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Name: Draco and Harry- Escorts Entangled
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Chapter 1 to 9

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Chapter: 1

Part Six

Escorts Entangled

Prologue

In memory of the fallen, the editors of the Daily Prophet proudly reprint this article each year on the anniversary of the demise of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. We feel it is particularly important to remember those who gave their lives in order to maintain our freedom and uphold the principles that govern our world, particularly during these trying times, and given the recent upheaval at the Ministry of Magic. (See Page Two for related article.)

POTTER VICTORIOUS!

The war is over! He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was defeated at last by The Boy Who Lived! The final battle took place on the desolate plain of Dartmoor. Sources close to the action describe some of the details. "Harry seemed to go mad when Ginny fell," one participant said, referring to Potter's long time love-interest, Ginevra Weasley. "He stepped up and unleashed magic like I've never seen. It took You-Know-Who by surprise. I'll never forget the sound when he fell. Merlin, we thought Harry was dead, too."

The Boy Who Lived survived the battle, although his condition is not known at this time. He was hastened from the field by his constant companions, Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger. Members of the Order of the Phoenix were questioned, but they had little to offer. Remus Lupin provided an accounting of the fallen, which included Order members Alastor Moody, the renowned former Auror, Dedalus Diggle, and Hestia Jones. Also among the deceased are Seamus Finnegan and Dennis Creevey, prior schoolmates of Harry Potter. Ginevra Weasley was joined in death by both of her parents, Arthur and Molly Weasley.

Many of the Death Eaters were destroyed, including Bellatrix Lestrange and her husband Rodolphus, Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, Alecto and Amycus Carrow, and the infamous Severus Snape, alleged murderer of the famed Albus Dumbledore. "Neville took him down with one hit!" one of the surviving Weasley twins told us. "It was amazing!" the other added. Neville Longbottom is the son of the famed Longbottoms tortured after the first war by the Lestranges. Longbottom's tragic story and final triumph is described in detail on page six of this issue…

Chapter One

"I'm not going to have another fucking row with you over the goddamn Ministry!" Draco yelled.

"In case you hadn't noticed, we're already having a row!" Harry snarled.

"That's because you keep bringing it up!" Draco bellowed. He was nearly to the point of picking up a nearby object and hurling it across the room. Unfortunately, the nearest object was his silver wand holder and he liked it far too much to risk damaging it.

"I only bring it up because I need your help," Harry said softly, but Draco was not swayed by his wheedling tone. He made a sarcastic noise.

"You certainly do not need my help, Potter. No one but you can break the Dark Magic and you know it. I'm just as useless as your little Auror friends. You only want me there so you can keep an eye on me."

The emerald eyes flashed. "It's not a crime to want you with me. I miss you, I'm not trying to keep an eye on you."

"Like hell you're not. You've become as possessive as a paranoid wife. I can't even go to the fucking pub for a drink without a goddamn permission slip."

Harry reacted as if slapped. "That's not true," he said. "I'm just concerned. You've been taken so many times, I just… I guess I am a bit paranoid."

Draco sighed heavily. "In case you've forgotten, Potter, we are bonded now, so you can find me anywhere I fucking go, all right? There is no escape."

Draco nearly bit his tongue in half, wishing he could call back those words, because Harry's face reflected the depth of the wound they inflicted.

"You want to escape, then?" Harry asked softly.

Draco put out a hand. "No, wait, Harry, I didn't mean that—"

"I didn't realize my presence had become so stifling and distasteful. I'll just leave you alone, then."

Before Draco could stop him, Harry Disapparated.

"*Fuck*!" Draco yelled into the empty room.

ooOoo

Harry Apparated straight to his office at the Ministry and threw himself into his chair before burying his head in his hands. He had known it was coming, but he had been powerless to stop it. He swore softly and wondered—not for the first time—what the hell was wrong with him. He had been acting like a clingy, overprotective idiot for the past month. Either that, or he was contemptuous to the point of rage. Harry thought he might be going crazy. He knew his behavior was driving Draco away. Lately the blond had been making up excuses to avoid intimacy. Harry knew it was the death knell for their relationship. Sex between them had always been spectacular, but now it seemed more like a battle of wills. Harry had always enjoyed the give and take process of their lovemaking, but now he only seemed satisfied when he dominated Draco.

Harry always felt guilty afterward, to the point of nausea more than once. Draco held him and crooned that it did not matter, that everything was fine. Draco could lie when it suited him, and those particular small lies had allowed the fractures to grow, fractures that now threatened to crack them apart.

Harry should have sought help a long time ago. He left the Ministry and went to see Hermione.

ooOoo

Draco sat cross-legged on the thick rug before the fire. He had left Grimmauld Place as soon as Hedwig had delivered a message stating that he would be spending the night at Ron and Hermione's. A message by owl. That, above all, clued him in that the Gryffindor was still upset. Normally Harry would send a Patronus, or hell, tell him in person.

Unwilling to face the pitying expressions of the Lupins—which had been happening all too frequently, damn it all—Draco had gone to his London flat to be alone. He had poured a large glass of wine and sat before the fire, tapping his wand idly against his palm.

He needed to seriously consider the repercussions of what he was about to do. He might actually make things worse. Draco touched his wand to his index finger. Point—Harry had been acting strangely ever since… well, ever since he had begun using wandless magic almost exclusively. Draco could not even remember seeing Harry with a wand in the past three weeks. Draco touched the hawthorn to his next finger. Point—what the fuck was the wandless magic about, anyway? Why was Harry so damned powerful? Did it have something to do with Voldemort, or the Dark Magic Harry was constantly dispelling? Or something else entirely? The wand moved to his ring finger and Draco felt a pang when his eyes caught the platinum band there. He ignored it. Point—Harry's whole personality was growing darker. He was more possessive, angrier, and more prone to violence and selfish behavior. All of it most un-Potter-like. Point—the

wand dug almost painfully into Draco's pinky—Draco was fucking sick of it and he wanted his Gryffindor back. This Slytherinesque Potter had to go.

Draco's hand clenched around the wand tip. That was the crux of the matter. Despite Harry's growing incomprehensible behavior, Draco loved him beyond all reason. Potter was slowly turning into someone Draco could no longer love, and he refused to let that happen. Draco would save Harry from whatever curse now gripped him. No matter the cost.

He aimed his wand at the fire and cast.

ooOoo

Hermione waved her hand absently and Harry picked up a shrivelfig from the table. He dropped it into her waiting hand and she tossed it into the cauldron as Harry resumed peeling another. He had already forgotten what potion she was brewing. Something to do with wrinkle-removal, or hair-removal, or spot-removal. Women seemed to be obsessed with removal, if Hermione's mail-order potion business was any indication. She had amassed a small fortune selling cosmetic potions and beauty products.

She was not thinking of cosmetic potions at the moment, though. Her analytical mind was chewing over Harry's words even as she stirred the cauldron. Harry felt relief just knowing her brain was working on his problem.

"You've definitely noticed a personality change, then?" she asked.

"Hermione, I broke the bloody table fucking Draco into it. In the kitchen. While the Lupins were home."

Hermione blanched. "More information than I needed, thank you, but I see your point."

"It's like I turn into a completely different person sometimes, like something dark takes over my mind. It isn't that I don't know what I'm doing—" He laughed sharply. "Oh no, I'm perfectly aware, and I *like* it. I think it's fucking *great*. Until the strangeness fades, and then I'm mortified out of my mind. It seems to happen most often when I'm… turned on." He flushed.

"Only then?" Hermione asked. "Only when you're aroused, or does it happen other times, as well?"

Harry pondered the question, glad for her clinical demeanor. "Well, it happens when I'm in the field, mostly when I'm taking down Dark creatures of breaking Dark Magic."

Hermione nodded thoughtfully and stopped stirring long enough to take another shrivelfig from Harry. "So, it seems to be triggered by heightened levels of excitement? Adrenaline, maybe?"

Harry sat back, stunned. He thought of the times in the past month when he had felt most out of

control. Fighting with Draco, having sex, blasting dementors, and once while racing Draco on brooms… Harry forced his mind away from that particular memory.

"Yeah. Yeah, now that you mention it, the craziness only takes over when I'm keyed up."

"All right, that gives us a starting point. And speaking of starting points, can you remember the very first incident? Even if it seems insignificant?"

Harry answered immediately. He had spent far too much time analyzing the possible beginning of his problem. "The night we took Draco back from Umbridge." *The night I murdered Maeve*, he added to himself, although he had never disclosed that to anyone. Only Draco knew his culpability in Maeve's death, and Draco had never brought it up.

"Nothing prior to that?"

Harry shook his head.

"Maybe it was the shock of losing Draco so soon after you bonded?" she suggested.

Harry shrugged. He had tried to trace it back a dozen times, but so much had happened during that time, now it was all a crazy blur. Draco's birthday and arrest, the trail, Draco sentenced to Azkaban, Harry breaking Draco out of Azkaban, hiding out in London, Umbridge incarcerating his friends, bonding with Draco—he swallowed hard at that memory—sneaking into the Ministry, Draco's capture… Harry shook it off.

"All right. Why don't you get some rest? I'll start looking up your symptoms and possible causes tomorrow. Are you certain you don't want to go home?"

"I'm sure," Harry said quietly. "I think Draco has had enough of me for a while." He must have looked as depressed as he felt. Hermione left her potion and hurried around the table to give him a hug.

"Maybe a little space will do you both good. It hasn't hurt Ron and I, for certain. I can hardly wait until he gets home; I miss him terribly." Ron was playing Quidditch for the Chudley Cannons, his dream job.

"Maybe," Harry agreed halfheartedly. He missed Draco already, but he was almost positive Draco did not miss him. "'Night Hermione."

"Goodnight, Harry," she said in a worried tone.

Harry walked down the hall to the guest room and was immediately assaulted with images of Draco. They had spent more than one passionate night in this room, draped in Silencing Spells.

"*Accio* buttons," he whispered on a whim. A lone button whizzed into his hand from its hiding

place beneath the bureau. He looked at the tiny reminder of Draco and nearly Apparated straight home to beg forgiveness, but he knew his distress would most likely trigger whatever madness possessed him. It would only make things worse. Far better to stay away from his lover until Hermione could locate a solution.

Harry undressed and climbed into bed, holding the button like a talisman of hope.

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Chapter: 2

Chapter Two

Spain was not Draco's favorite place. It always seemed hot and dusty to him and the sight that currently met his eyes did nothing to negate that opinion. Heat waves rippled over the twisted rows of ripening grapes and the tang of dust seemed heavy in the air. He snorted. A vineyard. Who would have guessed?

Draco swirled the wine in his glass and took a drink. The cool liquid did nothing to alleviate the sweat he felt collecting beneath his arms and he had already shucked his robes in favor of trousers and shirt. He wished he had thought to bring a pair of his Muggle sunglasses. Spain was damnably bright.

His host finished scratching figures on parchment and tossed aside his black quill before leaning back in his chair.

"All right, suppose you tell me what inescapable trauma spurred this visit? You have been quite obedient for the past six years, leaving me to my solitude, as requested."

"I would not have disturbed you if it was not urgent," Draco said and spun the liquid to watch the spidery legs crawl down the sides of the crystal.

"I can only assume it involves your idiotic paramour?" he sneered and Draco looked at him in surprise.

"You know about that?"

A contemptuous growl greeted Draco's words. "I might be in exile, but I still subscribe to the Daily Prophet. I feel it prudent to stay abreast of happenings in the dear homeland."

Draco gulped another mouthful of wine, disturbed even though he should have expected it. In a way, it made things easier, but he had already rehearsed the words intended to break the news

gently. The Daily Prophet. Well then, he already knew most of it, albeit a somewhat skewed version.

Is it true the mighty Saviour broke you out of Azkaban?"

If the words were intended to degrade Draco, they failed. He turned to face his host directly. "He loves me," Draco said simply. He raised his chin defiantly. "And I love him."

Two palms slapped loudly against the desk as the man shot to his feet. "God damn it, Draco! How the hell did you allow that to happen? You know what he is!"

Draco met the black eyes angrily. "And what is he?"

The man swept around the desk with a whirl of dark robes. Even in the beastly summer heat, the bastard would insist on dark colors. Frankly, Draco was surprised they weren't black. The green was dark enough that it was difficult to tell.

"He's a*Gryffindor*! Not to mention he is the worst bloody Gryffindor of all!"

The words hit home, but not at all in the way intended.

"He is not so Gryffindorish these days," Draco said blearily. "That's the problem."

The man glared at him and stalked to the sideboard to pour a second glass of wine. He tasted it carefully and muttered something about "perhaps a bit more concord in the next batch." Draco had to smile.

"It is hard to believe you have become a premium winemaker," he said.

"It is hard to believe you have allowed your prick to turn you into Harry Potter's rentboy." Draco clenched his jaw but said nothing. He had expected resistance. His host sighed and continued, "Winemaking is not so different from brewing potions, actually."

He gestured to a set of white chairs around a table on the veranda. Draco exited and obediently sat, grateful for the slight breeze that drifted across the open porch.

"All right. Start from the beginning and tell me what you need." The man sat across from Draco and steepled his fingers in a familiar gesture.

Draco smiled. "I'm glad Neville Longbottom did not kill you."

A snort answered his words. "As if I could be taken out by that incompetent imbecile."

"Not so incompetent now. Thinking he destroyed you gave Longbottom quite a boost of confidence. He turned into quite the hero."

"So I've read. Polyjuice abounded on the battlefield that day." The comment was full of wry humor.

"The Ministry is still searching for Avery."

"They need only look in the grave marked 'Severus Snape.' Enough stalling, Draco. Spill your sordid tale of woe."

Draco sighed. He felt slightly guilty going to Snape for help, especially considering the man's past history with Harry, but Draco was desperate. He sat back in his seat and started to talk."

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Harry was drunk. He seldom drank at all, other than an occasional ale or glass of Draco's wine, but he had stopped at a pub to try and drink up the courage to return home and face his lover. His exalted Gryffindor bravery had been difficult to locate and now Harry could barely stand.

He Flooed home and spared a drunken mumble of thanks for the wizard that had been released from Azkaban and repaired the Floo Network. With Umbridge gone, things were beginning to return to pre-war normalcy. The identity of the Benefactor had never been discovered, although his tentacles had been located here and there throughout the Ministry. The Aurors still sought information and Harry helped when he was not trying to destroy the remaining areas of Dark Magic.

The fireplace spat Harry out and he landed on his hands and knees in Draco's study at number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Harry had hoped the blond would be in attendance, but there was no sign of him. He staggered to his feet and immediately banged into a side table, knocking over a candlestick and a small vase. The candle rolled onto the floor. Harry reached down to pick it up and fell over completely with an onrush of vertigo.

"'M really drunk," he murmured from the floor. He thought about calling for Draco, but remembered the baby at the last moment. It was late and Harry did not want to wake Lyra. Mainly because Tonks would have his bollocks for target practice if he did. The floorboards felt nice and cool so Harry stayed where he was for a bit.

After a time, he noticed a pair of feet in front of his face and he reached out to pat one. "Pretty foot," he mumbled.

"Potter, what the hell are you doing on the floor?"

"Fell down," Harry clarified and moved his hand from the nice foot to its attached ankle, slipping his fingers beneath the concealing trouser leg. He wanted to touch even more of his lovely Draco, who suddenly knelt down and wrapped his fists in Harry's robes. Draco hefted him partially upright.

"You're drunk?" Draco asked in a tone of disbelief.

"Maybe," Harry said cagily and grinned. He swayed forward, hoping to press his lips to the Slytherin's, because the blond looked so incredibly sexy. His hair was slightly disheveled, as if he had been sleeping. He was shirtless and clad only in black silk pyjama pants.

Draco dodged Harry's lips, but shifted until his arm was beneath Harry's.

"Come on, let's get you up to bed," he said with a sigh.

Harry was far more interested in nibbling on Draco's jaw than making the long trek upstairs, although he gladly wrapped his arms around Draco's neck.

"Are you still mad at me?" Harry asked suddenly, recalling the reason he had been drinking to begin with.

"No, Potter, I'm not mad at you."

Harry squeezed tightly, but he was not reassured. "But you're calling me Potter again," he whispered loudly.

Draco sighed explosively. "Harry, my beloved, precious darling, come upstairs before you knock over something important and wake up everyone in the house. All right?"

The tone was sarcastic, but Draco's hand slipped beneath Harry's shirt and moved over his ribs in a gentle caress. Harry melted against him, which nearly sent them both to the floor.

"'M sorry," Harry said. "Going upstairs now, Draco." He giggled and added, "Precious darling."

Harry managed to ascend the stairs with Draco's help, and did not bump into the wall more than a couple of times. He sprawled gratefully on the bed and rolled over to look at Draco, who began to unlace Harry's shoes.

When shoes and socks were gone, he moved on to the jeans, and Harry obediently lifted his hips to allow Draco to pull them off. Harry sighed in relief when his erection was freed from the confining denim. His boxers tented noticeably. Draco pulled the covers roughly over him and moved around the bed. Harry pouted.

"Aren't you going to take off my shirt?" he asked as Draco slid into the bed next to him.

"No. Go to sleep."

"But it has buttons just for you. And it's a green shirt 'cause green is your favorite colour." Harry wrapped his arms around Draco and maneuvered himself close to the hard body. "Fuck me,

Draco," he whispered.

xxXxx

Fuck me, Draco.

The words seared into Draco's mind and his arms tightened around the man pressed against him. Harry placed soft kisses over Draco's throat. God, he was drunk, but he was acting like the old Harry. The darkness and near-violence that always seemed to possess him were absent tonight. Lately Harry insisted on taking the top position, pounding into Draco without mercy until they were both sore and bruised, sated with violent release.

Harry threw back the blankets and began to unbutton his own shirt. "Please, Draco," he begged in a voice thick with need. The sound of it sent the blood scrambling to Draco's cock in a rush of glee. He swallowed hard and welcomed the answering flood of desire. He levered himself up and straddled Harry before pushing the Gryffindor's fingers away.

"Buttons, eh?" he murmured and tore the shirt open, sending the buttons flying and baring Harry's chest to Draco's heated gaze. "Damn, you're gorgeous, Harry. So bloody gorgeous."

He bent his head to taste the banquet that lay so docilely before him. Harry's hands skated over Draco's shoulders, light as silk. Draco could barely remember a time when his lover had been so tender. As if to underscore the thought, Harry's fingers touched Draco's chin to coax him into a kiss. Draco groaned as their tongues met and followed paths long trod but never dull.

Draco's erection, still bound by silk, rubbed against Harry's. He shifted his hips somewhat to make the motion more obvious and Harry moaned into Draco's mouth, a sensation that made the breath catch in his throat, even after all this time.

Harry arched slightly, pleading for more without words and Draco frotted against him, but lightly, a tease that only hinted at fulfillment. The Gryffindor whimpered and his hands moved down to clutch at Draco's arse, urging him to press harder and faster. Instead, Draco pulled away completely, causing Harry to cry out in frustration.

For a breathless moment, Draco worried the action would send Harry back into his usual near-rage, but the green eyes stayed clear as they watched Draco step out of his pyjama bottoms. A soft smile curved Harry's lips and Draco sighed in relief.

He crawled back over the prone Gryffindor and kissed a hot path from Harry's groin to his collarbone. He moved his body higher and this time when their cocks touched there was nothing between them. Harry gasped and Draco smiled wickedly.

"You like that, love?" he asked. "How about this, then?" He slid his fingers gently over Harry's length and then wrapped his hands around it.

"Oh god," Harry half whimpered. "Gonna come."

Draco squeezed beneath the hood, halting that idea before it saw fruition. "Oh no you don't. Not yet, *precious darling*," Draco warned. A few quick spells readied his panting lover and then Draco was inside Harry and fuck if that wasn't the best thing ever. He had nearly forgotten how good it felt. The Gryffindor made a guttural noise and levered himself upward, driving Draco even deeper.

Now it was Draco in danger of coming prematurely.

"Hold on, love," he said, gripping Harry's hips to prevent the lovely devil from moving again. He held tightly until the need for release subsided and then a bit longer to test Harry's patience. The Gryffindor finally squirmed and made an impatient sound. Draco chuckled, pulled out almost completely and rammed in hard and deep.

Harry cried out and nearly arched off the bed, much to Draco's delight. He continued the motion and timed each thrust with a practiced twist on Harry's cock. Every panting gasp that made it past the Gryffindor's lips carried Draco's name.

As soon as Harry shouted his release and tightened around Draco in that brilliant fashion, Draco lost control. He kissed Harry to muffle his scream and drown his own as they shuddered together in mutual bliss.

Draco collapsed bonelessly on Harry's sweat-soaked body and tucked his arms close to the Gryffindor to hold him as tightly as possible.

"I've missed this, my beautiful Harry," he said softly and rubbed his cheek against the Gryffindor's. Harry's hands skated over Draco's back before hugging his waist tightly.

"I'm sorry. Maybe I should drink more often," Harry said sleepily.

"I hardly think that's a long term solution."

Harry sighed. "I suppose not."

Draco rolled away lest he crush Harry, but pulled him into a close embrace with Harry's thick hair tucked beneath his chin.

"I love you, Draco." Harry's voice was barely audible and his lips brushed Draco's chest.

"I love you, too, Harry.' His arms tightened and he felt a sudden certainty that he was doing the right thing. This was the Harry he needed and Draco would have him back by any means necessary.

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Chapter: 3

Chapter Three

Draco followed Snape down the long row of wooden casks, halting when the man stopped to open a tap now and again, or pour a bit of wine into a glass, or check a chart hanging from a peg, or cast a quick spell to shift a barrel to a different location. He seemed to be the same old Severus Snape—he could hardly sit still for a moment.

"So Potter lost his powers completely when he killed Voldemort?" Snape asked as he worked.

"Yes, when I met him after the war, he could only cast rudimentary spells, and even then they would not always work. He was nearly powerless until he destroyed the Occamy egg."

"Horcrux," Snape said.

"What?"

"It was a Horcrux. A sort of storage device that held the last bit of the Dark Lord's soul."

"Right. Harry mentioned something about that."

"And when Potter destroyed the Horcrux, his powers returned?" Snape's nose twitched as he sniffed at a wine sample. He poured it into a nearby bucket without tasting it. "Substandard batch. I'll sell it to the Muggle tourists."

"His powers returned stronger than ever. He could do things he couldn't before. And they grew. They continued to grow and… change."

Snape looked at Draco sharply. "Change how?"

"Well, he does wandless magic almost exclusively now. He is so powerful he doesn't even have to think about casting certain spells. He walks into a room and the lamps light. I know he does it without even giving it a thought. It's maddening, really."

"Was this a gradual change, or did it happen suddenly?"

"Ever since his powers returned, he has been stronger, but he never used wandless magic until…" Until the night we Bonded, Draco realized with a pang of alarm. Could the Bonding ceremony have triggered something in Potter's strange magic? "Until the night he Apparated half a dozen people from London to Ireland to save me. He callously arranged the death of the

woman responsible for kidnapping me. And he drove Umbridge mad. Frankly, that night seemed to be the turning point. Since then, he's been increasingly ruthless. His personality seems to be changing, as well. He's grown angrier and more impatient. He's more Slytherin than Gryffindor these days."

Putting the situation into words made Draco's heart ache. He could no longer pretend there was nothing wrong with Harry. "I've wondered if the changes were induced by the Dark Magic."

"What Dark Magic?" Snape asked in a tone that suggested Draco had been intentionally withholding information.

"You remember the lovely pools of wild Magic my dear father created as a gift for the bloody Dark Lord."

"What has that to do with Potter?"

"Harry has been using his new powers to dispel the Dark Magic," Draco said with no small amount of pride.

Snape rolled his eyes. "Bully for the Chosen One."

"He's the only one that can do it. He tried to teach me, but it seems to be a talent that requires his odd magical abilities."

Snape made a noncommittal grunt. Draco bit back his impatience and watched as the black-haired man cast a spell that enveloped a cask in a warm purple glow. "Temperature regulation," Snape explained. "Very important for the better blends."

Draco did not give a bloody fuck about the damned wine. "Can you help Harry?" he asked bluntly.

Snape sighed. "Draco, you are turning into a bloody Gryffindor. You are losing your Slytherin finesse."

"I know you well enough that I feel we can dispense with games. I will, of course, give you whatever I can in payment, but I need to know if you can help him. If not, please refer me to someone that can."

"I really don't think you can offer me anything, Draco," Snape said, but he held up a hand when Draco nearly made a Gryffindor-like outburst. "However, it *might* be payment enough to know the precious Savior owes me his sanity and possibly his very life."

"Do you think it is that serious?" Draco asked in alarm.

"I have a suspicion, but nothing I can confirm. Give me a few days to do some research and I'll

let you know."

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Harry watched in satisfaction as his Patronus charged down a Dementor. No matter how many he dispelled, he never tired of seeing the hated creatures twist into vapor. He grinned at Tonks and tucked his wand into a pocket. It was almost a chore to remember to use it around the Aurors.

"That's the third one," she said and scratched at her forehead with the tip of her wand. Her hair was vibrant yellow today, like a buttercup. "Do you think there is Dark Magic nearby?"

"I'm not sure. Draco was always better at detecting it…" Harry trailed off and tried not to think about Draco. He had been quite obviously absent in the past few days and Harry dreaded to think about what it might mean. He tried to suppress his idiotic, jealous fears, but they refused to go quietly. Harry knew Draco was upset about his erratic behavior of late. Perhaps he was annoyed enough to finally leave Harry for good.

"Are you two all right?" Tonks asked quietly.

Harry tugged at his hair and forced a grin. "Yeah, fine. You know, we have issues now and again…" He only wished their current "issues" were the normal sort, such as Draco bitching about Harry's inability to pick up a sock from the floor, or Harry complaining that Draco's sunglass collection exceeded Harry's drawer space.

"You know, I think I'll call it an early day. I want to go home and surprise Draco, maybe take him to dinner at that new restaurant in Bath that Luna recommended."

Tonks socked his arm. "You're such a romantic, Harry."

"Yeah, well I think I've been neglecting the romance lately."

"You and Remus both," she griped with a smile. "In fact, if you see him, you might put a bug in his ear."

Harry laughed. "Absolutely." He Apparated home, but Draco was not at number 12, Grimmauld Place. He was not at the London flat, either. A quick trip to Diagon Alley to chat with the Weasley twins verified that they had not seen Draco in days. Malfoy Manor was empty. By the time Harry returned home, he was in a fine snit.

The sound of voices drew him to the kitchen. Draco held a large wooden bowl and he mixed the contents while he laughed at something Tonks had said. He caught sight of Harry and a warm smile lit his face, dispelling Harry's ire somewhat. The relief at seeing the blond also helped. His anger eased slightly, but did not entirely dissipate.

Bill Weasley was present and he stood up to take Harry's hand.

"Hello, Harry."

Remus had his arm looped casually over the back of his wife's chair while he bounced Lyra on his lap. He grinned at Harry and Lyra waved happily.

"Bill. What brings you here? Not that I'm not happy to see you, of course."

"Just a social visit, actually. Fleur is in Versailles visiting relatives. Thankfully, my new duties got me out of that trip, although I'll appreciate you not mentioning that bit to her."

Harry grinned and felt his anxiety ease further. Bill Weasley had a way of making people feel relaxed, one reason he was a fabulous Minister of Magic.

"I also heard tales of Draco's prowess in the kitchen and I thought since I needed to eat anyway…"

"Weasleys," Draco snorted. "Always willing to follow their stomachs anywhere."

"You're always welcome," Harry said and sat down. Draco set the bowl on the table.

"Perhaps I should open a restaurant. I will likely stay in the black merely by feeding Weasleys. And my cousin, here," Draco joked and grinned at Tonks, but she was already dipping a tortilla triangle into Draco's fresh salsa. She groaned with delight after it touched her tongue.

"I'd have to get a better job," she said when she could speak. "My paltry Auror salary could never afford the prices Draco would charge."

Bill laughed. "Remus, this girl complains about her salary six times a day. I'll have to give her a rise in pay just to shut her up."

"It's about bloody time," she muttered. "Damned Umbridge had us cut back to nothing on both staff and budget."

"We'll be changing that soon," Bill promised. "If Harry can ever teach us how to destroy the Dark Magic, we'll need more field-ready Aurors."

Harry gave him a wan smile and looked at Draco, who grinned in commiseration. They both knew Harry's ability could not be learned. A shadow crossed Draco's features for a moment and Harry wondered at its source. A thread of disquiet crawled through him.

"Any luck on tracing the Benefactor?" Harry asked Bill, who scowled.

"None, although we've followed a long trailed of Obliviated Ministry officials and Imperiused pawns. Whoever he is, he knows how to cover his bloody tracks. It seems he had his hands in

every damned department. I'm almost alarmed that he's done nothing since Umbridge fell. I doubt he would relinquish the power he held without a fight."

Harry nodded. He also had a bad feeling about the mysterious puppet-master. The man—or woman, Harry supposed—was too intelligent to sit back and do nothing. It was far more likely the Benefactor's tentacles were wrapping around another plot. Harry only hoped they would uncover it in time.

Until then, they would have to support Bill and do the best they could.

They turned their attention to the food and dinner was a relaxed affair. Tonks and Bill kept them entertained through Draco's Spanish-influenced meal. Harry felt the blond's hand on his thigh as they ate, and tried to ignore the banked annoyance that still yammered for attention.

"So, Draco," Harry said finally in a casual tone, "I came home early today to surprise you, but you were nowhere to be found."

Draco took a sip of wine before answering and Harry clenched his teeth slightly at the stalling tactic.

"I took a quick escort job," Draco said. "I do still have a business to run while you play with the Aurors, you know."

Harry's rage returned so quickly he could scarcely see through it. *Liar!* it screamed. *Liar! Liar! Liar!*

"Destroying Dark Magic hardly qualifies as playing, Draco," Bill admonished.

Draco grinned, seeming oblivious to Harry's desire to reach out and throttle him. "I know. I'm very proud of him for it. I just miss him—jealous sort, you know." He leaned over and placed a kiss on Harry's temple, but it did nothing to ease the fire of anger pulsing through Harry. *Where the fuck had Draco been?*

Harry said nothing through dessert and his obvious tension finally transmitted itself to the others. Conversation became stilted and Bill finally thanked them all and Disapparated. Remus and Tonks lingered, but Harry's threatening glowers eventually drove them out. Harry caught the worried glance Tonks threw at the blond before she left and he wondered how much she knew about Draco's extracurricular activities.

"All right, Harry," Draco said with a sigh. "Out with it." He began to clean the dishes with a flick of his wand. Harry slammed the blond against the counter, earning a wince from Draco and causing a dish to clatter when it dropped abruptly.

Harry's fingers tightened into Draco's wrists.

"Where the fuck were you today, *Malfoy*?" Harry snarled. "And I would appreciate the goddamn *truth* this time."

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Draco tried to quiet his trepidation. The green eyes that bored into his contained a mad light, one Draco had seen all too frequently in recent days. The bones in his wrists creaked in protest and Draco knew he would wear bruises there tomorrow. He tried a reasonable approach, battling futility.

"Harry, why are you doing this?" he asked quietly.

The Gryffindor ignored that. "Why are you fucking lying to me, Draco?" Harry countered. "What are you hiding?"

Guilt from the fact that he was hiding something did nothing to diminish Draco's sudden anger. He *despised* jealous possessiveness and Harry—*his* Harry—knew that. Though his wrists were still held in a punishing grasp, Draco raised his hands and shoved Harry's chest with all his might. Surprised, Harry staggered back and nearly fell, releasing Draco in the process.

"You don't *own* me, Potter!" he said icily and Disapparated.

Draco went straight to Malfoy Manor. He knew it would only take a couple of minutes for Harry to trigger the bond and follow. Draco was somewhat surprised Harry had not done so earlier if he had been so bloody concerned about Draco's whereabouts. Likely the Gryffindor's inherent politeness had still been in control at the time.

Draco walked quickly to a small room near the library that he had recently completed. He had referred to it mentally as his inner sanctum, but now he thought of it as his anti-Potter room. When the door clicked shut behind him, Draco breathed a sigh of relief, although the true test was yet to come.

As expected, the bond markings flared gold. Normally Draco welcomed the connection between him and Harry, but now he bit his lip nervously. Under normal circumstances, Harry could Apparate directly to Draco's side. Now, however, he would be lucky to locate Draco at all.

A loud hammering sounded on the door and Draco nearly smiled. As usual, the Gryffindor luck held true.

"Draco? What the hell? You put up anti-Apparition wards?"

A burst of purple light ghosted around the perimeter of the room.

"And something else as well, eh?" Harry continued. They flared again and Draco felt a moment of unease.

"You are behaving irrationally, Potter," Draco said mildly after casting Sonorus to ensure Harry heard him through the thick oak door. It was more than possible that Harry could crack through Draco's wards, but he had deliberately linked them to himself. If Potter shattered them, he would hurt Draco and possibly even kill him. By Harry's next words, he knew it.

"I'm not fucking around, Draco," Harry warned. "Let me in."

"I'm not fucking around, either! Now go home and sleep off this madness or, if you must, go hurt someone who is not me."

There was a long pause and Draco sidled toward the door, fearing a trap, but still needing to hear Harry if he chose to speak.

"I won't hurt you, Draco," he heard in a tone he wished was sincere.

"That will be more of a certainty if you are not here, Harry," Draco replied calmly. A thump on the door made Draco leap back.

"Damn you, Draco!" Harry bellowed and pounded on the portal once more. "You know I can crush your bloody wards and *make* you open this fucking door!"

Draco stepped forward again and said quietly," I know you can, Harry. If you love me, you won't. If you're honest with yourself, you will admit that you are not in your right mind. You need—" He bit off the word help, knowing that person's with issues such as Harry's despised any insinuation that they needed assistance. "You need to just let it go for one evening, all right?"

Silence. Draco wondered if Harry had left or was merely pretending, hoping to lull Draco into opening the door. Draco retreated to the center of the room and Transfigured the desk into a bed. He climbed onto it and sat cross-legged to wait.

He was rewarded for patience thirty-eight minutes later when a faint hiss came to his ears and a prickling sensation crackled across his skin. He smiled. *Still there, then*. Predictable Potter, determined as ever. He was being Slytherin-subtle, though, testing Draco's wards for weaknesses with a delicate, seeking brush.

Draco picked up a book and settled in for a long, sleepless night.

Shortly after three o' clock in the morning, Draco warily cracked open the door. Slumped against the wall across the hall lay Harry Potter. His chin rested on his chest and his hands dangled limply on his upraised knees. He looked cold and uncomfortable as hell, but thankfully very asleep.

Draco cast a Sleep Spell to keep him that way and then a Weightlessness Charm. He lifted the Gryffindor and carried him upstairs to the master bedroom. He carefully removed Harry's shoes

and outer clothing before covering him and climbing into bed next to the black-haired devil. Draco wrapped himself around his chilled lover and fell into an exhausted sleep.

He awoke when a hand brushed over his cheek and he opened his eyes to see lovely green eyes peering back at him.

"You're beautiful when you sleep," Harry said.

Draco thanked whatever Providence existed that *his* Harry was back, at least for the moment. He reached up to take Harry's hand and pressed a kiss into the palm. A shadow crossed Harry's face.

"Harry, I am not cheating on you," Draco said softly. "Use whatever passes for Legilimancy for you these days and verify the truth. I love you."

"Then why—?"

"In case you haven't noticed, love, you have gotten a trifle possessive lately," he said in a teasing tone. Harry scowled and Draco pressed on lest defensive annoyance wake the slumbering beast. "If you simply can't trust me, then I shall turn over all owl post to you. Would you like to see my appointment book and approve my daily agenda, as well?"
As hoped, Harry flushed. "I don't want to be your gaoler!" He sat up and pushed a hand through his hair. "I know I've been impossible. I do trust you, I just… God, no wonder you're trying to get away from me."

Draco reached out and took Harry's jaw firmly. He pulled until the green eyes met his.

"I am not trying to get away from you," Draco said seriously. "I am trying to get you back. I am doing everything I can to help you—to help *us*, Harry. Can you trust me on that?"

Harry swallowed hard and nodded. Draco sat up and kissed him gently.

"I trust you," Harry said. "And I'm sorry, again. Go back to sleep; I need to see Hermione."

Draco nodded and watched as Harry dressed, kissed him farewell, and departed. The instant Draco was certain Potter would not return, he scrambled out of bed and drafted a note. He sent it through the Floo to Severus.

Time is of the essence was all it said.

xxXxx

Harry sat on Hermione's couch, occupying a tiny space not already taken by large books. She sat cross-legged on the floor with a massive tome in her lap. Harry was somewhat surprised it did not crush her legs.

"There really isn't much about a transfer of power," she said. "And what is available is difficult to find, probably because wizards don't want to be victims of magical theft."

"Is that possible?" Harry asked. "Stealing a wizard's magic?"

"Apparently yes, but it's not easy, thankfully. It is similar to creating a Horcrux, actually. In your case, however, I think you absorbed the magic from the Horcrux."

Harry was aghast. "Voldemort's soul?"

"Not exactly, no. I'm thinking he made the final Horcrux with the intention of storing not only his soul, but some extra magic as well. I don't think he was confident of his ability to survive the final battle. Rather than return to a vaporous state if he lost, I think he hoped to return as something more substantial."

"How could he store extra power?"

"As I said, it's something like creating a Horcrux, but instead of splitting your soul and placing it into an object, you tear the magic from a wizard and do the same."

"Wouldn't that kill the wizard?"

"It can, but mostly from shock. Apparently it's quite painful."

Harry snorted. "I'll bet. Voldemort would never strip his own magic and he certainly had power at the final battle."

"No, it wasn't his. I believe he took the magic from one of the Death Eaters and placed it in the Occamy egg you destroyed. Then Voldemort killed the Death Eater and turned the object into a Horcrux as well."

"Bloody hell," Harry breathed. "So when I defeated him by pouring everything I had into destroying him…"

"Your own magic was practically gone, yes, and when you destroyed the Horcrux your magic was not restored. Instead you took in the magic of the dead Death Eater."

It was a revolting concept. Harry had the power of some minion of Voldemort's!

"What Death Eaters were never accounted for?" he asked numbly. His first panicked thought went to Lucius Malfoy—wouldn't that be a lovely fact to have to reveal to Draco? But no, Lucius Malfoy was buried at Malfoy Manor with Narcissa.

"Rabastan Lestrange. McNair. I'll have to pull the records for others."

Harry felt like vomiting. "Can magic be inherently evil?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Hermione said dubiously. "But it's possible that there are some sort of… I don't know, psychic traces attached to it? Soul-residue of some sort?"

"Death Eater slime, you mean?" Harry shuddered. "If I get rid of this magic, I'll return to near-powerlessness, won't I?"

"Probably," said Hermione, never one to candy-coat the truth. "And it might kill you trying to remove it. I don't see that as a viable option, frankly."

"Do we have any viable options?"

"That is what these books are for," she said with a grin.

"Oh, I thought you were redecorating," Harry joked. She stuck out her tongue.

"Very funny. Actually, I'm hoping we can purify your magic."

"Purify."

"Yes, I believe something in the magic is causing you to act… erratically, if you will. Sort of like catching a disease from a tainted blood transfusion, to use Muggle terminology. I'm hoping we can filter it somehow, like putting liquid through cheesecloth to strain out impurities."

"Strain out the evil?" Harry asked and laughed.

"Something like that. We can at least try to remove whatever element is causing you to…"

"Act like a soulless Death Eater?" Harry finished dryly.

Hermione nodded.

"Has anything like this been done before?"

"Well, not that I can find," she admitted. "But I found some similar spells. If we can't find one, we'll invent it. That won't be the first time, eh?"

Her confidence was inspiring. Harry felt hope for the first time in a long time. It was on the tip of his tongue to offer Draco's assistance, but he suddenly remembered the last time Draco and Hermione had collaborated on research. It had led to Hermione nearly falling in love with the blond. Harry felt a sharp spike of jealousy at the thought and kept his mouth shut. Hermione would find it. She did not really need Draco's help.

Harry halfheartedly combed through some books and wondered how she could possibly find

research even remotely interesting. Harry thought it was akin to watching sand trickle through an hourglass one grain at a time.

"Harry, you are completely useless. Go home," she said finally.

He departed gladly.

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Chapter: 4

Chapter Four

Three glasses of wine sat on the table before Draco. Snape waited in the adjacent chair and watched expectantly as Draco drank.

"Well?" the winemaker demanded.

Draco suppressed a sigh. He was already slightly tipsy from the quantity of wine consumed and the subtle flavors were beginning to blend together.

"The second one," Draco replied. Snape sat back with a satisfied smile.

"Well, it's good to see your palate has not been disintegrated by your association with the Gryffindor Wonder. He most likely has you guzzling cheap ale and eating Cornish pasties."

Draco refused to rise to the bait. "Speaking of Harry, can we please get back to the reason for my visit?"

"I thought you were here to evaluate the Chianti," Snape said placidly.

"Severus…" Draco was not amused. The black-haired man stood up.

"Oh all right. Potter, Potter, Potter. Honestly, Draco, perhaps you should forget him and stay here with me?"

"I did not know you inclined that way, Sev," Draco drawled.

"Don't give me your cheek, Malfoy!" the winemaker snapped. "It would be for your sake, not mine."

Draco shot to his feet. "Is it absolutely necessary that we have this conversation every single

time?"

Snape gestured as if Draco's words were insignificant. He probably thought they were. "If you will not be swayed from this course of madness, then so be it. Do not come sobbing to me when it turns to ashes."

Draco glared. He had no intention of letting it turn to ashes, which was the purpose of calling on Snape. "The spell?" he prodded.

"You really are turning into a Gryffindor," Snape commented.

Draco wanted to *act* like a Gryffindor and smash the black-clad man into the nearest wall. "The. Spell." He spoke through clenched teeth and Snape chuckled.

"Yes, Draco." Snape straightened his robes and his demeanor changed immediately. "All right then, as we discussed, I believe the Dark Lord placed Avery's magic into the Horcrux, which was then absorbed by Potter upon its destruction."

"Yes, yes, and Avery's magic is being rejected by Harry's, which would have recovered naturally but is now augmenting that received from the Horcrux, hence his ridiculous levels of power."

"And his increasingly erratic behavior. His mind is trying to reconcile the two by suppressing Potter's inherent magic and embracing the new addition. Given time, the two sources will most likely merge into something completely different."

"Changing Harry's personality in the process," Draco said bleakly.

"Well, that could stand a change," Snape suggested.

"But it's more likely Harry will go completely mad before that happens."

Snape nodded. "It's possible. Either that or Avery's personality and magic will dominate, leaving you with the Avery-clone you are now enjoying."

Draco shuddered. "What are my options?"

"As I see it, there is only one. Remove the foreign magic and allow Potter's to reassert itself."

"And that will be difficult." It was not a question.

"That will be next to impossible," Snape admitted.

"But it can be done?"

"I believe so, using the same process the Dark Lord employed to remove it from Avery."

"That process killed Avery!"

Snape shrugged. "It killed him because he could not accept the loss of his magic. Potter will have an advantage—we will be removing only the foreign magic. Potter's will remain. Even if he were stripped entirely of magic, I'm sure the Boy Who Lived would survive, as he has a history of doing so under impossible circumstances. Besides, I'm sure his Muggle upbringing would keep him from going mad to the point of death at the loss. Did you not say he was nearly a Squib when you met him after the war?"

Draco nodded. Harry might survive such a loss, but Draco believed his lover would rather be dead than live life as a Squib. Draco knew what his choice would be if confronted with such a dilemma.

"I have the original spell used by the Dark Lord," Snape said. "It was in hidden in the Riddle house with some fascinating arcana."

"I can imagine. So are you certain we can cast this spell safely?"

"It will require some preparation, of course. Some of this ritualistic shite is unnecessary, but the Dark Lord doted on it. Since I'm not in the mood to pick it apart and decipher what can be left out, we shall have to follow the damned thing as written."

"We don't have time to alter it, anyway," Draco said. "The sooner we get this done with, the better."

"Give me three days," Snape said. "All shall be ready by then."

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"What the hell is he doing?" Harry railed. "He had his bloody hooks in the Ministry all the way up to the Minister for years and now nothing!"

Bill Weasley watched him placidly. "Harry, I'm happy enough that we haven't heard from the Benefactor. Hopefully he gave up whatever strange plans he had when Umbridge was removed from office."

"That's another thing," Harry snarled. "We don't even know what his plans were. No one knows! Was it simply to keep the wizarding world in a bloody state of chaos? To what purpose?"

"Sometimes there is no purpose, Harry," Bill said and shot water from his wand to extinguish a plant that had spontaneously burst into flame. Harry felt a twinge of guilt and tried to rein in his magic. He took a calming breath, knowing anger was a dangerous enemy.

"Sorry," he said.

"Have you looked into that?" Bill asked.

"Into what?" Harry countered, feigning ignorance.

Bill shrugged. "Your magic seems a bit out of control lately."

"You noticed?"

"The missing wall in Susan's office was a bit of a clue," Bill said dryly.

Harry flushed. He had gotten into a tiff with Susan Bones over his inability to teach the Aurors how to dispel the Dark Magic. She had accused him of keeping the knowledge to himself in order to maintain his hero status. The wall of her office had disintegrated in a puff dust, along with two filing cabinets, three portraits, and a bookshelf. Harry had replaced the wall and the shelves, but the portraits were a lost cause and they were still trying to determine which books and files had been lost.

"Yeah, Hermione is working on a solution. It's sort of an inadvertent gift left by Voldemort. He's probably laughing in hell right now."

Bill only winced slightly at the name. "Is that why you can't teach the Aurors how to rid us of the Dark Magic?"

Harry nodded. "I can't teach anyone, apparently. Not even Draco and Hermione. I was hoping one of the Aurors would have better luck, but so far…"

Bill sighed. "I hate to overwork you." Harry had dispelled the threats nearest London and had been forced to fly farther and farther afield. The Death Eaters had been prolific in seeding the evil across Britain. Harry planned to travel to Hogsmeade and eliminate the pockets nearest Hogwarts. He had not quite worked out how to convince Draco to accompany him.

He smiled at the thought of the blond. Draco had not left 12 Grimmauld Place for the past three days. Harry felt somewhat guilty for being pleased about that—he shouldn't be happy that his lover was a veritable prisoner in their home. The increasingly aggressive side of him was satisfied, however. Draco did not *need* to work, after all. Harry would take care of him. Harry would always take care of him.

The guilt reasserted itself when he thought about how he knew Draco had not left the house. The new wards Harry had placed around 12 Grimmauld Place would alert him if Draco left the house for any reason. He did not, however, feel guilty enough to take them down.

"The Aurors think I'm withholding information."

"Not all of them. They are just frustrated. They want to help. Umbridge had their hands tied for

so long…"

"They have plenty to do without dispelling the Dark Magic! The creatures it spawned still roam the countryside. They certainly can't complain about not being busy enough!"

A fishbowl on the corner of Bill's desk exploded, sending water and goldfish flying. Harry blinked at the mess and then sheepishly repaired the bowl with a pretend flick of his wand. When the fish were safely back in the water and Bill's desk dry, Harry met the unamused gaze of the Minister.

"Perhaps you should go see Hermione." His words carried an edge command. Even though Harry was not an official Ministry employee, he sighed and nodded. He headed for the door, but a comment stopped him with the door partially open. "And Harry? Don't come back until you have a bit more control, eh?"

Harry scowled. He'd just been banished from the Ministry. He stomped toward the lifts and spied Neville Longbottom. The lawyer had Luna Lovegood pressed against the wall and was apparently snogging the breath out of her. Their hands groped at each other madly. Harry watched in amusement for a bit and then cleared his throat. Neville stiffened and ceased his exploration of Luna's tonsils before he turned to Harry with a grin. Luna's expression was dreamier than usual and Harry thought she might have slid straight to the floor if Neville's hands had released her.

"Harry!" Neville cried. "I've been looking for you."

"You thought I was hiding in Luna's robes?"

Neville blushed and Luna buried her face in his shoulder with a giggle.

"She ambushed me with her womanly wiles," Neville said. "I had no chance."

Luna's small fist smacked into Neville's side. His breath woofed out with a laugh.

"Anyway, one of the Healers asked me to tell you that Pansy Parkinson is requesting a visit from you or Draco. She refused to let them send an owl. Seems pretty frantic about it, so you might pop over there."

Harry's brow wrinkled. He had barely thought about Pansy since the Mulciber incident. Mulciber had kidnapped Draco, imprisoned him, tortured him, and modified his memories. He had likely done much worse to Pansy. When the opportunity had presented itself, she had murdered Mulciber in cold blood. Frankly, Harry was grateful—she had saved him the trouble.

He thanked Neville, although the oblivious couple had already returned to their amorous activity and barely noticed his leaving. He left the Ministry for St. Mungo's.

Pansy Parkinson was on the fourth floor. Spell Damage. Harry expected to find her in the long-term residents' ward, since she had been there for months. He wondered if she stayed voluntarily, or if the Healers thought she might be a danger to others. As it turned out, Pansy had a private room. It was small, containing only a bed, a chest, and a petite desk with matching chair, but one wall was spelled to reveal a peaceful sunlit meadow, complete with chirping, fluttering birds, colorful butterflies, and grazing deer. Harry's eyes went to it immediately while Pansy rose from the chair.

She snorted. "They seem to think it relaxes me. I've told them I despise nature and would be far more relaxed by the view of a designer couture robe shop, but do they listen?"

Harry turned his attention from the wall. Pansy did not look nearly as thin and haggard as she had when they had found her in Scotland. The hollow places of her face had filled out and Harry noticed with a start that she was actually pretty. Her raven-black hair was waist-length and gleamed in the false light from the meadow.

"How are you?" he asked.

She shrugged. "As well as can be expected. The nightmares are diminishing. Some of my memories have returned, although I can't be certain which ones are mine and which ones were planted by Mulciber."

Harry swallowed in sympathy. "I'm sorry."

She made a huffing sound. "Why, Potter? Forget I mentioned it. I think I'm turning Hufflepuff in this place. I doubt you would have gone out of your way to save me even if you had known about Mulciber, if not for Draco. How is Draco, by the way?"

Harry wanted to protest that she was wrong, but in truth he wasn't certain. It didn't matter, anyway.

"He's fine." Harry wondered when Draco had last visited her. Probably before his stint in Azkaban. He expected her to mention the fact, but she surprised him.

"You know it was a trap, right?" she asked. She seated herself on the bed and gestured to the chair. "In Deerness?"

Harry sat in the chair and nodded.

She continued, "Mulciber did not initiate it. He was working for someone he called the Benefactor."

Harry gaped at her.

"You've heard of him, then?" she asked.

"He had control of the Ministry through Umbridge, before her recent… accident. She served him willingly."

"As did Mulciber."

"Do you know the Benefactor's identity?"

She shook her head. "No. Mulciber received written instructions. If they ever met in person, I was not aware of it. Or I was Obliviated." A shadow crossed her face and Harry winced inwardly at the thought of how many times she probably had been Obliviated. He suddenly wished he could do more to help her.

"Are you allowed to leave?" he asked suddenly. "You could always, um… come and stay with us for awhile." He nearly bit his tongue in half after the words left his mouth. He was jealous enough of Draco to keep him away from *Hermione*—allowing Draco's former girlfriend to live in the same house was inviting complete madness.

Thankfully, Pansy shook her head. "I'm not going anywhere, Potter. Frankly, I doubt I'm safe here, but I'll take my chances."

"What do you mean you're not safe?"

She reached into the neck of her robes and pulled out a small, folded piece of paper. Harry took it when she held it out to him. The message was black ink, written in a flowing script. It said simply: *Pansy, I'm coming for you.*

Harry looked at her sharply. "You think it's from the Benefactor?"

"Who else, Potter? No one cares about me. He likely wants revenge since I killed his little minion."

"Can I keep this?" Harry asked, thinking furiously. Why would the Benefactor target Pansy? Did she know something? Perhaps not consciously, but buried somewhere in her mind? Was the Benefactor afraid she would remember? He pocketed the note when she nodded. "You said it was a trap in Scotland; we knew that. Was it a trap specifically set for me?"

"I used to think so, but now I'm not so sure. I don't think you *or Draco* were intended to leave there alive."

"Wouldn't it have been easier for Mulciber to just kill Draco?"

"Then how would he have lured you there, Potter? Out of curiosity, why did you accompany Draco? There are rumors in the Prophet, of course, but I believe that rag only about a quarter of the time."

"In this instance, the Daily Prophet got it mostly right." Not long ago, Harry would have been mortified at such an admission, but now he felt no shame at all. "Draco and I are together now. In every possible way." The thought of Draco filled Harry with a nearly overwhelming need to see the blond. Since Draco had obligingly self-exiled himself at home, Harry had reciprocated by giving him plenty of space. He left the house early and refused to return until dinner time.

Pansy's eyes were wide. "Bloody hell, Potter, you've got it bad. You drifted completely away, there."

Harry smiled sheepishly. "Yeah. He's brilliant. Anyway, I'll do what I can to insure your safety here."

"You do that, Potter." She rolled her eyes. "The Benefactor can Imperius anyone, you know. It won't be hard for someone to slip poison into my food or just hit me with a simple Avada Kedavra. I only hope it will be quick."

"You sound resigned to your death!"

She shrugged. "I don't have much of a life, Potter, in case you hadn't noticed."

Harry glared. Bloody fatalistic Slytherins. He hated the idea of her at 12 Grimmald Place, but the thought of her uselessly throwing her life away because he could not protect her was even worse. Perhaps Draco could convince her to leave St. Mungo's for a safer place. Hell, she could even stay with Hermione while Ron was away. The idea made him choke back a laugh. Pansy Parkinson and Hermione Granger in the same house was probably an invitation to disaster. Still, it wouldn't hurt to broach the subject.

"Do they allow you your wand?" Harry asked.

She produced it from her robes. "Yes, but it's spelled so I can only cast minor Charms. Nothing dangerous." A faint aura of magic surrounded the wand—evidence of the blocking spell.

"Do you know charms to detect poison?"

"I'm Slytherin, Potter."

"Oh, right, you likely cast those before every meal," Harry said dryly.

Pansy actually smiled and Harry decided he would do just about anything to keep her away from Draco. She really was attractive.

"Can you cast a Patronus?"

She shrugged. "I probably could if I worked at it. I'm not exactly full of happy thoughts at the

moment."

"Well, work at it, then. Send it to me if you ever feel threatened. I'll come immediately."

"Now you're my protector?" she asked archly.

"Don't worry, I'm only doing it for Draco's sake."

"Gryffindor honesty."

Harry grinned. "Want me to lie, instead?"

"Do you know how?"

"You'd be surprised."

Harry Apparated straight to his and Draco's room. He pondered the message sent to Pansy as he opened his wardrobe and pulled out a small case hidden in the back. Why would the Benefactor bother to warn her? Merely to torment her and make her jump at every shadow? He supposed it was likely. Harry opened the case and lifted out a vial before uncorking it and downing the contents.

Calming Draughts were nearly as effective as alcohol for keeping the monster at bay, but they created long-term dependency. Harry did not want Draco to worry, but he planned to keep taking the potions until Hermione's research bore fruit.

When his potion stash was secreted away and the knot of barely-acknowledged agitation loosened, Harry kicked off his shoes and socks and traipsed downstairs. As expected, Draco was in the kitchen hovering over a bubbling cauldron. Harry crept up and wrapped his arms around the blond before pressing hard against his back and nuzzling Draco's neck.

"Smells good," Harry commented.

"It's green curry."

"I meant you," Harry said and sucked lightly on Draco's jugular. The Slytherin's hands covered his and he leaned back into Harry's embrace with a sigh.

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Draco relaxed into Harry's arms. He had been close to going out of his mind in the last few days, trapped in the bloody house with nothing to do but cook, read, and finally half-demolish one of the guest rooms in a pretense of redecorating. He had been determined to keep Harry in a state of relative calm, no matter the cost.

It seemed to have worked nicely. Harry had been placid and almost normal. Draco would not be able to keep it up much longer, however. He was definitely not the stay-at-home sort.

Harry gnawed on his neck until Draco thought about scrapping his plan in favor of dragging his lover upstairs for a shag, but the Lupins strolled in, followed by unwelcome guests—the Weasley twins.

"I stopped by their shop and they followed me home," Remus said apologetically.

"Can we keep them?" Tonks asked with a giggle. One of the twins bounced Lyra on his hip. The other enveloped Draco and Harry in a bear hug.

"My two favorite nancy boys!" he said and kissed them each soundly on the cheek. Draco deduced it was Fred, since George occasionally had something resembling dignity. "What's for dinner, Draco, love?"

"Curry."

"Oy, George!" Fred bellowed, nearly deafening them all. "Didja hear? Curry!"

"Draco, when you get tired of Harry, please move in with us," George said.

Fred nodded. "We'll treat you right, mate, honestly. We'll even switch teams for you."

Harry snorted and said, "You'll switch teams for his cooking, you mean." His tone was light, but his arm tightened dangerously around Draco's waist.

"Really, boys!" Tonks said with a laugh. "Willing to whore yourselves out for a decent meal? Surely some of those women you debauch regularly can throw down something edible?"

Fred cocked his head at George. "D'you reckon?"

"We wouldn't know. The debauchery takes precedence."

Draco gently detached himself from Harry's grasp, but squeezed his hands before releasing him. "All right, everyone sit down. Even the freeloaders. I'll dish up to avoid a stampede."

They obediently sat and Draco filled each dish before sending it across the room to land with a spinning flourish before each of his friends. Wine was poured and the twins immediately launched into tales of their products and customers that had them all holding their sides before long. Draco kept his free hand on Harry, whether resting on his thigh, caressing his shoulder, or lacing their fingers together. The Gryffindor seemed blissfully at ease.

Each of them took turns holding Lyra and Draco bounced the blond child on his knees while she squealed in delight. She managed to leave him a few locks of hair despite the ceaseless tugging.

Harry began to yawn before dessert, so Tonks offered to clean up while Draco coaxed Harry upstairs despite the catcalls and rude suggestions of the Weasley twins. The black-haired Gryffindor sprawled on the bed, fully clothed, and told Draco about his visit with Pansy. Draco stretched out next to Harry and listened while toying with the buttons on Harry's shirt.

Draco laughed when Harry suggested sending Pansy to stay with Hermione. His lover chuckled though a yawn. "I know, I know. They would kill each other in two days."

"Worse than that, Harry. What if they became friends? The world is not ready for such a combination of intelligence and evil. Can you imagine?"

Harry guffawed and buried his face in Draco's neck. "I never thought of that."

"Luckily, you have me to think for you."

"Lucky me," Harry said seriously and lifted his head to kiss Draco, who thought he might perish from guilt for a moment.

"Harry?" he asked when they broke for air. The Gryffindor's eyes were shut and he seemed ready to drop straight off to sleep. He made a questioning noise. "Harry, I want you to know that everything I do is because I love you. Everything."

The green eyes opened and blinked a few times before a smitten grin quirked Harry's lips. "I know, Draco," he said trustingly. He gasped slightly when the cold metal touched his chest and met Draco's eyes again when Draco reached around his neck and fastened the links around Harry's neck with a spell.

"What's this?" Harry asked in bemusement.

"An Inhibitor," Draco said quietly. "It prevents you from using magic. Any magic." Harry's brow wrinkled and his gaze became slightly more lucid. "Of course, you're so damned powerful that you might simply crush the amulet into a twisted bit of useless metal, so I also put a strong sedative into your curry. That's why you're so tired."

Eyelids slid shut over emerald again, thankfully, because Draco did not want to see the accusation there. It was bad enough to hear it in the single word Harry uttered. "*Why*?"

"Because I need to take you to someone who can help you, and I didn't think you would come willingly, especially when you find out who it is…"

"Draco, I took a Calming Draught earlier. I don't feel very well," Harry said weakly.

Oh fuck. "You did what?" Draco asked and sat up in alarm. He frantically sorted through the ingredients in both potions, mentally combining them and judging their effects. He grabbed

Harry's shoulders and gave him a shake. "Harry, stay with me!"

The dark head lolled unresponsively. Draco snatched his wand, held Harry tightly, and Apparated them straight to Spain.

Sorry about the cliffhanger. LOL! (Okay, not really...) is Slytherin

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Chapter: 5

Chapter Five

Draco landed hard on his knees, nearly cracking them on the hard flagstones of Snape's portico. He fell forward and fought the dark spots that swam before his eyes, inviting the cool blackness of a fainting spell. He straightened and ran a panicked gaze over Harry's still form. Not Splinched, thank Merlin.

"Severus!" he yelled and then increased his volume. "*Severus*!"

"Bloody hell, Draco, I thought I told you to use the Floo, and you are an hour early." Snape finished wiping his hands on a cloth and then Vanished it with a wordless flick.

"It's Harry! He took a Calming Draught before I gave him the potion."

"And you Apparated all the way here? Are you completely out of your wits?"

Draco did not dignify that with a response. He was far too busy holding Harry and checking for a pulse. Snape walked forward and knocked his hands aside.

"Let me do it," he snapped. Draco's suffered Snape's hands on Harry's neck and watched as he pulled back Harry's lids and peered into the green eyes. "Calming Draught, eh? Stupid Gryffindor."

Draco bit back an angry retort. Harry had taken the Draught for him, trying to normalize his behavior. And almost been killed for it. Guilt nearly overwhelmed Draco for a moment and he barely heard Snape, who said, "Bring him inside. I'll be right back." The winemaker glanced out over the stillness of the night, perhaps searching for curious Muggle neighbors.

Draco recovered his senses and followed Snape into the house, where he managed to maneuver Harry onto the sofa.

Snape returned just as Draco was about to have an impatient temper tantrum. The wizard uncorked a small vial and tipped the contents into Harry's mouth. Draco felt a moment of near-paralyzing fear when he recalled the history between Harry and Snape. He watched anxiously until Harry's pallor returned to more natural tones and his breathing eased.

"That should counter the Somnolus frond and keep it from reacting dangerously with the Valerian."

Draco nodded and tried to relax.

"All right then. Let's get him downstairs to his new quarters before he wakes up and demolishes *mi bella casa* with his rampant abilities." His words were sardonic, but Draco heard the truth beneath them. The Weightlessness Charm he had cast on Harry was still in effect, so Draco gathered him up and followed Snape through the house and down a set of wide plank steps.

Draco said nothing until he saw the huge pentagram etched on the stone floor, ringed with arcane symbols. It dominated the room, which had obviously been enlarged with magic. The chamber was quite large, and empty but for one wall lined with tables and potion making apparatuses.

A metal ring was set in the floor in the center of the pentagram. A thick chain trailed from the ring in a dark coil. Draco instinctively held Harry tighter.

"No," he said adamantly.

Snape crossed his arms and Draco had a flashback to Hogwarts, when all and sundry had feared the Potions Master. Snape's implacable nature had not changed one iota. "Then take him home. This is the only way. I've warded the circle to stop any magic escaping and the symbols will channel the spell we need to cast in order to strip away Avery's magic."

Draco hesitated. He cringed at the thought of placing Harry inside the cold circle and leaving him shackled there.

"If you haven't the fortitude for this, then get him out of here before he awakens. I will not risk my solitude for your mercurial whims," Snape growled.

"This is no whim!" Draco snarled. Damn the man for his unerring ability to cut to the quick with every utterance. He knew Snape would not allow him the luxury of mulling over his decision one more time. Besides, Draco had done little else for the past three days. He knew what had to be done.

He marched resolutely into the circle and felt a tingle of dampening magic, even though Snape had not yet activated it. Harry felt suddenly heavier in his arms.

"I'm not putting him on the floor," Draco said and glared into the black eyes that watched him impassively. Snape held his gaze for long moments and then sighed and pulled out his wand. He

Conjured a dark pelt and brought it into the circle before spreading it on the floor. Draco set Harry down carefully. He noted that the cushion was genuine fur, soft and thick. Snape pushed up Harry's trouser leg and snapped the metal shackle around his ankle with a click that seemed to echo through Draco's heart. He looked at Harry's bare feet and wished his lover had not taken off his shoes; it made him seem more helpless and vulnerable. Draco clenched his jaw when he realized that Harry actually *was* helpless and vulnerable, thanks to him.

A groan escaped Harry's beautiful lips and Snape touched Draco's arm.

"Come. We must get out of the circle." His tone was no-nonsense and Draco allowed himself one brief touch—his fingers glided over Harry's forehead and pushed the soft hair back in a gentle caress. He stood up and stepped away purposefully. Snape cast several spells and the sigils at the circle's edge flared green, gold, and blue before fading. A faint tingle remained, whispering against Draco's skin from his vantage. A miniscule distortion masked his view of Harry—so vague he wondered if it were imagined.

Harry stirred, lifting a hand in a weak warding gesture, possibly sensing something awry. Draco's nails dug into his palms. He sank to his knees and waited for Harry to fully awaken. It was surprisingly quick, considering the potions Harry had imbibed. He sat up abruptly, eyes wide and shockingly alert.

Harry took in his surroundings quickly and Draco swallowed hard at the suspicions that grew in the emerald depths with every passing heartbeat. Harry's eyes barely skimmed over Draco before fastening on Snape. A sharp inhalation swelled his chest and he shot to his feet. Surprise tightened his jaw when the chain pulled taut, but his eyes never left Snape.

"Draco," Harry said. The single word demanded answers, and Draco forced his tension down. This was *Harry*, after all.

"Harry, you remember Severus Snape?" he said in his best Malfoy manner. That earned him an incendiary glare from the Gryffindor. "Obviously he wasn't killed in the final battle with You-Know-Who."

"Fuck. I was hoping you would tell me this was some elaborate joke and that was really George Weasley on Polyjuice."

"No such luck, Potter," Snape said with a snort of near-amusement.

"How?" Harry asked flatly. He kept his attention on Snape, likely more than willing to ignore Draco for the time being.

"You were right about the Polyjuice, except it was applied quite a few years ago, on the eve of battle. I had no intention of being killed by either side, which was quite likely considering they all despised me. I put my good friend McNair under the Imperious Curse and dosed him with Polyjuice Potion. He died in my stead, killed by Neville Longbottom. I nearly perished from

mortification alone, knowing my good name would be forever marred by such ignominy."

"Pity you didn't," Harry said flatly.

Snape smiled like a leopard about to pounce on a hapless rabbit. "Same old Potter, charming as ever. You might try to keep a civil tongue, seeing as I am your only hope."

"Why does that terrify me?" Harry asked and looked at Draco finally. His fingers reached up to brush against the amulet he still wore. Draco wondered if Harry would try to utilize his considerable power and hoped the Gryffindor would not. There was no telling what would happen between the Inhibitor Amulet and the warded circle. At that moment, Draco realized Harry was already testing his cage, sending out tendrils of magic to search for weaknesses.

It wasn't working. A slight wrinkle of frustration marred Harry's brow, noticed by Draco only through long familiarity. The spells seemed to be working, keeping Harry from using his abilities. Draco was both relieved and horrified. He tried to explain, spilling the tale of Avery's magic and Voldemort's spell, his own duplicity and Snape's spell. He finally realized he was nearly babbling and clenched his jaw to silence the words.

"We should get started," Snape said mildly when Draco ran out of steam. Harry stared at them with eyes wide.

"Draco, listen to me," he said urgently. "It's my fault you felt you had to do this and I understand that. But there is another option. I'm sorry I didn't tell you earlier. I thought there was time… I should have known you would try to find a solution on your own. Damn me for not realizing that!"

"I'm going to begin the procedure," Snape said and lifted his wand.

"Draco, please," Harry said calmly.

"Wait, Severus." Draco held up a hand.

"Don't do this," Harry continued. "Hermione has been working on the problem and I think she's found a viable solution."

"What?" Draco demanded, feeling a rush of anger that effectively squelched the guilt. "You've been—and you did not think it was prudent to inform me?"

Harry flushed and tugged at his hair in the gesture that normally acknowledged his overwhelming stupidity.

"It was… I have no rational excuse. I'm sorry. Please, just talk to Hermione before you do anything we will both regret."

Draco turned to Snape, who sneered. "Yes, by all means let's waste valuable time checking in with Potter's underlings. I spent three full days in preparation for this, Draco. Those wards will not hold forever."

Draco's attention returned to Harry and he made his tone as earnest as possible. "Harry, this will work. You need to trust me. You have Avery's magic and it's interfering with your own."

"I know that!" Harry snapped. "Well, I didn't know it was Avery's, but that doesn't matter! Hermione found a solution. You need to go talk to her before blindly turning me over to *him*! You know how he feels about me! Let me out of here and I promise to go willingly to Hermione. You can cage me there, if you feel the necessity."

Snape laughed harshly. "I can tell you're lying, Potter, and I'm not even using Occlumency."

A crackle of multicolored light suddenly rippled around the circle and coruscated in a spiky half-dome. Harry screamed and fell backward, obviously in agony. Only Snape's clawlike hand on his arm stopped Draco from throwing himself into the circle. Harry's back arched in obvious pain and his hands tore at the fur.

"What did you do?" Draco demanded, rounding on Snape.

"He did it to himself. It's backlash from him behaving like an idiot. Don't worry, I doubt he'll try that again soon."

Harry rolled over, breathing hard, and climbed to his hands and knees. Snape ducked as a piece of metal flew past his head, narrowly missing his temple. It landed on the stone beyond them with a muted clank. Draco glanced at the medallion—it was twisted and slightly blackened at the edges.

"So much for the Inhibitor Amulet," Snape said quietly.

Harry stood once more and his eyes blazed almost madly. The circle suddenly glowed in vivid purplish lines and Harry's body tensed like whipcord. A sheen of sweat stood out on his brow.

"Stupid Gryffindor," Snape muttered. "He's pushing it, testing the limits of the circle. How much pain do you think he can withstand?" Snape's voice was detached, almost clinical. Draco knew the answer—Harry would keep it up until it killed him.

"Harry, stop it!" he called. "I'll go see Hermione. I promise, now just stop hurting yourself!"

The lines faded slightly and Draco turned to Snape. "I'll go talk to Granger and see if her theory differs from yours. Perhaps she can help us. I bring her back here and—"

"You will do no such thing," Snape said adamantly. "I am not opening my doors to the whole of the wizarding world for the sake of your foolish paramour."

"She can probably help us," Draco insisted.

"You should have thought of that before." Snape was unmovable. "You may go and collect any useful information she might possess, but you will *not* mention my name, nor disclose my whereabouts. Is that clear?"

Draco felt like gnashing his teeth, but he turned back to Harry. "I'll go talk to Hermione. You stay here and promise not to test the damned circle. And don't provoke Severus."

"Don't leave me here, Draco." Harry's voice rang with urgency.

"Harry, Severus is not the Dark Lord. You'll be fine."

"No, Draco, he detests me. I don't trust him."

Draco shared a look with Snape that spoke volumes. Surely Harry's paranoia was excessive. They were not at Hogwarts any longer. Regardless, Draco did not want Harry acting like a crazed beast. "Severus, tell Harry you do not hate him."

"Why would I hate you, Potter?" Snape asked smoothly. "You are no more insufferable now than you were as a child."

"I don't know why you hate me, I only know that you do," Harry said.

"And I love you, so stop acting like a damned brat and just be patient until I return, all right?" Draco asked, unwilling to draw the argument out all night. Harry sighed heavily, but seemed placated by Draco's declaration.

"Fine. But tell Hermione what you are planning. And hurry! I don't want to stay here with *him* one minute longer than necessary!"

Draco nodded, gave Snape a reassuring glance, and went upstairs to use the Floo Network.

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Harry felt a distinct chill watching Draco leave. When the blond disappeared up the stairs, Harry turned his attention back to Snape. A tight smiled played about the thin lips.

"Why do you hate me, anyway?" Harry asked. His head throbbed, likely from a combination of the potions and backlash from the circle.

"Because you are exactly like your father," Snape replied.

"No, I'm not. I am actually a completely different person, although I would not expect you to

recognize that."

"That is not the only reason, of course. I could compile you a list, if you'd like."

"Don't bother," Harry said with a sneer.

"You've been quite the hero lately, haven't you? Except for that brief hiatus after the war. I thought you were mourning your Weasley girlfriend, but apparently it was a bit more serious. Draco tells me you were very nearly a Squib. Are you quite sure you would not prefer to keep Avery's magic? Just think, you could become the next Dark Lord." Snape's words were taunting.

Harry glared, even though the thought had occurred to him already. It was, of course, one reason he had tried to find a solution.

"I have no intention of becoming the next Voldemort."

"Good, because I have no intention of allowing you to do so. Shall we begin?

Snape raised his wand and Harry's unease turned into full-blown fear. "Draco said to wait until he returned."

"Yes, and I shall beg his forgiveness. He has been quite fearful of you, Potter. I detested seeing that. I have been secretly protecting him for years and to find *you* of all people hurting him even while professing to love him... Well, it's simply not to be tolerated."

"I would never intentionally hurt him!" Harry snarled. "He knows that!"

"I don't care, Potter. I merely plan to see that it doesn't happen again."

With that, Snape began to chant.

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Chapter: 6

Chapter Six

Draco Flooed home first and then stuck his head back into the flames to contact Hermione.

"Draco?" she asked in surprise when she saw him.

"Can I come through? It's about Harry."

"Of course," she said immediately and he withdrew his head before using the powder to send him into her living room. She beckoned to him as she hurried into another room. "I'm in the middle of a potion. You'll have to talk while I'm working."

Draco trailed her, suddenly unsure where to begin.

"What about Harry?" she asked as she leaned over a cauldron, waited a moment, and then tossed in three reddish oak leaves.

"I know what's causing his unusual behavior," Draco admitted.

She grinned. "You too? I'm surprised he didn't ask you to help me with the research, actually. What's your theory? I'm curious to see if it's similar to mine."

"The Dark Lord stripped the magic from Avery, trapped it in an Occamy egg and then killed Avery to create a Horcrux. When Harry destroyed the Horcrux, Avery's magic was absorbed by Harry, whose own power was trying to restore itself, but now encounters resistance from the addition of Avery's, which is why Harry is going mad and it also explains his sudden extraordinary power." Draco got it all out in a rush and Hermione blinked at him for a moment.

"Well, that's certainly more detailed than my theory."

"It's the truth. I received it from a reliable source."

Her eyes narrowed at him as she stirred the potion and then tossed in a handful of white powder with a muttered spell.

"What reliable source? And where is Harry?"

"He sent me here to discuss your idea for removing Avery's magic. I was thinking of stripping it from Harry by the same method used to remove it from Avery."

Hermione gasped. "But couldn't that kill Harry?"

Draco nodded. "It's possible, which is why I'm here to discuss alternatives." He tried to keep the tension from his voice and pretend he had all the time in the world. The ticking of the clock on the wall sounded abominably loud. Draco could sense Snape's impatience all the way from Spain. The bastard had better not do anything rash to Harry.

Hermione set down the iron rod she had been using to stir the potion and took up a branch of what looked like nettles. She mixed the concoction with the branch three times and then let it sink to the bottom before tossing a round, grayish stone into the cauldron. A puff of white smoke emerged and the potion changed from a mud-colored sludge to a cherry-colored glossy liquid. She snatched up a glass rod and began to stir frantically, counting each stroke. The color

lightened with each circular pass until it was only faintly pink. She stopped stirring and set the rod aside with a quick swipe of her hand over her temple to dab at the sweat gathered there.

She extinguished the flame beneath the cauldron, grabbed her wand, and cast a Cooling Charm over the whole of it. The pink potion took on a vaguely purplish cast as it cooled. Draco raised a brow, impressed in spite of his urgency.

"What is it?" he asked curiously.

She grinned. "Lip plumping salve. Now poor witches with lips like stretched rubber bands can feel like they were born with the pucker of a Hollywood starlet."

Draco smiled back, although he hadn't the faintest idea what constituted a "rubber band" or a "Hollywood starlet". He caught the gist, though. She set her wand down and pressed her fingers into her hipbones as she bent backwards, working the kinks out of her spine.

"My idea for Harry's problem was more along the lines of *filtering* rather than removing the magic entirely," she said. Draco followed her to the kitchen where she made tea and explained her theory. He was fascinated by the potential of her idea and knew Snape had to hear it. Between the three of them, they might be able to come up with something entirely new. And non-fatal to Harry, which was the most important thing.

Draco made her write down the spell and then made several notes regarding her source materials.

"What did you mean by a 'reliable source'?" she asked. "Is someone helping you?"

Draco nodded. "I'm not at liberty to say at the moment, but after he gets this information, I'm hoping he will agree to meet with you. This might actually work!" He got to his feet and then awkwardly moved forward to pull her into a hug. She giggled unbecomingly and squeezed him back before stepping away.

"Go and ask him, then," she said and a faint blush tinted her cheeks. "And give Harry a kiss from me."

"I will," Draco said quietly and hurried to the Floo. From there he went back to Grimmauld Place and thence to Spain.

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Harry clamped down hard on an instinctive rush of panic, knowing it would only hinder him. The almost gleeful glint in Snape's black eyes was frightening. Harry did not bother to speak. Pleading with Snape would be a waste of energy better used elsewhere.

He sent out a tendril of magic and clenched his teeth against the backlash. There had to be a way to penetrate Snape's circle. Perhaps straight down, through the stone. The etched runes glowed,

but Harry's Seeking Magic was not the cause. The pain sharpened as the force surrounding Harry became almost tangible. The air seemed to thicken and he suddenly felt an increase in pressure, as if he had been plunged into deep water and was sinking fast. Harry struggled to breathe and a prickling sensation assaulted his lungs. He fought harder, sending his considerable magic straight down, cracking the stone beneath his feet. He felt an instant of exultation, until his magic went out of control.

Harry fought back instinctively, lashing out wildly without thinking. It was probably the worst thing he could do. He screamed as the pain became instant agony. He felt his magic pulling—*tearing*—away from him and the sound of his own scream seemed magnified. It hammered at his ears in a high-pitched howl that he barely noticed. Excruciating anguish enfolded him; he thought every cell in his body had been torn open. His vision went from red to white to black and even the painful squeal became inaudible.

He was certain he stopped breathing. The pain was too much—it overloaded every function until all he wanted was to make it stop. Mercifully, he blacked out.

Awareness was agony, so he fought it. Once it worked, pushing away from the misery back into the soothing darkness. The next time he was not so lucky. The pain seemed to grab him with eager, voracious claws and drag him over knife-edged rocks to lie exposed and bleeding, begging for relief. There was no single source; it was everywhere. He felt savaged and raw with no hope of it abating. Every agonizing moment brought it more sharply into focus. He would have pleaded for it to stop, but even formulating a though took effort. Speaking was impossible. The darkness eluded him.

Synapses connected again with a fresh flare of agony, but it allowed him to remember who he was. *Harry*, he thought. *I'm Harry*. It bolstered him slightly and he held onto the knowledge tightly as he tried to craft something around it, something besides awareness of pain hot as flame, sharp as glass. Why was he in such agony?

Slowly he discerned sensations other than the constant pain—the air hissing raggedly in and out of his body was cold, another source of torment, but welcome nonetheless. Something soft rested beneath his hands and something frigid as ice clasped one ankle. Sparks of blue flared through the white of his vision and a keening sound came to his ears. After a long moment, he realized it issued from his own throat. With some difficulty, he stopped it.

The pain slowly ebbed to near-bearable levels.

"Still alive, Potter?" The harsh voice cut like a knife and triggered a new set of memories, this time unwanted. He remembered where he was and why he was in such pain. Snape had taken his magic. He wanted to sit up and test it, to see if he was still whole, still a wizard, but moving was beyond him at the moment. Breathing and thinking were difficult enough. Even hissing a retort would hurt.

The blackness reared up again, brought on by a rush of despair, offering to take him away once

more. He refused to give in to it as another thought came to him with a plethora of conflicting emotions. Draco. Draco had done this to him.

Draco.

xxXxx

He stepped out of the fireplace and hurried for the stairs, tightly clutching the parchment Granger had given him. Draco hoped Snape had not done anything stupid in his absence, but his worst fears were realized the instant his foot touched the bottom step. Snape leaned against a table casually, watching the still figure that lay in the circle. Harry's twisted body was evidence enough.

"What have you done?" Draco whispered as his eyes went from Harry to Snape, who shrugged.

"It was for the best. You would have dragged the process out indefinitely. This way, it is done."

"Damn you, Severus!" Draco yelled. He threw the papers and hurried into the circle. The glow had gone—it seemed inert now that its purpose had been served. Draco's heart clenched as he knelt at Harry's side. He looked pale as death and his chest barely moved with each tortured breath.

"Oh, Harry," he murmured and tentatively touched his lover's side.

"Don't," Harry said. The word was barely audible. Harry's throat worked and it seemed to take immense effort for him to even speak. "Don't touch me."

Draco pulled his hand away.

"Harry, please," he said.

"Hurts," Harry whispered. "Clothes hurt. Everything hurts." His lashes stayed firmly shut over the green eyes, keeping Draco out.

"Want me to take them off?" Draco was willing to do anything at all to help. He wanted to gather the Gryffindor into his arms and hold him, but he wasn't certain Harry would allow that ever again.

"Don't care," Harry said.

Draco couldn't breathe for a moment, but a faint clink caught his attention. The damned shackle was still clamped around Harry's ankle. He could do something about that, at any rate. Draco shifted until he could reach the iron and threw a venomous glare at Snape, who shrugged. Draco pulled out his wand to cast a spell, but a key suddenly rang against the stone and slid to the edge of the fur.

"It's spell-resistant, of course. Might use that instead," Snape said dryly. Draco set his wand down and took the key. He quickly unlocked the metal and released Harry, trying not to touch him in the process. A soft sigh exposed Harry's relief when the shackle was removed.

Draco moved his attention to Harry's shirt and quickly started on the buttons. He threw a hiss over his shoulder. "Get me a blanket. Something soft. I won't have him freeze."

Snape muttered something guaranteed to be uncomplimentary, but he pushed away from the table and walked to the stairs. His footsteps retreated. Draco managed to get Harry's shirt off with only a few grimaces of pain from the Gryffindor. Harry made no sound at all. The jeans were more difficult. The fabric was rougher and it scraped over Harry's skin, causing him to arch his back in agony. The tendons on his neck stood out sharply and his fingers dug into the soft fur.

Snape returned just as Draco flung the jeans aside, shaking with remorse. Harry was nude but for his boxers, but Draco refused to remove those and expose him further. It was bad enough for Harry to be in the state he was before Snape. Draco snatched the blanket with a livid glance at the winemaker. The cream-colored throw was very soft and Draco draped it carefully over Harry, who sighed. His features relaxed slightly.

"Damn you, Severus," Draco said angrily. "Why could you not have waited? I was barely gone thirty minutes!"

Snape gathered the fallen papers from the floor and returned to his perch by the table to peruse them. Draco sat as close to Harry as he dared, pulling his legs up to wrap his arms around them while he watched the Gryffindor. Harry had not once opened his eyes.

"Interesting," Snape said, ignoring Draco's question completely. "Granger came up with this on her own, you say?"

Draco nodded curtly.

"It might have actually worked, with a bit of modification," Snape added. Draco gifted him with another look of loathing. He itched to hex the former potions master, but the damage had already been done. Draco wondered what the effect of the spell had been on Harry, other than obvious extreme pain.

"Are you hungry?" the winemaker asked after a long silence. Draco supposed it was a pathetic attempt at an apology.

"No. I would not say no to a drink, however. Something stronger than Beaujolais, if you don't mind." Snape tossed the sheaf of paper casually on the table behind him and sauntered again to the steps and disappeared. Draco looked at Harry, whose eyes had finally opened. They watched Draco with his normal clarity. Draco looked at him miserably.

"Sorry won't even begin to make amends, will it?" he asked. Harry's eyes closed once more and Draco felt his throat tighten painfully as the silence drew out uncomfortably. If Harry never spoke to him again, it would be no less than he deserved.

"Do you have my wand?" Harry asked finally.

Draco froze. "No. You left it at home, did you not?"

Harry shook his head and then made a sound of protest; the movement must have hurt. "It was in my pocket earlier."

Draco shot a glare toward the stairs. Snape. He must have taken it under the guise of examining Harry when Draco had first brought him in, when Draco was too distraught to notice. Surprisingly, Harry did not pursue the question and instead asked another.

"Can I use yours?"

Draco wordlessly handed it to him while absently wondering if his lover planned to cast a Killing Curse on him, or at least a Cruciatus.

Snape chose that moment to enter the room again and Harry buried the wand in the thick fur. Draco shifted slightly to shield the wand and much of Harry from Snape's sight. The winemaker Levitated a tray toward Draco. It held a bottle and two glasses. *Brandy*, Draco noted with a snort. Distilled wine. It figured.

"Your own label, I presume?" he asked and the black eyes met his in amusement.

"Of course."

Draco gratefully set the tray down and poured a stiff glassful. He glanced at Harry, who feigned sleep once more, probably to avoid conversing with the man he would cheerfully kill if given the chance. Snape carried an armful of bedding and he tossed it into the circle.

"I assume you'll choose to spend the night here," he said dryly.

"I would prefer to take him home, but apparently he's in so much bloody pain he can't bear to move or even be touched at the moment." Merely uttering the words brought Draco's anger back to the forefront and he gulped his drink to keep from doing something rash.

"Whatever. I'll be down in the morning. This will keep you from waking me before an appropriate hour." Snape raised his wand and cast a quick spell, causing the circle to flare once more.

"What did you just do?" Draco demanded, suspicion coloring his words as his instincts suddenly began to scream.

"Never mind, brat. Just get some rest." With that, the black-haired man glided back to the steps and out of the room once more.

Draco turned back to Harry, not daring to mention his misgivings.

"He's locked you in here with me, hasn't he?" Harry asked, giving voice to Draco's unspoken fear.

"I believe so, yes," Draco admitted.

"He probably hopes you'll kill me."

"Slim chance of that."

"What if I asked you to?"

Draco's jaw clenched. "Not amusing, Potter."

Harry lifted the wand from the fur and held it aloft. The tip shook slightly. Draco held his breath as the Gryffindor spoke a single word. "*Lumos*."

Nothing happened.

"Maybe the bastard activated the Nullifying Wards," Draco suggested. He reluctantly took his wand from Harry and tried the same spell. Light flared from the tip, dimmer than usual, but there. Draco felt sick for a moment as he wordlessly put the wand back into Harry's outstretched palm.

Three more spells had the same effect—none at all. A sharp, humorless laugh spilled from Harry's lips.

"Not exactly unexpected. He took it all, not just Avery's magic, but mine, too. To be safe? Or just to be an arse?"

Draco wasn't certain. Perhaps the spell was simply not refined enough to distinguish one magical signature from another. Or perhaps Snape had not even bothered to modify it from its original form. Regardless, Draco had allowed it to happen.

"Is this what you wanted, Draco?" Harry asked. His voice was edged with torment.

"No. *No*, of course it wasn't what I wanted. How can you suggest that?"

Harry sighed deeply. "It doesn't matter anymore. I doubt the process is reversible. I'm really tired. I think I'll sleep now."

He turned his face away from Draco and after awhile his breathing became slow and steady. Draco could not tell if Harry was faking or not. It made no difference; either way, Harry would not speak to him again. Draco stared into the darkness and drank Snape's brandy. After awhile, curiosity prompted him to try and leave the circle. An unmovable pressure kept him from passing over the etched lines. When he pressed harder, blue sparks sizzled in the air and stung him sharply. Snape really had locked them in. A cursory spell shot against the field caused the beam to rebound and sink into the fur near Harry's foot. Draco swore roundly and vowed to get even with Severus Snape if it was the last thing he did.

He lay down close to Harry without touching him and stared at the dark ceiling for a long time.

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Harry listened to Draco's breathing until it evened into a slow rhythm. He rolled over carefully and looked at his sleeping lover, moving by minute degrees to keep from hissing aloud or groaning at the pain. While it had lessened slightly—probably due in part to the softer fabric touching his skin—it had not abated completely. Draco's wand was clasped loosely in his hand. Harry longed to snatch it and attempt to cast spell after spell until he found one that worked, even though he knew it was useless. Something inside of him had fundamentally altered. He could feel it even through the nearly overwhelming torment endured by his body. Something was missing. He felt hollow inside. Empty.

It was far worse than it had been after the defeat of Voldemort. Then, he had still been able to cast simple spells. His magic had been weakened, but it had still existed. Now it was gone completely. Harry was officially a Squib. He choked back a bitter laugh as a rush of loss filled him. He could not help but catalogue the things he could no longer do. No Apparition. No Summoning. No *Reparo* when he dropped something. No *Wingardium Leviosa* to send something sailing across the room. Hell, he would not even be able to get into the locked doors and drawers in his own house. No more *Alohomora*. How the hell did Filch stand it? No wonder he was a bitter wanker stalking the halls of Hogwarts hating everyone who possessed magic he did not.

Harry took a steadying breath and fought down despair. He looked at Draco instead. The Slytherin's hair spread out over the dark fur and Harry allowed himself to reach out and touch a soft strand. Damn it, he should be furious with the blond. Part of him was. Part of him was fucking livid. Draco had drugged him and handed him over to *Snape* after lying to him for days—possibly *weeks*—while making plans behind his back. Harry's hand clenched instinctively around Draco's hair and he fought the urge to tear at it savagely. He wanted to wake the Slytherin and yell at him, but he knew he would most likely break down and sob in Malfoy's arms instead. Harry scarcely wanted to admit it to himself, but he was terrified to be completely without magic. Would Draco want to stay with a Squib? How could he love someone who was no better than a Muggle?

Harry realized suddenly that Draco's eyes were open, watching him steadily. Harry strove to pull

back, to turn away and shut his lover out, but he could not find the strength. God help him, but he could not hate Draco regardless of what he had done. He tugged gently on the length of hair still gripped in his fingers. Draco followed the motion; he levered himself up and leaned close to Harry.

Harry drew him nearer until their lips nearly touched. Draco's breath wafted over his face, smelling of alcohol and something unique to his lover. The grey eyes pierced him, although they looked nearly black in the darkness.

"I love you," Draco whispered and Harry shut his eyes against something too large for his bruised flesh to contain. He fought through the emotion.

"How can you love me now that my magic is gone?"

Draco inhaled sharply. "I don't care about that! I'll take you bruised, broken, maimed, mad, with magic or without. All that matters is *you*. Do you really think I care so little for you that I won't have you despite this?"

"This is no minor thing," Harry said rationally. "It's who I am."

"Even if it's who you *were*, I won't leave you, Harry. Do you understand?" Draco's words were low and intense. Harry's hand tightened on the length of blond hair in his fingers. He wanted desperately to believe the words. Draco continued softly, "If this is some ploy of yours to drop me for the Weasley twins, you had best rethink your little plot."

The incongruity of the statement shocked a laugh from Harry and he caught the brief twist of Draco's lips before they brushed his gently, lighter than a breeze, soft as the touch of a butterfly's wing.

"I love you, Harry," Draco repeated and Harry leaned forward into the kiss. Pain be damned, he would suffer the torments of hell for Draco's kisses. He released the bit of hair and wrapped his arm around Draco's neck to pull him closer. Pain exploded from his lips, burning like flame, but the touch of Draco's tongue soothed the embers and quelled the fire somewhat. Harry drew him in, whimpering at the rush of agony flaring in every bit of skin that touched Draco's, but he didn't care.

Draco pulled away. "I'm hurting you, aren't I?"

"I don't care," Harry gasped.

"You're shaking," Draco said. "I can't hurt you any more. This is my bloody fault!" He tried to detach himself from Harry's grip, but Harry only held more tightly.

"I don't care how much it hurts. I need you. God, I'll need you for the rest of forever now that I can't even cast a damned—"

Draco's soft kiss silenced him. "Don't. Don't talk like that. I'll get Snape to fix you if it takes me hounding his every step. He'll get your magic back if only to rid him of my nagging presence. I'll make Peeves look like an unruly toddler."

Harry tried to laugh, but yawned instead. Draco frowned at him. "Turn over," he ordered. "You need to rest. Hopefully you'll be a bit healed by morning."

Harry obediently rolled away and felt Draco tuck himself closer, although he was not quite touching Harry, except where his arm slung over his ribs. Harry ignored the prickles of pain and curled his fingers around the Slytherin's. Draco's face nestled gently in his hair.

"Go to sleep, love. I'll be right here."

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Chapter: 7

Chapter Seven

Draco became aware of discomfort first. He opened his eyes and saw an unfamiliar ceiling strung with cobwebs. His back was killing him. He turned his head and saw Harry asleep next to him. One hand lay possessively on Draco's abdomen and he covered it instinctively with his own. Draco fumbled for his wand to cast a Tempus Charm. A dry voice prevented him casting the spell.

"Finally awake?" Snape asked.

Draco slid carefully away from Harry's hand and sat up, rubbing the grit from his eyes. He reached around to rub a twinge near his spine while making a mental note to never sleep on a stone floor again.

"Did you cancel the spell that locks us in here?" Draco asked, not bothering to keep the bitterness from his voice. He felt fingertips brush against his and looked down to see Harry watching him. Draco gripped his hand tightly.

"Not quite yet. Someone wants to say hello to you and your little hero," Snape said.

Draco swallowed hard and the unease he had felt the night before grew into full-blown trepidation. He should have concentrated on escape instead of falling asleep. He felt Harry's fingers tighten.

"Who?" Draco asked as his other hand clenched on his wand, even though he knew it would likely do him little good if Snape intended to keep them trapped in the circle.

"Here he comes now," Snape said casually, but Draco tensed. The winemaker's stance belied his light words. Draco's eyes slid to the steps where black-booted feet slowly showed themselves, followed by midnight blue robes and matching cape. Draco thought there was something dreadfully familiar about the footsteps, but the breath still caught in his throat in disbelief when the man's face became visible.

"*Father*?" Draco whispered.

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Harry's eyes snapped open at the question and he felt Draco's hand nearly strangle his with the force of his grip. His mind raced with questions. Lucius Malfoy was alive. Severus Snape was alive. He wondered if *any* of the damned Death Eaters were actually dead. Malfoy Senior had supposedly died in the same battle that had claimed Snape, which explained a lot. It was no wonder some of the other Death Eaters were unaccounted for. He made a mental note to have Bill dig up a few graves to make sure the bodies therein matched the names on the headstones.

On a visceral level, he cringed at the sound of hope in Draco's voice. The bastard might be Draco's father, but Harry doubted anything good could come of his presence, especially considering he and Draco were still locked in a magical cage—and Harry was powerless. He wondered if Snape had planned it all along.

"Draco." Lucius Malfoy's voice had not changed. It was still haughty and cold as ice. "How nice to see you again."

Draco released Harry's hand and got to his feet. "You're alive? You've been alive all this time?" Draco's incredulity was tinted with accusation.

"All this time," Lucius admitted. "I must say I'm rather pleased to see you rebuilding the Manor. You are doing an excellent job, although I'm not certain I would have chosen cherry wood for the dining room floor. I was rather fond of the slate."

Harry felt ill, knowing Lucius had been to Malfoy Manor. He steadied himself with the knowledge that he could not have been there recently—not since the debacle in Ireland, at any rate. Not since Harry had placed it under a Fidelius Charm.

"I am, however, not at all pleased with your choice of company. You were doing quite well for yourself after the war, until you chose to associate yourself with… that."

Harry gave up feigning sleep and pushed the blanket away as he sat up. He wished to hell he did not feel quite so vulnerable. Even worse than being nearly nude was the knowledge that he was utterly powerless. He ignored the elder Malfoy completely and reached for his jeans to drag them

on, giving no hint as to the pain caused by the movement. The raw agony had receded somewhat from the prior day, thankfully. It no longer hurt to breathe, but the pins and needles effect was still in full force, particularly where Harry's clothing pressed against his skin. He ignored it as he got to his feet to stand next to Draco.

"Harry saved my life," Draco said simply. "More than once."

Lucius snorted. "Apparently, it's what he does, Draco. You should not have taken it to heart."

Draco reached out and took Harry's hand as he looked at his father defiantly. "Well, I have."

The pale eyes, so like his son's, narrowed. "So you have. You were always a foolish boy in many ways. Far too soft, like your mother."

Draco drew in a startled breath. "Is mother—?"

Lucius shook his head. "No. Unfortunately those rumors were true. Narcissa was killed, although of course it was not Snape's wand that fired the final curse. Snape, obviously, was someone else that day, as was I."

"It's been *years*! Why did you not show yourself before now?" Draco demanded. Harry nearly winced at the pain laced through the words.

Lucius chuckled. "Draco, someone had to step up and take up the mantle dropped by the Dark Lord. Even before that final battle it was obvious he would fail. His methods were crude and erratic. His only thought was to kill the Boy-Who-Lived. Hardly unexpected, considering his half-blood status. I knew I could do better once he was out of the way. And I succeeded for such a long time."

"What are you saying?" Draco asked and stepped closer to Harry. He thought it might be involuntarily and felt a moment of terror, knowing Draco instinctively turned to him for protection and there was not a damned thing Harry could do to help him.

"He's the Benefactor," Harry said quietly.

Lucius Malfoy laughed aloud. "Very good, Potter. I never thought you were stupid. Quite the opposite, as a matter of fact, especially after your little trick with my house-elf." Harry sensed suppressed rage beneath the words, an old grudge, long-held, never forgotten. "In a way, I'm almost impressed that you chose my son. If he had taken his true place at my side instead of cowering in his mother's shadow, he might have been worthy of you."

Harry pressed himself against Draco's side and held his hand tightly when Draco went rigid at the words. "He is more than worthy!" Harry snapped. "If anything, I am not worthy of *him*."

"Interesting that you should mention that, Potter, especially now that you are little more than a

Squib. Perhaps you are even a little less than a Squib. Let's see, shall we?" Lucius raised a dark wand and pointed it at Harry. He cast a spell Harry had never heard before and a golden light burst around him. Even as Harry braced himself he had to admire the construction of Snape's circle. Spells could enter, but not leave. It left them at an even bigger disadvantage. Nothing seemed to happen and Harry looked at Draco curiously, only to find the blond enveloped in a shimmering nimbus. A closer look revealed hundreds of tiny moth-like creatures fluttering around him.

"Magimoths," Draco said quietly. "They are attracted to magic, like normal moths to flame." Harry looked around to see moths clustered around the perimeter of the circle and hovering over the shackle on the floor. A few meager moths fluttered near Harry, but they seemed confused and rather aimless, unlike the cloud that surrounded Draco. The glow faded as the moths began to wink out, seemingly immolated by their consumption of magic.

"Less than a Squib," Lucius said derisively. "It is bad enough you are a half-blood daring to consort with my son. Only the fact of your prestige persuaded me to let you live."

"Let me live? You nearly had your own *son* killed by Mulciber in a plot to do me in! You allowed him to be tortured for months!"

Lucius narrowed his pale eyes at Harry. "That should have worked. By all accounts, you should have sacrificed yourself for Draco. I have been curious about that, actually. Lovely Pansy refuses to answer my letters. I will, of course, deal with her later. She already knows she lives on borrowed time. The idiots in St. Mungo's will prevent her killing herself before I go to claim her. She will pay for her betrayal."

He seemed to have forgotten the others for the moment, lost in his vengeful reverie. Harry looked at Draco quickly. Only their dual sacrifice attempt had saved them when each had tried to die for the other. Draco met his eyes for a brief moment and Harry tried to reassure him with the glance, even though he held little hope for making it out alive. He only hoped Lucius was not crazy enough to kill his own son.

"Why did you do it? I understand why you tried to kill me, since you lot seem obsessed with wiping me out, but why did you run the Ministry behind the scenes? Why not take it over openly?"

"You know as well as I that the Wizengamot would never accept a former Death Eater as Minister of Magic. Umbridge was ever loyal to the old Ministry, in her own twisted way. She was a willing pawn as long as she had the visible trappings of power. The idiots never knew who made the ultimate decisions. Even those in opposition were quickly subdued with an occasional Imperius."

"But why destroy the Floo Network? And prevent Apparition?"

"Please, Potter. You are not that dense. You know sheep are easier to control when they are

divided. Keeping the seat of power safely in London and not focused on the rest of the realm made it much easier to bend them all to my will. I am not pleased with you for destroying my network, Potter. I mistakenly thought you were not much of a threat as long as you were content to jaunt about with my son, even though you made it your mission to eradicate my lovely web of Dark Magic."

"Your web?" Harry asked, surprised.

"Oh yes. My final gift to the Dark Lord prior to his demise. It is a rather simple spell once you learn it. I've been forced to go out and reseed certain areas, if you will. I should have tried harder to kill you, apparently. Thankfully, events worked out on their own, did they not? Draco sought out Snape to rid you of the pesky excess of power bequeathed to you by the Dark Lord. It's almost a pity, Potter. You might have become a worthy opponent if not for my son choosing to save you from yourself."

Draco swallowed hard and Harry murmured, "It's okay. You could not have known." He decided to stop skirting the issue and face it head-on. "Do you plan to kill me now?"

"That would be too simple, Potter. Instead, I will give my son a chance to earn his way back into my good graces. There is power unlimited to be had, Draco. All you need to do is join me. I will admit that the Dark Lord's purposes were less than ideal and you can be forgiven for not wholeheartedly embracing them. I, however, intend to recreate the Ministry and the Wizarding World from the inside out. None shall oppose me… as soon as you eliminate the one person with the overweening need to do so."

"Me," Harry said flatly.

"Correct."

"You want me to kill *Harry*?" Draco was incredulous.

"You have little choice, Draco. You cannot exit the circle. It should not be difficult, as Potter's power have been drained utterly. The poor lad cannot possibly want to live as a Squib, especially after tasting such power as he possessed. You will be doing him a mercy, will you not?"

"Why bother to kill him at all? Harry can't hurt you now!"

Lucius sneered. "You know as well as I that his Gryffindor ideals will never allow him to let me be. He will oppose me with his last breath, powerless or not."

Harry glared and Draco said nothing. They knew it was true.

"I will not kill Harry," Draco said with finality.

"Then I will do it myself." Lucius sounded unconcerned. "It was for you that I suggested it,

Draco. You seem to care for him. How much better to die at the hands of a loved one, don't you think, Potter?"

"I'll stop you," Draco said and raised his wand.

Lucius chuckled. "You seem to forget where you are standing, Draco. If you prove to me that you wish to return your loyalty to me and kill Potter, then I will allow you to live and all will be forgiven. If you choose to remain with your *boyfriend*—" he sneered the term "Then I will simply remove your powers and destroy you both. The choice is yours." His gaze softened slightly. 'I do miss you, Draco. You are my son."

He turned with a flare of his cloak. "You have one hour," he snapped and stalked up the stairs. "Come, Severus. Leave the doomed lovers to their fond farewells."

Harry's venomous glare should have frozen Snape on the spot.

"Why, Severus? Why did you bring him here?" Draco demanded.

"He came to me, Draco. He has been keeping tabs on you and Potter for quite some time."

"You couldn't have warned me?" Draco cried.

Snape shrugged. "Lucius has the power to ruin everything I've built, Draco. Once this Potter business is done, he will return to London and leave me in peace."

"Once we are both dead!"

Snape shrugged. "As to that, you have a choice. It need not be both of you."

Draco let go of Harry's hand only to put an arm around his shoulders and draw him closer. Harry felt a swell of pride tinged with sadness at Draco's proud stance.

Snape sighed. "I never knew Gryffindor traits were contagious. I shall make a note of it." With that, Snape departed.

"You have to do it, you know," Harry said when they were alone. "You can't let him kill you. Like he said, I'm already a Squib and I don't really want to live this way." The lie tripped off of Harry's lips easily. It was almost true. He did not really want to live without magic, but he would have done so just to be near Draco.

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Draco stared at Harry, unable to believe his ears.

"As long as you're alive, you can try to stop him. Ron and Hermione will help you, and Bill, and

Tonks and Lupin, of course. He's right about… about being killed by someone you love. And it's—"

"Shut up, Potter."

Harry blinked at him.

"Do you really think dear old Lucius has any intention of letting me live? Especially after forcing me to murder you?" Draco laughed shortly. "This is the sort of thing he does for fun, Potter. It would amuse him greatly to come back and find I'd killed you, only to laugh and do the same to me. He will not allow either of us leave here alive and upset his plans."

Harry swayed against him. "Then what can we do? Why did he give you an hour? Why not force the issue now?"

Draco sighed heavily. "Pansy. He's going to fetch Pansy and provide one last opportunity to torment me. We saved her, after all. She was marked from that moment."

He noticed Harry cringe. "I told her to send me a Patronus if she felt threatened. Bloody lot of good that will do her now."

Draco enfolded Harry in a hard embrace, wishing the guilt would lessen instead of increasing exponentially with every passing moment. Harry's arms went around him, holding him tightly. His lips met Draco's with a gasp that sounded life a half-sob. Draco kissed him like it was the last time they would ever touch. He drank deeply, imprinting everything about Harry on his psyche—the taste, smell, and feel of the man he loved. The bloody idiot that had chosen Draco over all others, heedless of the cost. Harry met him caress for caress, kiss for kiss, until the need for air overrode even the desire to expire through sheer lack of oxygen.

Harry laughed shakily against Draco's cheek. His lips were wet and left a cool patch against Draco's heated skin with every exhalation. "I think I'd be okay dying this way," he said.

Draco tipped his head and nuzzled Harry's neck. Black curls brushed against his nose. Draco raised a hand to thread his fingers through the tangled mess. "I'm not ready to die just yet, Potter. Although you are right about the method."

"You have a plan, then?"

"Not really, no."

"I tried to go through the floor before Snape took my powers."

Draco pulled back in surprise and then bent down to lift a corner of the fur. The thick stone was cracked in the center of the circle, with long jags shooting from it. Draco felt a wild moment of hope, until he realized that it would take far longer than their allotted hour to dig out, even if

Draco could manage a proper spell to finish what Harry had started.

Harry knelt to examine the largest crack. "If we enlarge this and bring it down here…" he said and gestured to the etchings on the floor, "Do you think we could break the circle?"

Draco drew in a breath and thought about it. It was possible. The resulting backlash could kill them both, of course, but tearing the stone beneath the runes should break the ring, depending on how far down Snape had sent the spell. It was possible he had created an entire sphere, but such a thing took far more power than a hemisphere.

The problem was finding a spell strong enough. A Severing Spell did nothing but chip the stone. Neither of them knew any demolition-type spells. Their tenure as wilderness guides had been spent attacking the mortal or immaterial. Bodies and spirits succumbed far more easily than granite.

"This is useless!" Draco cried after extending the split a mere hand-span. He cast a Tempus Charm and discovered they had wasted nearly twenty minutes already.

Harry stepped up and put a comforting hand on his shoulder. Draco glared at the hopeful expression on his lover's face. Damned optimist. Harry grinned wryly at Draco as if sensing his thoughts and tugged at his hair. The ring glinted on his hand and the movement exposed his famous scar for a moment.

Draco stared at him and then took Harry's left hand. Giving in to a sudden impulse, Draco triggered their Bond. Harry gasped when the lines flared gold over his skin. Exultation rushed through Draco at the sight. They might die, but Harry Potter still belonged to him. He laughed aloud and Harry's delighted expression prolonged it.

"How?" he asked.

"This is *my* magic, Harry. Snape took Avery's and he took yours, but he was not aware of mine." Another thought rocked him and he pulled Harry close to run a finger over the lines he had painted so long ago, glowing now as a symbol of their unbroken connection. "I want to try something. It's completely insane and practically Gryffindor, but for that reason it just might work."

Harry obediently sat on the fur according to Draco's instructions. Draco sat down and linked his legs around Harry in duplication of their Bonding ceremony. He rested his forehead against Harry's for a moment and gripped his shoulders, willing his breathing to still. He tried to center himself, but Harry's teasing words broke his concentration.

"Are we renewing our vows?" Thankfully, he left *before we die* unspoken.

"In a way, now stop asking questions and let me do this," Draco said, trying to manage a stern tone and failing. In fact, he was quite nervous considering what he was about to attempt.

"Okay," Harry said simply, trusting to the end. Draco growled and kissed him. The Gryffindor melted into him as he'd done a thousand times before and Draco knew he was not ready to let go of this. He was not done with Harry yet; they simply weren't *finished*. After what they had already been though in the short time they had been together after the war… Well it wasn't fair. He knew it was a childish thought, as petulant and selfish as he had once been, but no less true for the realization.

With renewed determination, Draco said, "Link hands." Harry obediently put his hands in Draco's left to left and right to right, threading their fingers. "Good. Now breathe together."

Their foreheads still touched, and soon their breathing became slow and even. Draco inhaled as Harry exhaled. Draco tuned out everything but total awareness of Harry and their Bond became almost tangible. *Now*, Draco thought and flooded the Bond with his magic.

"What… what are you doing?" Harry asked.

"Keep breathing and let it in," Draco replied softly. Despite Draco's admonition, Harry's breath hitched.

"No, I can't… I can't let you…"

Draco felt immense satisfaction that Harry could not seem to stop the process once started. The Gryffindor tried to tug his hands away, but Draco held tightly. He felt magic draining out of him—*flooding* out of him—and into Harry like a tide, filling him.

His lover suddenly shoved him away and shot to his feet, breaking the connection. Draco fell back, immensely weak. Harry stood over him angrily, looking like a vengeful god, powerful and strong. Draco smiled at him. "Did it work?" he asked.

Harry's expression turned to bewilderment. "What did you do?" Without waiting for a response, he bent and snatched up Draco's wand.

Lumos," Harry said and the tip lit instantly. Harry stared at it and his knees seemed to give out. He knelt before Draco in a semblance of reverence. "You didn't. Tell me you didn't give me your magic."

Draco reached out gently and took the wand. "*Tempus*," he said and numbers gleamed in the air for a moment. Draco did not bother to hide his relief. "Not all of it, Potter. I just… shared."

"You shared," Harry repeated and then Draco was knocked flat by the Gryffindor. Harry's mouth was on his, hot and demanding. Draco would have laughed in elation if Harry had allowed him to breathe. It was all he could do to draw in air during Potter's brief pauses, during which Harry murmured against his lips. "You insane… mmm… beautiful, incredible… oh god, Draco… absolutely…mmnnnn… fucking *gorgeous* man. I can't believe you did that." Harry drew back

suddenly, green eyes wide as saucers. "How did you know it would work? How *did* it work?"

"I only hoped it would work; I got the idea when I saw the markings. Obviously that particular magic was unaffected by Snape's spell. It acted like a conduit, since it already connected us through magic. Once I began to pour it in, you soaked it up like a sponge, obviously trying to replace what had been lost. How do you feel?"

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Harry looked into Draco's incredible eyes and could barely formulate an answer. He felt like a million Galleons. The screaming ache he had felt to his bones was gone—completely gone.

"I feel like I could fly," he replied and kissed the blond again. "Draco, you're amazing."

Draco laughed. "Yes, I know, Harry. How amazing am I?"

Bloody hell, his voice, his scent, his *magic* coursing through Harry's very being—Harry was harder than he'd ever been in his life. He rocked his groin into Draco's and felt an answering hardness rise as the Slytherin gasped. "You're the most amazing man on the face of this planet… or any other," Harry admitted. "And I love you. God, I love you so much."

Draco's hands gripped his hips and pulled Harry against him with an almost pained moan. "Harry, love, too bad this is neither the time nor the place."

Harry kissed him a few more times, unwilling to admit reality quite yet. He wanted nothing more than to remove every stitch of Draco's clothing with his teeth and retrace those beautiful bond markings with his tongue. He said as much and smiled in delight when Draco's silver eyes went wide and dark. Harry regretted being such a bastard for the past few weeks—he had missed so much. He had forgotten how much he loved watching Draco come undone. It was beyond painful that he might never see it again. "I love you," he said again, finding it difficult to speak.

"How did *my* magic turn you into a Hufflepuff?" Malfoy asked and Harry guffawed against his cheek, amused in spite of his growing fear.

"Bastard," he said.

"That's better."

Harry rolled away, trying to rein in his raging libido. It would not do for Lucius and Snape to return to find them in such an amorous state. "How much time do we have?" he asked, knowing that despite Draco's unbelievable gift of magic, they were still doomed if they did not get out of the damned circle.

Draco fumbled for his wand—too late.

"Time's up, boys," Lucius Malfoy said.

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Chapter: 8

Chapter Eight

Draco kissed Harry lingeringly one last time, trying to suppress his annoyance. He knew it was foolish to wish for one last chance to make love to Harry, but foolishness seemed to run in his blood lately. He broke the kiss at last and turned to his father as if unconcerned. As expected, Pansy stood next to him, looking frightened and defeated.

"Pansy wanted to say hello," Lucius said pleasantly. "Say hello, Pansy. You might say goodbye to Potter, he won't be with us much longer."

Pansy said nothing until Lucius swung his gaze to her. 'H… hello, Draco," she said. Draco set his jaw. He hated to see her so cowed. She must have suffered immensely to be so terrified against her very nature.

"Pansy," Draco replied calmly. "Nice to see you again, although the circumstances leave much to be desired."

"I'm disappointed in you, Draco," Lucius said. "Not surprised, mind you, but disappointed."

"What else is new?" Draco muttered, loud enough for his father to hear. The grey eyes narrowed at his words and Draco felt a flash of satisfaction. Insolence was insolence and apparently would remain so until Draco died, according to Lucius Malfoy. Unfortunately, this was not the time to bait his father. Draco saw his father's wand lift and spoke quickly. "I assume you brought Pansy here for a reason other than allowing us to exchange our final goodbyes?"

"I am feeling generous this month, apparently. I offered you a chance at redemption and now I am giving Pansy that same opportunity," Lucius said.

Draco nearly gnashed his teeth and asked why he didn't just kill Harry himself if he wanted it done so badly, but he knew damn well it would provoke Lucius into doing just that. As long as his father was playing twisted games, they might have a chance. If nothing else, it would prolong the time of their deaths. Unfortunately, Harry was not so circumspect.

"Why don't you leave her alone?" he snarled. Draco gripped his wand more tightly, preparing to cast a Shield Charm to deflect whatever Lucius chose to fling at them. He only hoped it wasn't a Killing Curse.

Instead of hexing them, his father only sneered. "It would have been easier for you if Draco had killed you, Potter. Pansy, I believe it is time for you to work your way back into my good graces. You know what to do."

She blanched and took her wand from her robes with shaking hands. Draco began to fear she was truly broken. "I… I can't," she said. "They spelled my wand."

Lucius snatched it from her and took a moment to break whatever charms the staff at St. Mungos had cast on it. He handed it back and gifted Pansy with a cold smile. "I can see a tiny flash of rebellion in your eyes, Pansy. I advise you that I will not be so easy to kill as Mulciber."

Pansy looked away and Draco could see her throat move as she swallowed. He applauded her for even considering turning on the bastard. She could hardly miss at that range. Part of him wished she would give in to the urge and simply do it, but her defeated expression returned and he sighed inwardly, knowing the moment had passed. Draco saw mute apology in her eyes and he moved to block Harry from her view, raising his chin defiantly. If Pansy planned to kill Harry, she would need to go through him. Unfortunately, he did not think that would be much of a deterrent. Regardless of what they had gone through in Scotland, he and Pans were not exactly close any longer.

Her lips curved slightly—in appreciation of his sacrifice, or amusement at his stupidity? Regardless, Lucius was not pleased at her hesitation. He turned on her immediately with a snarled, "*Crucio*!" A startled shriek tore from her throat and she collapsed as if suddenly deflated. Harry's fingers dug into Draco's arm and he was suddenly glad that the wand was in his hand instead of his lover's. The Gryffindor had a low tolerance for witnessing torture. With wand or without, they were both helpless to stop it, but he knew Harry would have tried.

Pansy's screams went on and on until Draco realized Lucius no longer tortured her as punishment, but rather for his own sadistic pleasure. "Father!" he yelled. The silver eyes turned to his with a mad light Draco barely recognized. The man that had helped Draco onto his first broom and hugged him tightly when he cast his first spell was gone, burned away by whatever insanity he had inherited under years of servitude to the Dark Lord.

"Leave her alone!" Harry snarled, stepping out from behind Draco. "I will never understand why you would-be *Dark Lords* get off on tormenting those weaker than yourselves."

"Are you volunteering to take her place, Potter?" Lucius taunted.

Harry shrugged. "Yeah, why not? You're going to kill me, anyway."

The silver-tipped wand leveled itself immediately at Harry. The murmured Cruciatus Curse was blocked by Draco's weak Shield Charm. He glared defiantly at his father, who sneered. "How long do you think to protect him, Draco?"

"As long as I can," he replied firmly. "Why did you really bring Pansy here? Your redemption story is not fooling anyone." Draco's eyes flicked to Snape, who leaned against the same table he had utilized the night before. The winemaker looked bored.

"To punish her, of course. She was instrumental in the failure of the events I set in motion with Mulciber, as well as his demise. He was ever an obedient servant and I am not at all pleased at his loss. Your precious Harry Potter should have died in his stead, along with countless others. You know I have never accepted failure lightly."

"That spell would have decimated the population," Harry snarled. "There are few enough wizards as it is."

"The fewer there are, the easier they are to control, something the Dark Lord knew well. Why do you think he was so keen to destroy the Mudbloods? They outnumber the purebloods by quite a large margin and they breed like flies."

"And you plan to continue on his mad path?" Harry asked.

"I am forging my own path, Potter, as you have seen. The Dark Lord sought to destroy the Ministry and bring war to the world. I plan to control the Ministry and bring peace."

"Peace," Harry sneered. "Your peace will never be worth the price."

Lucius laughed. "I have almost forgotten how much fun it is to debate with idealists. The inability to see past their own morals is endlessly amusing."

Draco could feel Harry's suppressed rage and knew it would not be long before his Gryffindor did something foolish, although his options were limited trapped in the circle as they were.

Pansy had risen shakily to her knees. She raised a hand to touch the blood that marred the corner of her mouth. Her black eyes narrowed as her wand lifted. Draco wanted to shout a warning to her, but it was too late. She leveled her wand.

"*Avada Kedavra*!" she screamed.

Draco winced. As expected, nothing happened, except that Lucius turned and stared at her for a moment before bursting into laughter. Pansy looked at her wand in horror.

"Pansy, Pansy, Pansy. It will be almost a shame to kill you," Lucius cried as his shoulders shook with laughter. "Surely you did not expect me to trust you? Such a predictable, deceptive little *bitch*!" His last word was accompanied by a backhanded blow that caught her on the temple and sent her to the stone floor once more. The laughter ceased immediately and his face twisted in rage. He began his torture anew, even though Pansy did not respond—she seemed thankfully unconscious.

Harry's fingers dug into Draco's arm. "Why didn't the Killing Curse work?"

"He only pretended to remove the suppressing spells from her wand," Draco explained woodenly. "To see what she would do."

"Your father is a sick fuck," Harry said. His words were proven by Lucius losing all control and kicking at Pansy's limp form with his black boots, alternating the blows with Cruciatus Curses. "We've got to stop him. He'll kill her."

Draco did not bother to point out that Lucius was going to kill them all and that Pansy was the lucky one at the moment, because she was not awake to feel the torment. Before either of them could attempt to distract his father, another voice rang out.

"Lucius. That is quite enough."

The platinum head rose and Lucius stared disbelievingly at Snape before a sneer twisted his lips. "Severus? Certainly you are not growing soft?"

"In your eagerness to inflict pain, you are losing sight of your ultimate goal. Can we get back to it, perhaps? I have duties."

"The fate of the Wizarding World is more important than your next batch of Madeira, Severus."

Snape shrugged. "To you, perhaps, but not to me. Finish your business and get out of my house. I want to be left in peace, as you well know."

"Do not presume to order me about, Severus," Lucius said in a dangerous tone.

"I am not your servant, Lucius. I delivered Potter and your son to you, now finish your bloody task and get the hell out! In fact, I tire of watching you. I have casks that need turning. I assume you can let yourself out when you've finished. And I expect you to clean up your mess, as well."

Lucius glared as Snape brushed past him, heading for the stairs. "You go too far, Severus."

Snape shrugged. "Torture me if you must, but do so quickly. I have no patience for this." He paused with one foot on the stairs and watched Lucius steadily. After a tense moment, Lucius chuckled.

"Ah, Severus, my old friend. You know you are the only one who can speak to me that way and live."

Snape rolled his eyes. "Come up for a glass of before you leave," he said. "Oh yes, and one more thing." He pointed his wand at Draco and cast a wordless spell. Draco braced himself, but nothing seemed to happen. Snape smirked and withdrew, watched by several sets of distrustful eyes.

"What did he do?" Harry whispered.

Draco watched his father carefully, but Lucius seemed just as puzzled by Snape's strange behavior. He muttered something uncomplimentary about the winemaker and then turned toward them.

"Time to die, Potter."

Harry tried to push Draco aside and a short wrestling match ensued when Draco refused to be pushed. "Do you really plan to murder your own son?" Harry demanded.

"He is no longer my son, Potter. Stand aside, Draco. I'll kill you first if I must, but I would rather you watch your lover die. As I did." A momentary flash of pain crossed his father's features and he realized that as twisted as Lucius was, he had loved Narcissa and still mourned her death.

"How can you wish that upon me?" Draco snarled. "Do you think Mother would approve of this insanity?"

"Do you think she would have approved of your taking up with *Potter*?" Lucius countered angrily. "Now stand aside, Draco. I won't tell you again."

Harry pushed him once more and Draco turned on him angrily, only to find Harry staring at him though wide green eyes. "Draco," he whispered. "You're standing on the circle."

Draco did not dare to look down, but he knew Harry was right. The usual pressure associated with the circle's edge was missing. Snape must have dispelled it.

"That son of a bitch," Draco murmured before he whirled and cast a Stunner at his father. Lucius Malfoy's distrust served him well—if not prepared, he was at least more than wary and lightning fast, throwing himself to the side and casting a Deflecting Charm at the same time.

"Damn you, *Severus*!" Lucius bellowed as Draco stepped out of the circle with Harry on his heels. "*Avada*—"

Draco's *Sectumsempra* nearly took off his father's arm, stopping the Killing Curse before it could start. Lucius sealed the wound with a snarled spell and attempted another hex, but Draco's experience in the past few years stood him in good stead. Fighting Dark creatures was the norm for him, while his father had doubtless been living a comfortable, sedentary life. Draco went on the offensive and did not let up for a moment. He knew it would be simplest to cast a Killing Curse, but the spell froze on his lips. Damn it to hell, the man was still his father. How could he live with killing him?

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Harry kept an eye on Draco as he ran to Pansy. He threw himself next to her, snatching up her fallen wand in passing, even though he wasn't sure he could even cast a weak Shield Charm with the altered wand. He checked for a pulse and felt a stab of relief when he found one—weak and erratic, but still there. He felt somewhat responsible for Lucius forcing yet more torture on her after Harry had vowed to protect her.

Harry glanced at Draco dueling his father. He knew the usual offensive spells were unavailable to him, so he restrained himself from shouting one of a dozen pain-inflicting spells in his arsenal. Instead, he raised Pansy's wand and shouted, "*Turbinis maximus!*"

The cape Lucius favored swirled, lifted, and wrapped itself around his head and chest, trapping his wand hand and half-smothering him. He fought to free himself—too late. Draco's shout rang out and a blast of light flung Lucius backward into the stone wall. He grunted in pain, fell forward, and lay still.

Harry shot to his feet and raced over to envelope his lover in a hard embrace. He could hardly fathom that they were still alive. And not merely alive, but relatively unscathed, except for the loss of Harry's excessive powers. Draco allowed him to place an exuberant kiss on his lips before pushing him away. "Down, Harry, we need to do something about my father."

"And then deal with Snape," Harry growled.

"Nice maneuver with the cape," Draco added.

"I didn't have much choice with this wand." He held up Pansy's slender wand and Draco took it with a frown. Harry exchanged it for Draco's and cast an experimental *Lumos* with his lover's wand.

"Did you notice any lessening of your ability?" Harry asked curiously.

"No, not really."

"Odd, considering that you gave me half of your magic."

Draco started to reply, but his eyes widened and Harry spun quickly. Lucius had shaken off the Stunner—how the hell had he done that?—and now struggled to rise while lifting his wand, aiming it straight for Draco.

"Worthless whelp," Lucius snarled. "*Avada Ke*—"

Pansy's foot shot through the air and connected with Lucius Malfoy's wrist with a sharp crack. The blast of green light sailed over Draco's head and impacted with the wooden ceiling with enough force to crack the beams.

"*Avada Kedavra*," Harry echoed quietly through the rage hammering in his ears. The bastard had

nearly killed Draco! The curse shot forth from the wand in his hand, but unlike the elder Malfoy's, Harry's hex did not miss. Lucius Malfoy jerked once, illuminated in sickly green, and then lay still forever. His reign as the Benefactor was over.

Harry sagged slightly, a bit stunned by his lack of hesitation. He turned to Draco with eyes wide. "God, Draco, I'm so sorry."

Draco's arms went around him immediately. "Don't be. He tried to kill me. Bloody hell, Harry, he *really* wanted to kill me."

"Your father was a real son of a bitch, Draco," Pansy said dryly from her still-prone position on the floor. Draco released Harry and hurried toward her while Harry verified that Lucius Malfoy would definitely not rise again. He half-expected the white-haired bastard's eyes to open like some mad Inferi, or some… Voldemort.

"Is he dead?" Draco asked. Harry wished guilt did not assail him at the question. He regretted not disarming Lucius after Draco had Stunned him—he would still be alive and on his way to Azkaban. Not that Harry believed there would have been hope of the man ever learning a lesson, but still…

"He's dead." Harry picked up the black wand and grimaced at the fanged serpent adorning it. He supposed he should hang on to it as a sort of family heirloom for Draco, even though he would rather have tossed the thing into an incinerator. "How is Pansy?"

"I've been better," she replied, but with Draco's help she had regained her feet. "Thanks for ridding the world of another menace, Potter. I only wish he could have suffered a bit more before the end. After the hell he put me through…" She glared at the still form and Harry thought she was restraining the urge to stalk forward and kick the body a few times. He knew how she felt.

"Draco, do you think your father would have made Horcruxes, like Voldemort?" It was a chilling thought.

Thankfully, Draco shook his head. "I don't think so. He always thought the Dark Lord was foolish to have tried to live beyond his time, especially considering the price he paid." Draco laughed without humor. "Can you imagine Lucius Malfoy returning as some sort of hideous being? His appearance was always a matter of pride for him."

Harry hid his smile, knowing the apple had not fallen far from the tree as far as that issue was concerned. He sighed. "So, what do we do about Snape?"

"I think the most prudent thing to 'do about Snape' is to get out of his house and never darken his doorstep again," a snide voice interjected from the steps. Harry turned to see the winemaker lounging against the wall at the bottom of the stairs, nearly blending in with the darkness there. Harry instinctively cast a Stunning Spell, but Snape deflected it with barely a flick of his wand. The black-haired man sneered. "Draco, put a leash on your pet, if you please."

Draco replied, "As far as I am concerned, Severus, Harry has the right to extract vengeance upon you. You have much to answer for."

Snape huffed. "Spare me your righteous indignation. You would never have defeated Lucius on his terms. This way he was unprepared and he allowed his emotions to get the better of him. As expected, your Gryffindor pulled his usual trick of surviving against all odds."

"You expected us to win?" Draco asked incredulously.

Snape shrugged. "Naturally."

"Lucius nearly fucking killed Draco!" Harry yelled, barely restraining himself from casting another Killing Curse.

Snape waved a hand airily. "As if you would ever allow that to happen, Potter. I anticipated you to leap in front of any deadly curses meant for Draco, nobly sacrificing yourself and all that. Pity it wasn't necessary."

Harry clenched his teeth. If not for Pansy's well-aimed kick, Draco would be dead. Harry would gladly have thrown himself in front of the Killing Curse, but it had happened too quickly. "I really hate you," he gritted. "I should cut you down like the cur you are. You took my magic!"

"That was an unfortunate side effect of trying to remove Avery's signature."

"*An unfortunate side effect*?" Harry bellowed and lifted the wand once more. Draco put a calming hand on Harry's wrist and stood close to his side. Harry took a deep breath and glared at the winemaker. He wondered at Snape's uncanny ability to make him lose control.

"Is there any way to get Harry's magic back?" Draco asked.

Snape levered himself away from the wall and strode forward, but Harry noticed he kept his wand in hand. At least he was not completely immune to Harry's need to destroy him. "There is no need. The magic you foolishly gifted to him will mingle with the traces of his own and eventually regenerate into something resembling his original signature." Harry blanched at the thought of Snape spying on their private ritual. Snape continued, "He will, however, always maintain traces of yours, so spells keyed to the Malfoy family will be accessible to Potter."

Harry glanced at Draco, who smiled softly. Harry grinned back and felt a rush of warmth. For a moment he was almost grateful to Snape for allowing him to share Draco's magic. It made the bond between them seem even stronger.

"Spare me the lovesick staring into one another's eyes, if you don't mind. I have not yet eaten and you are destroying my appetite. Pansy, dear, let me take a look at you. I am sorry to have left you to Lucius's less than tender mercies."

"I'm sure you are," she growled sarcastically.

Snape looked surprisingly contrite, an expression that made Harry actually gape in astonishment—he had not thought the hatchet-like features could bend in such a remorseful fashion. "Truly, I am," Snape replied. "Of everyone here, you deserved his rough treatment the least."

She looked away and shrugged, although the movement made her grimace in pain. "I'm not so innocent. I sought him out in the beginning. I foolishly thought I might make him fall in love with me."

Harry stared at her. "Lucius? You wanted *Lucius Malfoy*?"

Pansy threw him a quelling look. "I could not have Draco!" she snapped. "You made certain of that, Potter. Lucius was almost kind to me in the beginning. Narcissa's death nearly unhinged him and I wanted to help. I think I gave him some comfort, until the madness took over and he began to treat me like just another piece of property. He was incensed by what he saw as Draco's betrayal. When I tried to defend Draco, it was over. That was when he shut me out of his plans entirely and launched his plot with Mulciber."

Harry nearly asked why she did not simply leave, but he remembered at the last moment that Lucius had apparently enjoyed using the Imperius Curse on her, among other things. He looked at Draco, unwillingly recalling the six long months when Draco had been forced to forget Harry. He suddenly felt much less guilty for killing Draco's father.

Snape approached Pansy cautiously and began to run a few diagnostic spells that Harry recognized from his multiple visits to various hospital wards. He followed those with a number of healing spells. Draco removed his wand from Harry's grasp and used it to unlock the blocking spells on Pansy's wand.

"Where is Harry's wand?" Draco asked.

"Upstairs."

Harry's lips thinned. He would rather hand-carve a new wand than ask Snape to return his. Draco handed Pansy's restored wand to Harry with a sardonic grin. Harry recognized the look—Draco trusted him not to turn Snape into a smoking pile of ash… yet.

"There," Snape said with a self-satisfied air. "That should suffice until you reach a suitable healing facility."

"I'm not going back to St. Mungo's," Pansy stated.

Snape shrugged. "There are other places."

Pansy looked at Draco almost helplessly. "Actually, I never thought I would be free of him. I had almost resigned myself to dying at his hands. I… don't know where to go."

Harry managed not to blanch, barely, at the thought of taking Pansy back to London. She would have to stay with them, of course. She was sort of Harry's responsibility now, he figured.

"You may stay here, if you'd like," Snape offered.

Three pairs of eyes turned to him with identical expressions.

The former Potion's Master assumed a familiar scowl. "I could use an assistant," he snapped. "I despise the tedious chore of maintaining my calendar. I would much rather concentrate on perfecting my vintages."

Pansy looked at him speculatively and Harry tried not to think about what the Slytherin girl might have planned for the winemaker. He would rather not know. He would *definitely* rather not know. He exchanged a look with Draco and was pleased to see a similar mortified expression there.

"I might take you up on that, Severus," Pansy purred. "And thank you."

"I think it's time to go home," Draco said.

"Wait, we can't just let him get away with what he did to us!" Harry protested. "He would have let your father kill us without lifting a bloody finger to stop him!"

"What would you have us do, Harry? Do you plan to cast the Killing Curse on him?" He wished Draco's voice was not tinged with amusement.

"No, but a Cruciatus or two might be nice," he gritted.

"Have at it, Potter," Snape taunted.

Harry lifted his wand, but the thought of Draco's disapproval halted him. He lowered it with an oath.

Snape smirked. "I knew you wouldn't have the guts, Potter."

A wrestling match ensued then, and Draco managed to tear the wand from Harry's hand mainly through judicious murmuring of things he planned to do to Harry when they got home. As distractions went, Draco was a professional.

"I still think he should pay," Harry muttered as he followed Draco up the stairs in the wake of Pansy and the damned winemaker. "What are we supposed to do about the Dark Magic? I was

the only one who could break the spells!"

Another snort issued from Snape and Harry's hand itched to grip a wand. *Just a couple of Crucios… Ten or twelve, maybe*? "Egocentric as ever, aren't you, Potter? It must be interesting to believe yourself indispensible to the wizarding world."

Draco's hand on his shoulder prevented Harry from charging up the steps and shoving Snape. Draco said, "It's a fact, Severus. Harry has tried to teach us several times."

"I happen to know the counterspell, Draco."

Harry groaned aloud. Now he didn't dare kill the cretin. Not until they mastered the counterspell, at any rate. "Prove it," Harry sneered.

"At my convenience," Snape admitted. "Would you care for a glass of wine, Pansy? Draco?" The omission of Harry did not go unnoticed.

"You could try to stop provoking Harry, Severus," Draco said dryly.

"What would be the fun in that?"

Draco sighed. "I'm taking us home. Severus, I'll be in touch."

Snape picked up a wooden box from a nearby table and tossed it to Draco. "Potter's wand. I trust you'll not give it to him until you are gone from here?"

"What would be the fun in that?" Draco repeated drolly.

Harry grabbed Draco's arm. "Let's just go," he snapped. Being surrounded by Slytherins was annoying beyond comprehension. He dragged Draco to the fireplace and they Flooed straight back to Grimmauld Place.

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Chapter: 9

CHAPTER NINE

Draco had never been so glad to be home. He felt as though weeks had passed; so much had changed in such a short time. With a jolt of surprise, he realized that Grimmauld Place was more of a home to him now than the Manor.

And all because of Harry.

Harry had retrieved his wand from the box and was casting random spells.

"How does it feel?" Draco asked tentatively.

"Odd. It's sluggish, like I'm using someone else's wand. Yours works better for me now, which makes sense, I suppose, since I have more of your magic than mine."

He sounded slightly regretful and Draco frowned. "I'm sorry."

Harry turned to him quickly and then walked over to wrap his arms around Draco. His eyes were soft. "Don't be. You saved me."

"I should have told you what I was planning. Hermione's plan might have worked. If only I had—"

Harry's fingers pressed against his lips, halting the words. "Don't. I was going mad. You did what you thought best and chances are I would not have listened to you. I was turning into someone I hated. God, Draco, how could you stand it? I was horrible to you."

Draco pushed his hands into Harry's hair and kissed the fingertips that touched his lips. "Because you were still you, despite everything, beneath the excessive power and the influence of Avery's magic. You were still you."

Harry's eyes went dark and then a familiar expression crossed his features, one that made Draco's heart leap. Harry cupped his jaw and then his lips pressed into Draco's, gently, almost achingly sweet.

"I love you," Harry whispered.

Draco swallowed hard, knowing the three simple words could not begin to express what they felt for each other, but acknowledging that it was enough. The rest would be shown. Their kiss was tender at first, but quickly changed to a frenzy of need as Draco recalled how close they had been to making love that morning, after finding Harry restored through Draco's magic.

"Blimey!" The sound made them pull apart, although not hurriedly. Draco smiled at Harry, revelling in the glazed look in his eyes. They both turned to see Tonks in the doorway, smirking at them. She held Lyra on one hip and the toddler babbled and reached her chubby arms out to them. "Nice to see you two getting along, but could you maybe do it in a less public place?"

Draco chuckled and released Harry only to take one of his hands and lead him toward the door. They both paused to kiss Lyra and coo at her. "I'll take her to the park a bit later," Draco promised.

"*We* will take her," Harry corrected. "I've been very neglectful of things around here recently. I mean to change that."

Draco snorted, remembering that Harry had been absent mainly due to his attempt to battle the insane possessiveness that had overtaken him. He swallowed hard for a moment, hoping those days were gone. If Harry continued to demand to know his whereabouts at all times…

"But not in a psychotic, ultra-possessive way," Harry promised and touched Draco's cheek lightly.

Draco cleared his throat. "We'll be going upstairs now," he announced.

Tonks took her burden and headed toward the kitchen. "Yes, I rather thought you might."

"Silencing Charms," Harry muttered. "We must remember Silencing Charms."

Draco took the steps two at a time and Harry matched him. They tumbled into the bedroom and slammed the door, already tearing at each other's clothing. Draco muttered a Silencing Charm as Harry quickly divested him of his garments. Draco lamented the lack of buttons for only a moment, suddenly filled with gratitude at the knowledge that they were home and alive and there would be plenty of buttons in their future.

"I love you, Harry," he admitted and the Gryffindor cocked a feral grin at him.

"Now who's the Hufflepuff?" he asked and pushed Draco onto the bed before climbing over him with a growl.

Draco's laugh was cut off when a bang echoed through the room and he was suddenly entangled in a ridiculous number of red ribbons. They wrapped around his wrists and ankles, pulling him tightly against the bed. He opened his mouth to berate Harry for the foul trick, but Harry's eyes were wide and green—he was similarly bound, tied equally to the bed and to Draco.

"What the hell?" Harry asked in a surprised tone.

Draco was not alarmed, yet. The ribbons were made of silk and did not seem particularly sinister. They were tight enough that he could barely move, but not tight enough to cause pain.

A pair of loud voices rang in the room and Draco closed his eyes with a groan as he recognized them. The Weasley twins. Of course.

"Congratulations, Harry and Draco!"

"You are the lucky recipients of the newly patented Weasley Love Bond!"

"Or Lust Bond. We haven't quite decided."

"Made especially for quarrelling lovers—"

"Such as yourselves." The twins' voices were maddening, but at least they were subjected *only* to the voices. The ginger prats were not present, thankfully.

"After some time in the Weasley Love Bonds, you will either forgive your grievances and make up, or…"

"Or what?" one whispered. "Is there an alternative?"

"I suppose they could stay angry and just lie there for hours, trapped together."

"Do we really want to risk pissing those two off?"

"How long since they've been really mad at us?"

"Weeks?"

"It's time."

Harry groaned and dropped his head onto Draco's chest. "I'm going to kill them."

Draco smiled, more willing to forgive the twins now that he knew the enforced bondage was not deadly, or even dangerous. "I don't know, we might be able to work with this," he said.

Harry raised his head and he snickered. "Hours, they said. I hope you have some ideas, or this could be a long afternoon."

"Well, what can you reach?" Draco asked.

In the end, they discovered the bonds were rather flexible as long as they were only attempting to reach one another and not trying to escape the bed. When they linked hands, the ribbons wrapped around their wrists, tying them together. After Harry Summoned the lime salve from the drawer, the cords loosened enough to allow him to slick Draco's cock with the flavoured concoction (although all forms of *Finite Incantatum* had no effect). When Harry climbed on top of Draco and then lowered himself carefully onto his prepared erection, the ribbons coiled around their thighs, tying them together more symbolically than actually.

Harry braced himself with his palms on Draco's chest as he began to move, keeping his eyes locked with Draco's the entire time. Draco had to remind himself to breathe now and again, gasping with every downward thrust of Harry's body. The look on his face was a far cry from the grim intensity Harry had displayed of late. *This* was the expression Draco had missed, the way Harry looked at him as if his entire world shone from Draco's eyes.

Harry's lips were half parted and his hair was a tousled mess, clinging to his forehead where beads of sweat gathered. Red ribbons coiled from his wrists to his biceps, making him look like a Christmas gift. Draco had never seen anything quite so fetching, but it suddenly became even better when their Bond lines lit up, gleaming on Harry's skin in iridescent gold.

Harry's delighted smile made Draco laugh aloud as his lover's appreciative eyes slid over Draco, who knew his own markings glowed, as well. Draco's wrists were still tied to the bed—apparently the ribbons were only so forgiving—so he could not reach Harry's lovely, leaking cock. It did not seem to matter. Draco used his legs instead, thrusting upward with each downstroke of Harry's. They both knew exactly where to find the sensitive places deep inside of each other and Harry's cries reached a crescendo even as Draco's orgasm began to rush through him, curling his fingers and toes and making him arch his back.

"Draco!" Harry cried and then he tightened impossibly around Draco's cock before spilling pale fluid onto the glowing lines over Draco's abdomen. The timing was perfection and a guttural keening sound tore from Draco's throat as he came, shuddering in unison with Harry while staring straight into his eyes. Draco briefly noted that if he and Harry lived to be two hundred, the sight of him like that would never get old.

Harry sprawled atop him, panting. Draco wished he could hold him, but he was relatively helpless and the bonds showed no sign of loosening. Bloody Weasley twins.

"How long do you think we'll be stuck here?" Harry asked after a moment. His breath felt delicious on Draco's neck, alternately heating and cooling the skin there.

"Did the prats say the word 'hours'?"

Harry chuckled. "We might have to hurt them, if we survive."

"Oh ho, is that a challenge? You think you can kill me with lust, Potter?"

Harry sighed. "No more talk of death, please." He raised his head and frowned at Draco. "Can you ever forgive me for… your father?"

Draco cursed the bonds as he tugged at them, but they suddenly loosened, perhaps sensing his need, and allowed him to enfold Harry in a tight embrace. "There is nothing to forgive, Harry. He would have killed us all. The person he was at Snape's house… that was not my father. And he never would have let us rest. Even in Azkaban, he would have been plotting. Eventually he would have gotten out, somehow." He leaned up to place a kiss on Harry's lips, knowing the words were true, but unable to suppress a pang at the memories—old childhood memories when his father had loved him. It would take time for him to heal newly opened wounds, but at the moment it was Harry that needed comfort.

"You are too good for me, Draco," Harry said when the kiss ended.

Draco smirked. "I know, but I like you, and so I shall have to make do."

Harry nipped at his lower lip in mock irritation. "Prat."

"But, you love me," Draco said as Harry's nibbles turned more amorous.

"I love you," he agreed breathlessly and kissed him in earnest.

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Several hours later, the ribbons showed no sign of allowing them to leave the bed. Draco pulled at them in frustration. "This is really getting annoying. I'm starved. And as much as I adore you, I don't really need to spend eternity with you at quite such close quarters."

Harry had to agree. For a moment, he truly missed the near-limitless power Snape had stripped from him. It was going to take him a while to adjust to becoming just another wizard.

"I'll send the twins a Patronus," he said and cast. As an afterthought, he used another spell to drag a blanket over them both.

After a short wait, during which Draco had thought up several fascinating torments to inflict upon the ginger twins, a knock sounded on the door. "Are you decent?" George called and then laughed.

Harry had already cancelled the Silencing Charm. He yelled out, "Shut up and get in here."

George Weasley entered the room and did not bother to suppress a smirk when he saw them.

Harry glared. "This stopped being interesting a while ago. Now get us out of these."

"And if you ever do anything like this again—" Draco started, but Harry silenced him with a quick kiss, since he hands wouldn't reach Draco's mouth to quiet him. It would not do to provoke the prankster before he released them.

"Are you sure?" George asked. "I can come back later…"

"Get us free, George!" Harry snapped.

"All right," George said, somewhat petulantly. "I'm fairly certain the spell would have worn off, eventually. Luckily, we did come up with a way to deactivate the bonds." He pulled out his wand and approached the bed, but then he looked at Draco warily. "Um… promise you won't kill me. Or extract some horrible revenge. We only did it because you two seemed to be having… issues."

"Yes, well we stopped having issues *before* you tied us up, so next time we will thank you to

mind your own business," Draco growled.

Harry sighed and tried to diffuse Draco's irritated words, lest George decide to leave them there. "Thank you, George. We will not seek revenge. Please let us up; we haven't eaten since yesterday."

George blanched at the mention of eating, most likely realizing that Draco's revenge might consist of never cooking for them again. He quickly muttered a series of arcane words and the ribbons loosened and fell away. "Bye!" George called and fled.

"Coward!" Draco yelled after him.

Harry laughed and planted one more searing kiss on Draco's reddened lips before pushing away from his lover. "Come on; let's have something to eat and then a hot bath. And remember to look for more Weasley traps in the bathroom. I don't quite trust them."

"'Don't quite trust them,' he says," Draco muttered behind him. Harry rooted in the wardrobe and tossed a green silk dressing gown to Draco before donning another. He vaguely wondered how they had ended up with six identical dressing gowns, but bit his tongue on the question. Draco's shopping practices were always beyond his comprehension.

The kitchen was pandemonium. Every pot and pan in the house seemed to be in the centre of the kitchen floor and Lyra was happily banging away at them while Tonks hovered over a cauldron on the counter. She threw them a harried glance and added a powdered ingredient.

"Did she wake you?" Tonks asked loudly.

Harry shook his head and smiled. Draco scooped up the toddler and she started to wail as one of the pots slipped from her grasp and clattered to the floor.

Harry laughed. "Bloody hell, it's good to be home."

"I need a vacation," Draco said dryly.

Author's Note: I know it took me FOREVER to just write the simple closure chapter on this. *grovels* But on the plus side, I've already got a bunny for Part Seven. LOL! It won't be written for a bit, but these boys are my fav and they never me alone for long. *huggles* to everyone who read this series and commented and demanded more! I love you guys!