd fooled around with her, but he'd hardly done the things his school-wide reputation touted. Handjobs and blowjobs were tame enough, but being called a deity of sex was pushing it.

He'd wondered if she'd only said that to him to make sure she could hold his interest, seeing as she might have feared he'd discard her once having her. And really, he couldn't fault her suspicion if that were the case. Pansy's voice was irritating, as was her nose. He'd liked snogging her because it shut her up, mostly. And, well, free snogs. Who'd turn them down?

Potter had hugged Ginny and was now leaving the room. Draco cursed his own wandering mind and wondered if he dared send the bubble after him. Biting his lip, he decided he'd chance it.

But by the time he had followed Potter out of the common room, he realised Potter had already said yes or no to Blaise, who was standing there looking impatient.

"Are you absolutely sure about this?" Potter asked him.

"He's gagging for it, Potter. He's been gagging for it as long as you have. From the beginning. We'll deliver him where we promised. Meet us there in fifteen minutes. Bring your cloak. We don't want the teachers finding out about this."

"Fine. I'll be there." Potter sounded staunch.

Blaise glanced upwards though, and caught sight of something. He seemed to be looking straight at

Draco. Blaise's eyes widened. "Shit," he exclaimed. "I didn't think he'd be at it already! Finite!"

Draco's bubble went dark.

Hell, he thought in a sort of fog. Blaise knew that he knew. That they were…coming for him. To hand him over to Potter at some predetermined location. His own eyes widened.

He flicked his wand at the bubble with a nonverbal Finite, got up from the bed and threw back the curtains, suddenly feeling his heart pounding from the adrenaline rush, only this time he wasn't sure if it was out of fear or anticipation. Mostly fear, seeing as he had no fucking clue what was going on. Except that Potter was going to do unspeakably kinky things to him. Which he apparently wanted. But didn't remember.

And they knew he knew it. If he didn't leave, that would look like he really did want it. He wasn't sure if he did or not! And he couldn't just let it happen now, or he'd lose face.

Standing in growing alarm, Draco thought about the best way to leave the dungeons. His arse was literally on the line.

He slipped out of the dorms, made his way through the common room where Goyle said to him as he ran past, "Oh, hey, Draco, Blaise said to tell you he wants to see you."

"Right, thanks Greg, 'bye," Draco said in a rush and ran to the door, and left the common room to run up the corridor, deciding to make his way to the forbidden floor of Hogwarts, the one where the professors kept supposedly secret storerooms with dangerous items such as three-headed dogs and weird mirrors guarded by Devil's Snare. He'd have to chance Mr Filch and his cat, but that was a lesser problem right now.

He managed to avoid running into anyone on his way as he quickly made his way several floors up, but as he ran down the corridor that led to the landing where the moving staircases were, intending to reach the forbidden wing, Pansy suddenly appeared in front of him, with Millicent and Theodore beside her.

"Sorry about this, Draco," she said, "but it's for your own good, love." She flicked her wand and a spell shot out towards him. He managed to throw himself to the wall and avoid it, and promptly began running back down the corridor he'd come, but unfortunately, the next one hit him and he couldn't move his legs, frozen in place.

Then he heard "Petrificus Totalus," and he couldn't move anything, not even his eyes.

He realised he was being levitated along the corridor, and down another, as Pansy crooned, "Oh, you're going to be SO happy, Draco. I just know it. You are SO lucky." She heaved a heartfelt sigh.

Bulstrode was chuckling, and Theodore said, "Yeah, Draco. This is your lucky night."

Draco did not care for the tone in Nott's voice. They were going to pay, he thought furiously. They were all going to pay. He'd see to it. He would. Just as soon as he got out of this- this farce. They'd taken it too far. There was no way Snape would stand for it, and he had no qualms about going to the Headmaster with this either. They'd be in detention for weeks. Months, even. They'd all be banned from Quidditch games. Boils for all of them; they'd be unable to sit down without crying.

Fuming silently, he found they had finally stopped and he was floating before a blank wall. The Room of Requirement, he realised. And then he was floated inside and stood beside a big soft chair, beside a Pensieve and another chair.

Blaise joined them in the room, with Potter by his side. "Did anyone see you?"

"No," Millicent said. "We made it just fine."

"Great," Blaise said, relieved, and then said, "I know you can hear me, Draco, so I'm going to tell both of you right now. We want to merge the houses; all four of them. The Headmaster was right: Hogwarts will be safer and better for us all if we aren't divided by petty rivalry and bad feeling. Also, we can't see members of the other houses without problems if everyone's on opposite sides, so it's better this way all

around. We Slytherins are tired of having to take the blame for everything that's wrong with this school. We're sorry we had to do it this way, Draco, but you've made it pretty clear so far that you didn't want to go along with it. We had no choice but to come up with this. In the end, I think you'll thank us for it, but you aren't leaving this room until we believe you're not going to go on a murderous rampage afterwards."

Potter cleared his throat and sounded amused. "What about me? I'll be in here with him, if he starts rampaging."

"Don't be daft; he's not going to murder you, Harry. He loves you," Pansy said with a grin.

Draco wanted to yell with outrage and denial, furious that Pansy would say so, and that she'd said it so frankly. To Potter, no less. It wasn't even true; just because he fancied Potter's arse didn't mean he was in love with him. The bitch! Oh, she was very, very dead. Pansy was through. They all were, for subjecting him to this betrayal and humiliation.

Blaise stepped up to the Pensieve and took out a memory. Uncapping it, he poured it into the basin. "Both of you watch that, and then decide what you're going to do. Whether you're going to decide to get along, or if you're going to go along with the house unification as the rest of us have chosen to."

"Er, I've already gone along with it," Potter started.

But Blaise cut him off impatiently. "Yeah, yeah, I know. But you need to sort it out with Draco here before it goes any further, or else we're still not going to be properly unified, if he's leaping about in a snit over this."

"Fine," Potter said in a sullen tone.

Pansy unPetrified him and Draco took a breath. He was barely able to speak, he was so angry. "Zabini, you are dead. Do you hear me? Dead." He glared at Pansy and Theo. He ignored Millicent, who sneered. He would deal with her later. But he'd have to do it carefully. She could be a problem. Her and

Greengrass. "And you also. Both of you. You won't be able to sit down for a week."

To his surprise and anger, all the Slytherins burst into laughter while Potter turned his head and cleared his throat.

"Once Potter sees this, I think you'll be the one not able to sit down, darling," Pansy said, still laughing. She handed his wand to Potter who took it with a quiet thanks.

"Have fun, boys," she said, and turned to leave the room, Blaise and Theo following her out.

"Be good, Draco," Blaise grinned.

"Good luck, Malfoy," Theo said with a leer.

Draco stood in fury, glaring after them. When the door closed, he realised there was nothing else to do but look at Potter.

Potter seemed nervous, fiddling with both wands. "So, erm, shall we? Have a look, I mean?"

"You go first," Draco said, wondering if he could disarm Potter and leave.

Potter's eyes narrowed. "I don't think so. After you, Malfoy, I insist."

"Together then," Draco said, feeling oddly let down that after all that, all they wanted to do was show him some stupid memory.

Unless… He blinked, wondering if it was the memory of his drunken confession. Suddenly he really did

not want Potter to see it.

Potter took a step towards the Pensieve, and Draco quickly exclaimed, "No, wait! Just, wait a moment here. We don't know what it is. It could be anything."

Potter rolled his eyes. "We both know what it is. Don't tell me you're not curious."

"If it is what I think it is, then you have no right to look," Draco snapped.

"Oh, you mean like spying on me taking a bath the other night? You had every right to do THAT," Potter said mockingly.

Draco felt his cheeks burn. "How did you…"

"Blaise told me. He had his bubble follow yours. He saw everything that you saw. Said it wasn't really his thing, but that he could understand it." Potter delivered this calmly enough, but his cheeks were reddening now.

Oh hell. Potter knew he'd watched him undress, and wank, and everything. And fucking Blaise had watched. Blaise really was dead.

He felt deflated. And slightly sick again. This time it was a hollow, sad feeling in his chest. And he couldn't figure out what any of this had to do with him being a kinky bastard, unless Potter was simply upset that he'd got off from watching him.

"I'll tell you what, Malfoy," Potter said in placation. "I'll look past your spying on me if you'll consent to let me view this memory."

"I think not," Draco returned instantly.

"Fine. You watch it then, and I'll stay out here."

"No, thank you, Potter, as generous as that sounds. See, how do I know you won't come in while I'm there?"

"You have my word. Honest," Potter said.

Draco's heart was still pounding, and he felt trapped, but it was more threatening to have Potter view this memory than be stuck in this room with him.

"Draco, I promise," Potter said intensely. "I won't look. You go ahead. I'll wait."

Suspiciously, he stepped to the Pensieve. "You'd better not, Potter. Or I promise you'll regret it."

"I won't," Potter said.

Desperate to see what the memory contained, Draco muttered, "I have your word on that?"

"I swear," Potter promised. "I'll wait out here. You can tell me afterward if I can see it, all right?"

Taking a deep breath, Draco leaned over it and entered the memory.

He found himself in his own common room, and he recollected that night clearly now. He'd had quite a few shots of firewhisky that Pansy kept refilling for him. He saw himself sitting on the settee with a goofy grin on his face. Draco was horrified at his lack of poise. He was sprawled somewhat drunkenly, and was

giggling under his breath. "P-Pansy," he heard himself say, and winced at the obvious slur and over-pronouncement of the consonants of her name. "Paaaaannnnn-sy."

Pansy draped herself on the arm of the settee beside him. "Yes, Draco?" she asked in a suggestive voice.

"I think I'm well and truly smashed. Smasshhhed. Is that a word? Mashed?"

"Yes, it's a word, darling, and you truly are. We may have given you a bit much. You're smashed. Well, mostly. How do you feel?"

Draco saw Blaise, Millicent, Theodore, Daphne, Tracey and Greg get closer to him. Draco saw himself struggle with a single hiccup before replying, "Better. I feel a lot better. Better than I have in, ah, years. Yeah, years. I feel smashing, in fact." He giggled.

"Do you still fancy Harry Potter?" Daphne asked him, grinning.

"Of course I do," he replied with a note of indignation. "What kind of stupid question is that?"

"You watch him all the time, don't you?" Blaise asked him.

Watching the memory unfold, Draco saw an expression on Blaise's face, the bastard, that looked as though he was enjoying himself immensely.

"You know I do. Ever since you gave me that nice little bubble-bubble spell," he said, and then degenerated into quiet laughter over something.

Watching himself, Draco was trying desperately to remember any of this but found no help in his own mind. He wondered if they'd Obliviated this part before putting him to bed that night. A part of him was glad; he'd have never left the dorm in the morning if he'd remembered this. He would've been too

mortified to show his face.

"You like to watch him in the Prefect's bathroom too, don't you?" Blaise grinned.

"Ohhh, yes. I do. Very much. See, he's got this perfect cock. And this perfect arse. Completely perfect," he said dreamily, staring off into space. He sighed with a smile. "He's perfect. Quite a surprise, that was, I must say. Didn't think he had it in him. Perfect Potter."

The others were laughing now, trying not to interrupt him, and Pansy asked, "Do you love him?"

"Yeah, pretty much. He's a git and a wanker, but - and he really is a wanker, you know. He wanks in the bath, I saw him. He's got really red lips, they're perfect too, and he's perfect. You know, Potter's got the most perfect cock. Did you know? Did I tell you?"

Pansy was doubled over now, and she gasped, laughing, "Yes, Draco, you did!" She tried to stop, but her smile seemed permanently stuck there as she tried to speak through her laughs. "It's - perfect, apparently!"

Theo looked horrified and amused at the same time.

"It is," Draco agreed gravely now, as if stating some profound truth. "He has the most perfected, perfect-id cock there ever, ever was."

Watching quietly, Draco was writhing inside with complete humiliation that they'd got him to go on about this, and under Veritaserum no less. The thing was, he didn't think they'd really needed it, the way he seemed to behave under the influence.

Blaise tried to stop laughing long enough to ask, "And you'd- you'd like him to shag you, yeah?"

"Yeah. But only if he spanks me first, because he's sort of nice like that, when he's all- all fffiery and everything. And he has to do it really hard, because, because otherwise it's no good, you know? If a spanking isn't hard, how can it be any good?"

At this point, standing behind them all, hearing them laugh and looking at himself sighing rapturously on the settee now and gazing with a smile into space, Draco put his head in his hands. There was no way Potter was ever going to see this, that was for certain.

"And then he has to rim me, 'cause I've heard that's really very good too," he heard himself say.

Draco lifted his head and stared back at himself in alarm.

His drunken self continued, as the others stopped laughing and perked up a bit, "And he has to pare-prepare me prop'ly as well, you know? 'Cause otherwise it hurts. Well, it does, you know. And he has to domin-…dominate me. Properly. He's good at that, you know. Dominating. He fights like it. And he has to fuck me, too. And then he has to love me, because it is fucking unfair for someone not to love you back. Isn't it? Fucking unfair, it is," Draco said drunkenly over-pronouncing all of this, his voice turning mournful.

And then to Draco's complete horror, he saw himself dissolve and crumple into tears, saying, "Why doesn' he love me back? Stup-bastard. He's a stupid, stupid bastard. He's s'posed to love me too, and he won't. Why won't he love me?" he implored Pansy, who was now far from laughter and looking down at him with a mixture of pity and curiosity.

"Maybe he does, Draco. You don't know that he doesn't love you back. You two are fighting all the time. And he's always looking at you. Maybe he wants you just as much as you want him."

"He doesn't though," he said, sniffling. "He hates me. He always hates me, for years and years. That's why I hate 'im." And he was overcome with tears now, unable to speak.

Pansy looked like she was about to cry herself. Theo folded his arms across his chest and looked

uncomfortable. Blaise looked thoughtful.

Daphne sniffled, wiped her eyes and sat down next to him, and then put an arm around him.

Draco found himself trembling while he watched this, certain that if he let Potter see this, he'd never, ever live it down, and never be able to look him in the eye again. He wasn't sure he'd ever be able to look at any of the others, as it was.

Blaise cleared his throat and took a drink from his own glass. "Been there, mate. I know how you feel. What would you give to have things cleared up so you could love him properly, then?"

Sniffling, "Any-thing, any-thing at all," he said miserably, tears streaking his face once more. He rubbed his nose with the sleeve of his robe, and Draco, watching this, flinched as he saw himself do it. He hadn't done that since he'd been seven and his mother had yelled at him for ten solid minutes for doing so.

He watched himself blearily look up at Blaise, hopefully. "Anything at-'tall," he said imploringly.

Blaise exchanged glances with the others, and then bent down in a crouch to eye-level with him and said, "All right. We'll help you. But we need to know if you'd be angry about it afterwards. Would you be upset if we set you up with Potter? It won't be easy."

Draco shook his head, looking more like a twelve-year-old as he said, "I won't. I won't be upset. I promise. Please? Make 'im love me, and I won't be upset."

Merlin. Draco cringed, watching; he even sounded like he was twelve, trying to cajole his parents into giving him something that was an absolute necessity that he possess, as soon as possible.

"And you'll stop fighting with him?"

Draco nodded, "I'll stop fighting. But he has to kiss me properly."

Pansy rubbed his shoulder, and Daphne squeezed her arm around him tighter, once. "I'm sure he will, once he knows you want him to love you properly, Draco," Pansy said, a note of stubbornness entering her voice.

Oh dear, no, Draco thought, as something occurred to him. They'd already told Potter about all of this. Potter already knew the whole thing. It was irrelevant whether Potter watched it or not. They'd only wanted him to see it. And to have to discuss it with Potter. No wonder Potter had tricked him into looking at the memory first.

Luckily the memory was over at that point, and Draco found himself standing by the Pensieve gulping breaths of air. Potter was sitting in the other seat, playing with their wands. Potter stopped when he saw him, and said tentatively, "You all right there, Malfoy?"

Draco was speechless. What could he say? Dangerously, he asked, "Exactly what did they tell you?"

Potter regarded him warily and licked his lips. "That you fancied me, and that you had for years. And that you wanted me to fancy you back. Which I do, Draco," he hastily added.

Draco felt afraid, hurt, and very, very exposed. "What else did they tell you?" he asked in a low voice.

"That I was lucky that you were as obsessed with me as I was with you. They also said you wanted me to top you," Potter replied, his mood seeming to shift into something as dangerous as Draco's.

Draco's mouth went dry. "Did they - say how?"

"I'd rather show you," Potter said. "You see, there's this little problem with you and I always fighting."

"That's hardly my fault," Draco said, furious.

Potter gave him a look askance at this. "Draco. You stepped on my face, and-"

"You hit me the year before!" Draco heard his own voice was too shrill, but he couldn't stop. "And you broke my nose! And hexed me and left me there with the others on the train! You've always hated me! You've looked down on me from the very start! You snubbed me! All I was trying to do was talk to you and you went and acted like I was something awful you'd found on the bottom of your shoe!"

"What?" Potter asked, as if puzzled. "When? What are you-"

"In Madam Malkin's, before first year!" Draco exclaimed. "And let's not forget, oh, let's see, Sectumsempra! Does that ring any bells?!"

Potter had gone white. "I was sorry for that. You can't possibly believe I meant to do that to you! I was sorry! It was an accident!"

"Naturally," Draco sneered. "It's always an accident with you, isn't it?!"

"You've not exactly been a shining example of politeness yourself, Malfoy," Potter retorted. "Hurting Hermione's feelings, and poor Colin's, and Dennis's, and the others. Bullying people, and, wait, let's not forget wanting all Muggle-borns and half-bloods to die! What were we supposed to think?! You were spouting off your father's pureblood rubbish at the top of your lungs for bloody YEARS! You hated us! You hated ME! How was I supposed to know you wanted to be friends? You wanted me dead! You didn't care who died here last year, so long as you and your parents were safe! How was I supposed to GUESS from all of that, that you fancied me?!" Potter stopped, breathing hard.

Draco stared back at him, feeling unaccountably ashamed. He'd been led astray by Lucius, he knew, but he couldn't hide behind his father any longer, and with his pride already in shambles along with his name and his reputation, he knew he was as much at rock bottom as he had been after he and Snape had left the Tower that night, after the old man had…

Slowly, Draco said, "People change, Potter. Do you believe that I've changed?"

"Sure. Do you believe that I have?" Potter shot back.

Draco regarded him, feeling like he had before, when seeing him anew as if for the first time. "Yes," he agreed.

"I don't want to fight anymore," Potter stated.

"Nor do I," Draco said, wondering at the fact that he might, might have a chance here.

Potter pinned him with those green eyes now, and asked, "Do you want me?"

Put on the spot, Draco felt Potter's eyes looking right through him, the eyes of a panther, and he was suddenly more afraid now than he had been all along. He moistened his lips and asked, "What - what are you going to do if I say yes?"

Potter sat back in his seat and sighed loudly. "Can't you drop the mask for once and just be yourself? Do you have to play games with everything?"

Glaring back at him, Draco answered, "You tell me, Harry. Can I afford to?"

Potter looked thoughtful now. "I see. I get it now. Fine. We'll play it your way, Draco. But afterwards, we play it mine."

He stood up, and pointed his wand at Draco who stiffened in fear, wondering if Potter had decided he wasn't worth it after all. A spell shot from the end of his wand, and Draco realised in that split second

that Potter was using nonverbal spells, as his hands were suddenly seized invisibly and bound tightly before him by his wrists with thin, silvery cord.

Next, Potter wore a look of concentration, and a sofa appeared, and with a wave of his wand in the direction of it, he said, "Go on. Bend over it."

Cold shock ran over Draco at his command. He couldn't possibly be seriously expected to just bend over, for this? It could mean only one thing. "Why?"

"I think you can figure out why," Harry replied in a flat tone. "You're clever, what do you think I'm going to do?"

"No, why are you doing this?"

Harry stopped and smiled a little. "Well, I was going to say that I'm doing it because you want me to, deep down, but actually, I'm doing it because I want to. And really, you've had it coming for years, Draco. But I'd be happy to explain it before we start, if you like. As soon as you bend over the back of the sofa. Shall we get started? Or am I going to have to force you over it?"

Draco let out a breath of surprise. "Can't we talk this over?"

"No, we can't," Harry said, slightly more forcefully now. "You've had your chance, and you didn't want to. So get over there."

This wasn't how Draco had ever imagined interacting with Harry Potter. He stood in paralysed vacillation, wondering what the hell had been going through his firewhisky-impaired brain that he'd believed, truthfully, that what he really wanted was a spanking. "I-" he began, and then stopped, finding his breaths coming shorter and his heart pounding harder. "I can't."

"Okay," Harry said cheerfully. "I'll help." He crossed the few steps to where Draco stood, and grabbed

him by the arm, and then the other arm, and shoved him toward the sofa, pushing him so that he ended up bent over it, horrified to find his toes barely reached the floor. Gasping, he realised Harry must have asked the room for a sofa of appropriate dimensions.

"We'll need some other things too, I think," Harry said behind him, as if lost in thought. Moments later, a small table appeared beside Harry, to Draco's right.

He tried to get down again immediately, only to find Harry's hand on the small of his back, keeping him there, and he was too off-balance to find his footing to get down. He could try to inch forward and slide down the front of the sofa, but he knew Harry would probably just tie him down for it at that point. Harry felt too warm behind him; he acutely felt him standing there.

Fear trickled over him at the thought of what Harry would do. He'd been babbling about wanting to be spanked hard. He licked dry lips with an even drier tongue and said, "Harry? We don't have to do this, you know. We could skip it, and move on to the next part."

"The next part?"

"Yeah, whatever's next."

"I don't think so, Draco. You see, you've had this coming for so long, and I know you're never going to apologise for all the horrible things you've said and done, not really. Not like you'd mean it, sincerely. So I'm going to punish you properly for everything all at once, so you won't have to apologise at all. For any of it. You won't even have to apologise to Ron for insulting him and his family, or Hermione for herself or her family. Or the rest of us. Or me. Or even Professor Dumbledore. You won't have to apologise to anyone by the time I'm through with you. We can start off with a clean slate. Isn't that a happy thought?" The glee and satisfaction that Draco could hear in Harry's voice didn't sound like he should be happy in the least. Harry sounded positively determined.

"Not really," Draco managed, hating the tremble in his voice. He wanted to be sarcastic and witty, and give Potter what-for, but he couldn't, not when facing the immediacy of a spanking. He just hoped Harry wouldn't -

He felt Harry lift his robes and bring them up to bunch around his waist.

Oh. Hell. He was going to.

"So I've got the perfect arse, have I?" Harry mused behind him. "I might have to contest that. Yours isn't bad, Draco."

"You pervert," Draco snarled, feeling every ounce of pride being stripped from him. This was not what he'd had in mind when he'd informed the Slytherin common room he wanted to be spanked, he was sure of that.

"Mm. Actually, I wasn't sure before if I was or not, to be fancying you. But now that I'm looking at your arse, Malfoy, I can promise you that I really am the most perverted pervert that ever perved on your bum." Harry stepped up behind him and pressed his body against him, grabbing his hips, and Draco sucked in a strained breath as he recognised the hard lump pressing directly into his upper legs and his buttocks. Harry's hands were hot and firm around his hips, and the imprint of Harry's grip upon his skin was searing. Harry's body, however clothed he still was, felt new but wonderful against his body. Draco felt his scalp tingle with something like fear but it wasn't really; he was already afraid and it felt more like -

Like lust.

With a slight grind into him, Harry breathed, "You know what else? I'm finding I really, really want to punish your arse. I can hardly wait." He punctuated this with another grind into him, and knowing that Harry was hard for him, wanting to do this to him, suddenly helped Draco to not feel so horribly ashamed that he was in this position or that he was starting to wonder if he really did like it.

"You really don't need these, and they're in my way, so; sorry, but I'm gonna have to take them off you," Harry said, stepping away from him and sliding both his hands down to the waistband of Draco's pants and pushing them down his legs, leaving them around his ankles to be caught on his shoes.

Draco felt his face burning with new shame as his arse was bared, and he gritted out, "Enjoying yourself, Potter? You can admit it, I won't tell anyone; how long have you wanted to do this, anyway?"

But Harry seemed uncaring at his tone and didn't rise to it, merely said reflectively, "Actually, I think I've wanted to punish you like this for years. The spanking part, that is. But this first part I've only thought of doing to you for the last three weeks."

Curious dread filled Draco, and he struggled to twist his head around so that he could see. Unfortunately, he was bent too far forward and all he could see was the edge of the sofa he was bent over. "What?! What are you doing?"

Harry stroked a casual hand along his flank, and then across his left buttock, making Draco suck in a breath at the touch, and said meaningfully, "I'd be remiss if I didn't prepare you - properly, now wouldn't I?"

Draco heard something clunk on the table behind him, and then felt both Harry's hands cup his arsecheeks, and then part them. He was barely able to suppress a whimper. No one, in his lifetime, had ever dared to touch him there. But Harry ran an experimental finger down his crack, all the way down to his balls, and then up again, and said in a quiet, admiring voice behind him, "You have the loveliest arse, Draco. I'm not sure whose pleasure will be greater here. I'll try to make sure it's yours, if that's any consolation."

Draco's mind whirled, as he took that in. Was Harry about to fuck him? He felt his sphincter tighten in fear at the thought.

But Harry replaced his hold on both of his buttocks and spread them wide, and then Draco nearly yelled as he felt hot breath upon the sensitive skin of his crack, and the cold tip of Harry's nose press against him, with those cool glasses pressed into either side of his cheeks, followed by a wet, warm tongue flicking lightly against his anus.

"Oh," he squeaked, and immediately wished he hadn't, but it was too late, and it didn't matter because

Harry's tongue slid across it harder, running along the outside of it in a circle, before pushing into him. It was such a small thing, hardly of consequence, but Draco felt robbed of breath at the enormity of being breached like this. It was dirty; dirtier than he thought Harry would be willing to go, and yet he felt the unmistakable sensation of that tongue slipping into him deeper, and then pulled out, and swirled around, and with a moan Harry pushed his mouth harder against his hole, licking and slurping with an absolutely unforgivably wet sound back there, and Draco was unable to do anything but tremble because he couldn't speak.

After a few unbelievable moments, he could feel dribbles of saliva dripping down his perineum to his balls, and the growing sensation of that maddening tongue was too much; it wasn't enough somehow. He found his hips shifting in little twitches he couldn't control, and was horrified to find he was pushing his arse back into Harry's face, trying to get him to push his tongue in deeper.

Harry's hands were gripping him hard, pushing him against the back of the sofa, and he felt his cock was hard, rubbing against it. He wondered when it had happened; but the sensation of Harry's soft, stroking wet tongue was too much, and finally he gasped, "Please." He wasn't even sure what for. To stop, or do more, or what.

Harry pulled his tongue out and left Draco feeling bereft and abruptly cold, and let go of him altogether. But then he heard Harry give a deep, low moan of breathy satiation behind him and pick up something from the table. He heard wet sounds, and then Harry's hand was on his arse again, spreading his cheeks slightly.

"This is something I've always wondered if you'd be able to handle," Harry said conversationally. "You've always acted as if you've got a broomstick stuck up your arse, after all. Let's see what you make of this."

The idea of his punishment slowly filtered back into Draco's mind, and he wondered what perverse act Harry was going to act out upon his partly willing body next. He wasn't exactly looking forward to the spanking.

"You're the better flier, we both know that," Draco gasped out. "I rather think YOU'RE the one with the stick up your arse." He wasn't sure why he was goading Harry at the moment, except possibly to ensure that Harry wouldn't back down.

Sure enough, Harry chuckled. "I don't think so, Draco. And I'll tell you why. No, I'll show you."

Draco felt Harry move in closer and step to the left a little, and then was shocked to feel the cold, wet tip of something press against his anus now, a far cry from Harry's lovely tongue. It pushed into him, invading him, stretching him, and although it burned a little as it went in, it didn't exactly hurt. But it went up, and up inside, until he felt rather impaled. He felt the edges of something hard and flat sticking out like a flared base, and realised Harry had just stuck a dildo inside of him. It felt huge. He knew it probably wasn't. Harry pushed it home, until he felt the flared end pressed against the lower part of his buttocks, snugly lodged inside of his arse.

"Told you," Harry said softly behind him. "God, Draco, I don't think I've ever seen you look better." Harry's breaths were coming harder.

Draco felt awkward, and stuffed, and wondered why Harry had bothered to shove this thing into him. Draped over the sofa, he gulped, and realised that it was in fact a small price to pay to have Harry play sex games with him in order to clear his name, rather than being in Azkaban where the guards and the Aurors probably would have done far worse, especially to someone like him. He was also glad he hadn't kicked or struggled more, because he wasn't sure he would have enjoyed the ignominy of being tied down for this, either.

"And now I'm going to spank you," Harry said. "How many shall I give you, I wonder? How about twenty-five smacks for being a snob and a spoiled brat. And twenty-five more for having such a nasty mouth. An extra ten, for having such a lovely arse and still being a complete prick to everyone. And ten more for all the Muggle-borns you've insulted. And how about five on top of that, for the Weasleys?"

Draco wisely kept his mouth shut, biting his lips, knowing that if he spoke back at this point, Harry would probably add more. Seventy-five smacks was unimaginable; he couldn't think what it might be like to have additional smacks up to a hundred…

"Say hello to your prostate, Draco," Harry said with a definite tone of amusement.

Draco wasn't sure what to make of that, and abruptly did not care, as Harry's hand suddenly came down on his arse, right in the middle, and he felt the object plugging his hole push into him with a stab of strange pleasure, reaching that nameless place inside of him that he'd started to get a glimmering of when Harry had been licking out his arse.

He was still seeing stars when Harry's hand whacked him again, and then again, and continued repeatedly pounding it into him, and even the inadvertent lighter push into him as his hand switched buttocks or concentrated on another part of his arse kept jabbing the pleasure within. Draco was squirming and whimpering in spite of himself, unable to hold still.

Each burning swat was painting his bum with fire, but the toy inside of him was jolting him deeply, coring him out, pushing an oddly itching hunger into him over and over.

Soon, he was groaning and yelping open-mouthed, the spanking getting harder as Harry abruptly moved and switched hands. He hoped Harry was keeping count; a part of him was afraid Harry would just keep going.

It was starting to really hurt, and his arse was burning hot, his skin on his bottom stinging unbearably even when the smacks weren't landing, and yet they continued, relentlessly, until he knew that Harry wanted to fuck him with that thing inside of him at the same time, and was using the spanking to do it, and he felt his cock dripping copiously at the thought.

Each time he cried out, he cringed at the entreaty he heard in his own voice, and he truly didn't know if his face was as hot as his bum by now.

It went on and on, and it was hurting so badly, but it didn't stop feeling good inside of him, and he felt so confused by it. But it wasn't enough to make him come, somehow. The angle was wrong, or something.

"Oh, fuck, stop," he panted finally, and whimpered, and said, "Please, please, Harry, stop, I'm sorry. I'll apologise."

Harry did stop at this, and said, "My hands are hurting. And we're only up to forty-two. Hold on." He

stepped away, leaving Draco feeling absolutely stunned, to know he was lying here across the back of a sofa with a butt-plug up his arse getting tanned by Harry bloody Potter, about to cream himself from just receiving a spanking.

He heard the crack of something wooden against flesh, and heard Harry said, "I guess this'll do."

He preferred Harry's hands; this wasn't good, no, no -

Something hard and flat and unyielding came whistling against his arse and spread new painful fire over his already suffering bum, and Draco shrieked. "Shit! Harry, please! I'm-"

It came again, making him holler, twist in place, and pull uselessly at the cords binding his wrists, and he babbled, "Please, please, I'm sorry, I really am, you don't need to-"

But he could hear the nearly inaudible sound of Harry counting behind him, paying no attention to him, and he realised his eyes were already streaming with tears, because suddenly it was getting harder to breathe, what with his nose filling, and he shrieked with each lancing, sharp blow as it unmercifully landed, one after the other.

The plug in his bum was still rubbing pleasure into him, juddering deep each time, but it was less than it had been under the strength of Harry's palms, and he knew he wasn't going to be able to come from it now.

Helplessness overcame him. His world had ceased to be anything but an unending rain of fiery, wrathful, punishing blows. He was sobbing openly and jerking with each one to try to avoid them by the time Harry reached sixty-three, and Harry stopped at sixty-seven.

He lay there, bawling like a small child, suddenly feeling very sincerely sorry indeed, knowing that if only someone had taken the time to do this before now, he probably wouldn't have pushed as hard and as far as he had, and would have been far more aware of the need for tact - and yes, prudence - where others were concerned.

He was still crying, quieter now, when he felt the touch of something cold and slick against his arse. He flinched violently, and Harry said softly behind him, "Easy, Draco; it's just salve for the welts."

Draco wondered if he would ever be able to look at anyone ever again. He wanted to sink into the floor and disappear, and never have to speak to anyone - least of all Harry Potter. He wondered if the welts were why Harry had stopped before the last of the count. He was more grateful than he knew how to articulate.

He was shuddering silently now, the tears still irritatingly flowing from his eyes, when he felt Harry lean against him, felt bare flesh against the backs of his thighs, and horribly enough, all up against his flaming arse, and Harry leaned over him.

He abruptly felt the sofa drop under him a little, and then a little more, and suddenly he could place his feet upon the carpet, and Harry sighed against him. "That's better."

He felt Harry's voice rumbling into him as he continued, "You took it really well, you know." He felt Harry's hands tighten upon his arms, and he wondered why Harry had stopped.

"I hope you didn't come. Not yet, anyway," Harry said.

Draco felt too raw and exposed to talk. He didn't know how to answer, or if he even should.

He felt Harry's hand move to reach down and feel his cock, where it had softened and was now only semi-erect. In Harry's warm grasp though, it seemed to revive instantly.

"I'm going to shag you, Draco," Harry murmured hoarsely from behind him. "I'm going to fuck your pureblood arse and you're going to like it."

Draco was snuffling awkwardly, and wiping at his face with his bound hands, and finding he had to make do with wiping his nose on his sleeve again, which only served to remind him yet again that he was behaving like a child - and always had, hence the spanking - and made him silently weep all over again.

But the immediacy of the shock of Harry pulling the plug out of him now, and tossing it aside somewhere brought him back with another shudder. Harry's slick, hard cock was pressing into him, gliding into him easily, and it felt so much better than that damn thing, and filled him properly, and at the angle Harry was pushing into him, it was jarring against his prostate now, with every stroke.

Harry's hand reached around roughly now and grabbed his cock, and began pulling and squeezing him, milking him, and Harry growled, "Oh god, finally. Finally fucking you, Draco, oh fuck it's been too long. So many fucking YEARS," he said, "waiting for you, WANTING you, oh FUCK, gonna…oh GOD yeah," he said, the excitement and lust colouring his voice.

Draco gasped, hearing it, along with the words Harry was speaking, and the constant pounding against that pleasure point inside of him with the wider, thicker hardness of Harry's red, lovely cock inside of HIM, it was so good, and he had to agree. It was about fucking time.

He was getting shafted by the Boy Who Lived, the Hero Who Defeated The Dark Lord, and loving it. Loving every inch. He felt Harry's thrusts slamming into him, and occasionally penetrating so deeply that he felt Harry's balls pushing against him, and it felt so good to finally be owned.

Finally, someone cared about him, cared enough to give him what he needed, and he knew that no one had ever owned him so completely before. The image of Lucius flickered in his mind's eye, and he knew that his father hadn't loved him this much. Not enough to care for his happiness, only enough to ensure he'd survive long enough to be the Malfoy heir.

Mother only saw him as her baby boy; never allowing him to grow up.

But Harry. Oh Harry.

Harry wanted him, not his bloodline or his inheritance or his name or even his permission - Harry just

wanted him.

Harry's hand was jerking him faster, and he was gasping behind Draco now, not speaking, and it was all too much, and Draco came and came and came, a high-pitched keening wail pulled out of his lungs as his head felt hot and black and far too full, like his arse, and his buttocks were still sore, but it didn't matter, and Harry was pumping into him like he was possessed.

He heard Harry cry out and felt him stiffen, buck into him wildly, and then felt him go still, with a few more half-hearted thrusts into him, and finally stop, panting.

Draco felt light-headed. He wanted to lie down somewhere. He was exhausted.

Harry continued to catch his breath behind him, drooped upon him, and then slowly peeled away, letting go of his limp cock, and pulled out of him.

Draco could barely imagine moving, but he heard whispered spells and a hot and cold tingling on his bum, and then suddenly the pain was gone.

"Sorry," Harry said roughly, apologetically. "I would have done that sooner, but I wanted to leave them on you while we - you know."

He pulled up Draco's pants, and pulled down his bunched-up robe so that it fell behind him, and then Draco felt the cords disappear from around his wrists. Harry helped him up, and handed him a tissue. "Here."

"Thank you," Draco muttered, taking it, not looking at Harry. God, how could he? He blew his nose, and wiped at his eyes. He felt like a mess. He couldn't even begin to think what he must look like.

He turned around and leaned against the back of the sofa, sliding his gaze over the small table to see what had been inside of him. It was small and grey and looked absolutely harmless. He couldn't believe

how threatening and yet promising it had felt, to be so small. He quickly looked away from it. Harry was standing beside him, to his left, and leaned against the sofa with him.

Draco sniffed, and then sniffed again, and stared at the floor.

He heard Harry's intake of breath. Draco blinked, unable to look at him. "What is it?" His voice sounded scratchy to his own ears, from all the crying and yelling.

"I don't think I've ever seen you look more beautiful," Harry said, a catch in his voice.

It was too sincere, and heartfelt, and conveyed awe and authenticity, and it was too much. Draco's eyes welled with tears again. "I look a fright," he said tensely.

Harry stepped around to face him, and leaned into him, putting his arms around him. "No, you don't. You look beautiful," Harry said, muffled against his neck.

Rather surprised at this unexpected affection, Draco brought up his own arms, awkwardly, and hugged Harry back.

It was with some shock that he realised the only person he'd ever embraced like this had been his mum, after they'd been reunited after their separate trials, and they'd been standing outside the courtroom, feeling as though they'd escaped death, which they had; and feeling bittersweet about the fact that they were free, despite Lucius remaining in Azkaban.

This was much the same, only different in that it had more hope in it. It didn't feel like things had come to an end; embracing Harry right now felt instead like a beginning. He hoped it was.

Harry pulled back, not letting go of him, and searched his face.

Draco couldn't quite reach Harry's eyes, glancing at his mouth and then down again. God, what must he think of him? That he'd voiced the desire for all of that?

Draco licked his lips. "You must think that I'M the pervert."

Harry exhaled quietly. "Actually, I don't. I think we both are. And I don't think it's perverted, either. I think we both needed it. I did it for you as much as for myself, I hope you realise. I knew what it must have meant, that you'd say you wanted it under Veritaserum. I knew what you were really asking for."

Draco grimaced, feeling like crying again. "Well, you tell me, since you've got it all worked out. Because I haven't a clue."

Harry shook him slightly. "Forgiveness. Forgiveness, Draco. That's what you wanted. And guess what? You're forgiven. Do you think Dumbledore would have spoken at your trial if he hadn't forgiven you? Do you think the rest of Hogwarts would have waited until you were ready to accept the unification of the houses if they hadn't forgiven you? Everything's been centred around you for a while now."

"No," Draco protested. "They haven't. They still centre on you. Not that I'm complaining now, but they do."

"Draco, look at me. Please?" Harry waited until Draco lifted his gaze to finally meet Harry's brilliant green eyes. They weren't filled with pity, as Draco had feared. They were filled with hope, and concern, and excitement. "Draco, we've all been waiting for you. The Slytherins have been ready from day one at the start of school to mingle with the rest of the houses. They didn't want to be on the outside anymore, especially now that it's no longer cool or fashionable to be seen as flirting with Dark magic. But everyone knew, without saying anything, because they didn't need to, that we had to give you the space to find yourself first. It wasn't easy coming back here, we all know that. You're not the coward you think you are, to return here after what happened last year, Draco. After what you'd done. That's why you were given the chance, and the time to think about it."

Draco flushed with shame at feeling his eyes tear up again at this. "I don't deserve it," he said.

"How many of us really do?" Harry asked, somewhat philosophically, but Draco could tell he meant it candidly. Probably thinking of his own mistakes, in the past. And all the unnecessary horrors that had transpired. "But you're forgiven. You can forgive yourself, and move on."

Draco looked back up at him, sniffled, and said to the boy who had been the centre of his world for so long it seemed a lifetime now, "So I can finally be your friend, then?"

Harry grinned widely, joyfully. "Yeah. So long as we're more than just friends."

Draco considered the sparkle in his eyes and nodded. "Of course. I can't be your friend if I'm not more than that. Your lover, I mean."

At that, Harry grinned again and then said, "I should hope so. You have the most perfect arse."

Draco heard the echo of his own words, and glanced over at the Pensieve, beyond Potter's arm. "You can look at it if you want; the memory."

"They already showed it to me," Harry admitted. "Don't be upset. I had no idea what was going on until I saw it. I was angry that they'd do that to you. They claimed it was the only way to prove to me that you really meant it, though. It was kind of hard to deny that it worked, too."

Draco shrugged. "That's all right. It wasn't as bad as being put under the Cruciatus Curse by the Dark Lord. Nothing's as bad as that."

Harry laughed grimly. "Yeah. I know. Look, do you want - shall we move this over to the bed?"

Draco looked back up at him and then around the room. "There's a bed? Since when?"

"Since about when I pushed into you," Harry answered in a wry tone. "I think the room assumed we'd

need it for what we were doing. I'm not sure I even want to know what other things have gone on in here over the decades."

"I'm sorry about the Vanishing Cabinet," Draco said.

Harry looked back at him so fast, Draco wondered if he'd sprained his neck. "Draco, it's okay. We understand. I understand."

"Still," Draco persisted. "I am. And Bell, and Madam Rosmerta. And about Bill Weasley, too. I really didn't know that Greyback was going to be here that night."

"I was there when you said it the first time, Draco, remember?" Harry said gently, tightening his hold on him. "You don't have to apologise. No more apologies necessary."

Draco gave him a small smile. "Did you like it? Punishing me?"

"I did. Not because I was hurting you, but because you wanted me to, and I wanted to give it to you. Do you, er," Harry stopped. "Do you know what I mean?" he asked now, cautiously, as if fearing his answer.

Draco nodded. "Yes. Don't worry, I get it. I do. I was just worried you might have thought I was sick for wanting or needing it."

"Far from it," Harry said thoughtfully. "If only it took just a spanking for everyone to be redeemed. Come on, let's go over to the bed. You looked knackered. I think we both need a lie down at this point. Besides, it's late."

Draco was happy to let himself be led over to the rather large bed. It was comparable to the one he had at home. "Do you think we can stay the night here?"

"I think we can get away with it for several hours, but we'll probably need to make sure we leave before breakfast. Long before, actually." Harry was pulling off his clothing.

Draco followed suit, feeling in shock still, and was struck all over again at the sight of Harry without apparel, climbing into the bed and getting beneath the covers. He quickly joined him, and the lights dimmed to almost nothing.

In a low voice, Harry said, "How are we going to make do for the rest of the school year like this? We won't be able to carry on every night, here."

"We'll work something out," Draco said, not caring at this point. "One way or the other. As long as you're mine, I don't really care." A thought occurred to him. "Harry?" he whispered.

"Yeah?" Harry seemed far too awake for someone who was supposed to be tired.

"May I tell you what I'd like? Right now, I mean?"

"Of course. What do you want?" Harry turned to face him, inquiringly.

Draco smirked, relishing the pure indulgence of finally having Harry Potter all to himself. Naked. In a bed. Perfect cock and all. "I want you to kiss me until I'm begging you to shag me again."

Harry's mouth was on his before he could draw his next breath, and Draco experienced the momentarily flash of happiness at knowing he'd been pounced upon, as Harry pushed him backwards and rolled on top of him, pressing him into the bed. It felt like fire and salty heat to have Harry's lips against his own, and when he felt the cautious tip of Harry's tongue brush against his parted lips, he opened them further, moaning as he remembered the sensation of that very same tongue sliding in and out of his hole not long ago.

His bum was still full of Harry's come, dripping a little, and he spread his legs, hoping Harry would get the

hint.

Harry groaned into the kiss, and settled into him, letting Draco feel his hard dick against his own. Finally relinquishing Draco's mouth, Harry slid down farther over him, and pushed his legs up a bit. Bending him back, exposing his anus once more beneath the covers that covered both of them, Harry pushed the tip of his cock into him, and then slid home in one stroke, fitting into him like his arse had been made to take Harry's cock.

"I might have to do this to you all night," Harry breathed down at him, his eyes glittering in the dark.

"Every night," Draco corrected, with a gasp, feeling Harry's cock thrusting home over and over, slowly, knowing that he'd never survive if he didn't get to feel this regularly now. It was too good to ever live without.

"There's… something I never told… you," Harry said, in between long, hard, deliberate pushes into him.

Draco was already starting to float away on the feeling of being taken again. Harry's weight on him felt so good. "What would that be?"

"That I - oh god - love you as well - ah, fuck - Draco," Harry panted.

Draco felt his arse muscles clench around Harry at the words, and love and lust suddenly felt like the same thing, and he whimpered slightly. "Harry. Harry, swear to me that this is it, yeah? We won't go back to the way it was?"

"No way, there's - no chance," Harry said, the promise evident in his voice. And leaned over, despite the break in their rhythm that it caused, to seal his mouth over Draco's once more.

Being kissed by Harry, Draco finally felt that he had done something he could be actually proud of. He'd accomplished something. He'd managed to earn Harry's attention, focused solely upon him, against all

odds and obstacles. He'd got Harry to kiss him while making love to him.

He'd finally got Potter to want him, and to love him back. Because as everyone knew: it would be fucking unfair otherwise.

~Finite~