Storyid: 276824
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Name: Certain
Author: plumeria
Chapter 1 to 5

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Chapter: 1

A/N: Harry/Draco is the primary focus, although there are minor Ron/Hermione references as well
Disclaimer: JKRowling owns Harry Potter.

A/N: Harry/Draco is the primary focus, although there are minor Ron/Hermione references as well. If you're not into **slash,** the exit door is thataway. I do appreciate thoughtful, positive and/or constructive feedback. I do not appreciate "eww" commentary. This is my first foray into writing HP fanfiction.

"You know, it's pretty funny, when you think about it,"

"What?" Ron asked. He and Harry were taking a study break to walk around by the lake. The sun sparkled off the water, and the squid's tentacles gleamed, the colorful streaks gliding by below the calm surface.

Harry grinned. "That you and Hermione ended up together."

"What, just because at first I thought she was a know-it-all, and she thought I was an ignorant git?" Ron chuckled in response.

"Oh, so things haven't changed, then."

Ron gave his best friend a good-natured punch in the arm. "Thanks a lot."

"Ow!" Harry rubbed the sore spot. It was the same place Ulrika Farnswoggle's broom had hit when she'd collided with Harry during Quidditch practice the previous night. But he grinned back at Ron anyway as they sat on some rocks nearby. "Seriously, though. You two are good for each other. I never would have thought it at first. But I'm happy for you."

Ron raised an eyebrow. "Thanks. But what's with the sudden interest in mushy stuff?"

"I don't know. I guess since next year's our final year, I was just thinking about the future." Harry sighed. "And that depressed me. So I started thinking about someone with a happy future - you and Hermione."

"Whoa, whoa!" Ron gestured wildly. "You haven't gone and gotten us married with three kids and a pet Kneazle already, have you? I mean, we're having fun, but nothing is certain, you know."

"I dunno," Harry teased. "You looked pretty certain when I caught you guys kissing behind the statue of Giuseppe the Generous Giant yesterday."

Ron blushed enough so that his face and his hair blended into a solid red shade. "Yeah, well, it's a nice big statue to hide behind.…"

"I'll bet."

Ron scoured his brain frantically, looking for a way to get Harry off his case about Hermione. "You know, speaking of things that *are* certain …" Ron trailed off enticingly.

"What?"

"Well, let's just say that I'm pretty damn sure how *you* feel about a certain … someone."

"What?"

"You're repeating yourself, Harry," Ron said sweetly. "Must be all those plant names we've been memorizing for Professor Sprout. You really must work on maintaining the rest of your vocabulary."

"Well, sorry for not being more articulate," Harry retorted. "It's just that I haven't the faintest notion who you're talking about."

"Oh no?"

"No."

"Why, Malfoy, of course."

"Oh, very funny. Ha ha."

Ron turned his gaze to look at Harry. His jesting expression had faded. "I'm serious."

"You can't mean that." Harry gaped. "I *hate* Malfoy."

Ron shrugged. "Maybe yes and maybe no. But I've been watching the two of you for six years now, Harry. Even if you hate each other, there's a lot more going on underneath. And if only you two would stop being so pig-headed about it for one second, I think it's likely I'd be catching *you* snogging behind that statue of Giuseppe one of these days."

"You've gone starkers. Since when have you been such a fan of Malfoy?"

"I'm not. I think he's a royal pain in the arse," Ron replied.

"Well, so do I."

"Ok, fine. But you also follow him with your eyes everywhere he goes, and not just with an 'I-want-to-turn-you-into-a-turnip-as-soon-as-McGonagall-teaches-us-how' sort of way. You look like you want to be with him. Although"-Ron rolled his eyes-"God only knows why. Fleur put me off blonds entirely."

Harry jumped to his feet. "I'd rather do my Potions essay than listen to this!" He turned to leave.

"Potions, eh?" Ron's voice remained calm, with a hint of amusement. "Interesting that you chose to name the one class we share with the ever-charming Malfoy."

Harry turned around. "I didn't." His voice was low, almost menacing. "I chose it because I hate Snape, I hate Potions, I hate Malfoy, and I'm beginning to hate you for suggesting such a ridiculous notion."

"Look, Harry." Ron rose and went to stand before his seething friend. "Why are you getting so worked up over this if you really don't care about him? If I suggested you were in love with Pansy Parkinson, Goyle, Moaning Myrtle, or even Snape, you would probably have just laughed it off and not thought twice."

Harry just stared Ron, his green eyes dark with reflected turmoil. Then, without warning, the anger went out of him and he sat down on the grass with a thump. Ron joined him more gracefully, folding his long limbs to sit cross-legged beside his friend.

"Harry?"

"Just shut up for a minute." Harry had drawn his knees up to his chest, and he was staring back out over the lake, apparently lost in thought. Ron waited patiently.

"Ever since I met Malfoy," Harry finally admitted, "I felt there was something about him. He was an arrogant bastard, sure. But there was also a raw …" Harry trailed off. "I don't know how to explain it."

"He turned you into a seething tower of lust."

Harry glared at Ron again. "Not when I was eleven, he didn't. But … you're right. I *was* attracted to him, despite everything. Attracted in ways so subtle I didn't even notice that's how I saw him."

"And now?"

"I guess I'd gotten so used to the subtlety, that when I started feeling more, I didn't know what to do. So I just … "

"Denied the fact that you wanted to have your way with him on the Potions floor?"

"Look," Harry said, "you're not helping."

"Sorry." Ron tried to look repentant. "You know, if it makes you feel any better, I'm pretty certain he feels the same way about you."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Oh, sure, that makes me feel a lot better."

"I'm serious! He's watching you just as much as you're watching him."

"I never noticed."

Ron shrugged. "You didn't notice how much you were watching *him*, either. Trust me. He's watching you with the same interest - if not more."

"Even if that were true," Harry replied, resting his chin on his knees, "and I'm not saying I believe you - but even if it were true, what am I supposed to do about it?"

"Well, you can have your way with him on the Potions floor with a clear conscience now."

"Gee, thanks." Harry rolled his eyes in response. "And how is it that you're so understanding about this whole thing, anyway? If there's anyone who'd rather see Malfoy strung up by his toenails rather than happily paired off, it would be you. He's said some pretty awful things."

Ron shrugged. "Hermione," he said simply. "Not that she's a big fan of your heart's desire, either, mind, but we both agreed that you two had something going on. And she pointed out that we should be happy to see you happy. So tell the little twit how you feel and be happy, Harry." Ron grinned mischievously. "At the very least I'll get a good laugh out of seeing you two all acting gooey, instead of trying to kill each other."

Harry sighed as he got to his feet. "You do have a way with words, don't you, Ron?"

"I try." Ron stood up as well, and the two of them started walking back toward the castle. "So," he asked, as they approached the great double doors at the entrance, "what *are* you going to do?"

"For now … my Potions essay," Harry replied. "It's due tomorrow, you know."

Draco Malfoy slumped into his seat at the Slytherin table and sleepily poured himself a glass of pumpkin juice. Ugh. Why did Charms class have to meet so early on Monday mornings? What a way to start the week. He helped himself to some cereal - the wizard version of Lucky Charms - and automatically picked out the miniature metal horseshoes.

"Hey, Malfoy!" Someone elbowed him.

"Hmmm?" Draco looked up groggily.

Blaise Zabini was pointing at the swarm of owls who were making their regular morning deliveries. "Isn't that your eagle owl? Maybe your mum sent you more Cockroach Clusters." Blaise looked dourly at his own oatmeal. "It'd sure beat this glop."

Despite still being half asleep, Draco straightened up and eagerly held out his hand for the anticipated package as his owl landed. But it wasn't a package. It was a letter. Disappointed and annoyed that he was stuck eating cereal after all, Draco still managed to be curious. He didn't get many letters. He grabbed a table knife and slit the envelope.

Malfoy -

Meet me behind the statue of Giuseppe the Generous Giant at 8pm tonight.

Harry

(TBC)

Thanks go to Rhysenn for beta-reading (especially so quickly!), Bennie for her assurances, and Misako for encouraging me to take my first steps into the wonderful world of writing HP fanfiction.

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Chapter: 2

Part 2
"Certain" Part 2

The Longest Day

A/N: Apologies for the unimaginative title. Many thanks to all of you who provided feedback for

part 1 (see note at the bottom). Without that encouragement, I might not have felt so inspired to continue this story. Credit goes to Rave for the song. Which song? You'll know it when you see it, especially if you've read Draco Sinister. g Usual disclaimers: JK Rowling owns all things Potter.

Harry waited nervously for the morning's mail to be delivered, unable to swallow more than a few bites of his own cereal. He'd been up before dawn, slipping off to the owlry to tie his note to the leg of Malfoy's eagle-owl. And now that he'd done so, all Harry could think about was that he must have been crazy to let Ron talk him into it. Was there any way he could possibly intercept the owl before Malfoy received the letter?

Apparently not. The morning mail arrived, thoughtlessly on schedule, and Harry watched with a sinking heart as Malfoy's bird flew straight to the Slytherin table, the familiar envelope attached to his leg.

Ron chose that moment to lean in and make exaggerated kissing noises in Harry's ear. Harry silenced him with a sharp elbow in the ribs as Hermione simultaneously smacked Ron lovingly upside the head on his other side.

"Ow!" Ron muttered, rubbing his sore spots. "Well excuse me for stating the obvious. That is what you want, isn't it? Snogs with-" Ron wrinkled his nose briefly, but smoothed his expression hurriedly as Hermione glared at him. "-snogs with Malfoy?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "I'll thank you for not broadcasting that to the entire school." Then he sighed. "And I don't know *what* I want, really. To say nothing of what *he* wants. What if you're wrong?"

"I'm not," Ron retorted.

Harry knew Ron meant well, but he still couldn't get rid of the nagging doubt. Abandoning all pretense of eating, Harry watched in suspended terror as Draco read the letter. Then the other boy raised his head and stared at Harry across the crowded, bustling room. Gray eyes gazed into green, and held for one long moment. Then Draco nodded, a very small, single up-down motion, but enough for Harry to notice before they both looked away. He was too uncertain to even try interpreting Draco's intent behind those eyes. Instead, he forced himself to take a few bites of toast, and then he gathered his books and fled the Great Hall before he could do something really stupid - like run over and grab the note out of Malfoy's hand, or throw up, or break into a chorus of "I May Be A Tiny Chimney Sweep But I've Got An Enormous Broom," which had inexplicably gotten suddenly stuck in his head.

Herbology was normally a quiet, soothing class; nonetheless it failed to calm Harry's nerves. They were repotting the latest batch of Mandrakes, and somehow Harry managed to knock one of the pots over on his way out of the greenhouse. For the first time he was grateful that Professor Sprout had recently insisted they keep their uncomfortable earmuffs on until they left the enclosure, as the plant immediately began wailing in distress. With a sigh, Harry put his bookbag back down, and stayed behind to help Professor Sprout clean up the mess and soothe

the young Mandrake's hysterical crying. Only after Sprout had checked the plant for concussion and proclaimed it healthy was Harry able to make a mad dash for his next class - Potions.

Panting and sweaty, Harry just barely managed to slide into a seat in the back of the classroom before Snape strode in. He saw Malfoy turn and give him an uncharacteristically curious gaze, eyebrow raised, and Harry was suddenly glad he'd been delayed at Herbology. There was no chance for Malfoy to question him about the note.

As they began the day's lesson, however, Harry discovered that Ron had been right. He really *did* follow Malfoy around with his eyes. How had he failed to realize this before? Even as he measured out turnip paste and dried iguana tongue for his All-Purpose Repellant potion, Harry found himself glancing up constantly to search out Malfoy's silver-blond hair, to watch as Malfoy's long, thin fingers deftly handled the ingredients. He tried not to think about where he'd rather have Malfoy put his hands, and twice he barely managed to pull his eyes away before the other boy could look up and catch him staring.

His reprieve from questioning, however, was short-lived. After the potions had turned an acceptable shade of bilious green, and Snape had worked in his daily dose of criticizing Neville, class was dismissed and everyone filed out, eager for lunch. Since he'd been sitting at the back of the room today, Harry was one of the last ones to leave. As soon as he entered the corridor, Malfoy stepped in front of him and cut off his escape route.

"Go on ahead," the blond boy commanded his ever-present sidekicks, Crabbe and Goyle. "I'll be there in a minute."

"You sure you don't need us to hold him down for you, so you can get a good punch?" Goyle sniggered.

Malfoy's gray eyes narrowed. "Do I look like I need help? Just go." Shrugging, the other two boys lumbered away. Harry could see that, beyond Malfoy, Ron and Hermione were also lingering. One face held worry, the other a suggestive smirk. Harry nodded his head slightly in their direction. *Go on, I'll be fine*. He hoped it was true. God only knew what Malfoy had in mind. Harry couldn't decide if he should be afraid, annoyed, or thrilled to be alone with the blond boy.

"So…" the Slytherin drawled, "what's this about, Potter?" He pulled the scrap of parchment out of his pocket and waved it in Harry's direction.

"You-You'll see," Harry stammered. *Oh, real smooth.*

Malfoy quirked an eyebrow. "A mystery? Well, well well. Not enough adventure for the Gryffindors lately, so you're having to create your own, hmmm? But why drag me into your little game? Trying trick me into a wizard's duel, perhaps?"

Harry sighed. Annoyance was quickly winning over the other emotions. "Look, Malfoy, I just

wanted to talk to you. That's why I sent the note."

"We're talking now. Or has the term 'talk' been redefined and somehow I missed it?"

"Just show up by the bloody statue at eight, all right? I have my reasons." Harry pushed past the other boy and started to climb the dungeon stairs on his way to the Great Hall. He felt rather than saw Malfoy shrug behind him. "Fine. Whatever floats your boat, Potter."

It didn't take long for Harry's annoyance to fade back into nerves. How he got through the rest of the afternoon and evening, he had no idea. His afternoon classes passed in a blur, as did both lunch and dinner. The only thing he remembered was Neville excusing himself rather abruptly at lunch, after some of the Repellant potion on his hands accidentally came off on his food. Otherwise, Harry's entire mind was focused on seeing Malfoy again. At night. Alone.

At a quarter to eight, Harry closed his books and rolled up his untouched Charms homework. "Well," he said nervously to Ron and Hermione, "I guess I should go."

They both gave him what were presumably encouraging smiles, although Harry could see they still thought he was nuts for pursuing Malfoy. "Have you worked out what you're going to say?" Hermione asked.

"Er … no." He tried not to dwell too much on this fact.

"He won't need words, Herm," Ron interjected brightly. "You know…" He gave Harry a winsome smile and then puckered up.

"It's a tempting offer, Ron, but no thanks," Harry snapped.

"Oh, Ron," Hermione sighed, "can't you forget about kissing for one minute? I'm sure that somewhere deep down - deep, deep, deep, down - Malfoy has the ability to carry on an intelligent conversation, right Harry?" She looked up at him and sighed again. "You know, things would probably be easier if it weren't … well, you know … *him.* The only thing I could ever say to Malfoy would just get me into trouble. And it definitely wouldn't be conducive to any sort of romance." Then she shook herself. "Sorry Harry. I want you to be happy, really. But - well, did you have to choose someone so difficult?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "I didn't really *choose* him. It just happened. Recall that until a few days ago, even *I* wasn't aware of it. And yes, I realize I'm probably crazy for being attracted to him. But, if I can quote Return of the Jedi for a minute, 'There is good in him.'" He bit his lip. "I hope."

Hermione nodded. "I hope so, too."

Ron furrowed his brow. "Return of the … what?"

"Muggle movie," Harry explained shortly. The other boy shrugged.

"Well, anyway," Hermione cut in, pasting an encouraging smile back on her face, "I'm sure you'll be fine. Just relax."

"Thanks," he muttered. He headed for the dormitory stairs.

"Uh, Harry?" Ron called after him. "The statue is that way." He pointed out the portrait hole.

"I know. I just want to get something first." He didn't want to announce his plans to use the invisibility cloak to the entire common room. It wasn't that late, so he wouldn't *technically* be breaking any rules by wandering the halls, but you never knew. Harry didn't want to chance being seen by anyone. It was bad enough that Ron and Hermione knew what he was up to.

He quickly located his father's cloak at the bottom of his trunk, then draped it around his lean frame. The familiar liquid material soothed him, somehow, giving him a boost of much-needed courage as he returned to the common room. A whispered request to Hermione got him out through the portrait hole without a hitch. Then, with eight o'clock ticking nearer and nearer, he hurried off toward the fourth floor and his meeting with Draco Malfoy.

TBC evil grin

Many thanks to: Elyra Rainstorm, CatFish, Dsky, Cat Who, Krissy, Sarvihaara, Lassiter, LunarBard, ghost, Gwenn, Black Goddess, Cat Samwise, bracken, CrystalStarGuardian, Hazel, Lelio, Annie, Misako, Keladry of Mindelan, nicki, radamof (I know how you feel about Ron), Warui Nekochan, and Stranger, with special thanks to Sheli for telling me how to upload stories to so my formatting stayed intact. And, of course, to Rhysenn for being my HP Slash Queen and for being a great beta reader, along with Bennie and Hah. You guys are the great Fizzing Whizbees in my life. g
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Chapter: 3

Part 3
Certain, Part 3: Closing the Distance

***A/N:** This segment is Draco POV. Also, the "secret bedroom fantasy" line is the genius of our ever-talented Rhysenn, and can be found in part 2 of her story "Windswept Feelings". If you haven't read that yet, I *highly* recommend that you do so. Pronto.*

***Standard disclaimer**: JKRowling owns all things Potter. I'm just borrowing them for a bit.*

Draco paced in the shadow of Giuseppe's statue, checking his watch for the tenth time. Two minutes before eight. He'd had Quidditch practice that night and, after showering and changing, it had been late enough that it had seemed pointless to sit down with his homework. Instead, he'd headed straight for the fourth floor, hoping Potter would also arrive early, so they could get this … talk … over with. Draco figured it would be just like Potter to do something goody-goody like arrive early.

He sighed. There were so many things to hate about Harry Potter, and being a goody-goody was only one of them. Potter had fame; he somehow always managed to weasel his way out of serious trouble; rules bent in his presence as if suddenly made of rubber - look how Potter had been given the team Seeker position as a first-year! - and people flocked to give him sympathy whenever he got so much as hangnail. None of which had Draco ever experienced. And to make it worse, Potter was a Mudblood, had been raised by Muggles, had another Mudblood as a best friend, and didn't seem to give a damn what pure-bloods like himself thought.

And yet … and yet … as much as Draco hated to admit it, there was something sort of refreshing about Potter. Nauseating, but refreshing. Goody-goodies could be sickening, gullible saps, but they, or rather, this one, could also make for a good, honest change from the perpetual cunning displayed by his fellow housemates. And Potter was strangely handsome to boot. Try as he might, Draco had been unable to stop himself from watching the dark-haired boy. Almost from day one he had been sneaking glances at Potter whenever they were in the same room, on the same Quidditch field, on the same train. However pitiful his parents might have been, they had left him some rather striking features, and Draco had been unable to squelch the attraction he felt.

He had never said anything to anyone about his feelings. Potter was a Gryffindor, for Salazar's sake! Instead, Draco had allowed his natural Slytherin attitude to surface whenever the other boy was near. It wasn't too hard - despite his attraction, he still found Potter damned annoying most of the time. So he concentrated on their discord, even doubling up on the nastiness at times, to keep his less comfortable feelings buried, and temptation at bay. Maintaining the distance, and using Crabbe and Goyle as additional shields, ensured that Draco's cool veneer would never crack. He had a reputation to protect, after all - the last thing he needed was for someone to find out he, a hardcore Slytherin, had an interest in the Hero of Gryffindor.

But now Potter had called this meeting, god only knew why, and they would be face to face. Alone.

The sound of approaching footsteps broke into his reverie. Finally. Draco craned his neck around Giuseppe's enormous stone calves, expecting to see the other boy's wiry frame, but he saw no one.

"Am I late?"

"Gaaah!" Draco jumped, nearly bumping his head on the statue's elbow.

"Er … sorry, Malfoy. I forgot you couldn't see me."

"Well, isn't that convenient?" Draco snarled, as Harry pulled off his invisibility cloak. "And yes," he pointed at his watch, "you are late. Three minutes. Do try to do better, Potter. If you're going to drag me out here, the least you can do is show some courtesy."

"Since when have you and courtesy been nodding acquaintances?" Harry snapped back.

Draco was glad for the animosity. Maybe being alone with the dark-haired boy wouldn't be such a challenge to his resolve after all. "I'll have you know," he said, drawing on countless generations of Malfoy haughtiness, "that my family sets *great* store on courtesy. I had lessons in protocol long before I flew my first broom."

"Could've fooled me," Harry muttered. Then he bit his lip, as if regretting his words.

Draco quirked an eyebrow at Potter's rueful gesture. "So, did we meet here in secret so you could slander my social habits? Or was there some other purpose to this little assignation?"

He was surprised to see Harry flush in response. The Gryffindor boy seemed to have entirely lost his aggressive stance. "Well, um.…" He trailed off.

"'Well, um'?" Draco's biting voice filled the silence. Potter made it too easy sometimes. "'Well, um.' Wellum…William? Let me guess - you've discovered a treasure trove buried beneath a Muggle statue of William the Conquerer, and, being the immensely kind-hearted person that you are, you decided to share the spoils with me."

"No!" Harry cut in. "It's just that, well … what I wanted to say was, er…."

Draco started getting impatient. "Potter, did Longbottom accidentally put a lip-locker curse on you? I know he's incompetent, but surely your know-it-all friend Granger should be able to put it right." He crossed his arms and glared at Harry. "For god's sake, just say it so I can get out of here and finish my homework. Or was that your evil plan? Keep me from my work so I'll look bad in front of Flitwick tomorrow?"

"No, you impatient git, I did not have an evil plan!" Harry bit out. "That's your department." He took a deep breath, obviously steeling himself for something. Malfoy watched the other boy's wildly shifting emotions in mild amusement. What could possibly have gotten Potter so worked up?

"I'm waiting."

Harry blew out his breath. "Fine. You want to know why I asked you here? I wanted to tell you that … I like you."

Draco stared, all traces of amusement gone. Potter couldn't possibly have meant what he thought

it meant. Because if he did…. Oh no. It would mean the end of everything. The strength of Draco's resolve rested solely on their public dislike for each other. He had always assumed Potter truly did hate him, which made things that much easier. But if his dark-haired opponent actually shared his feelings… oh god.

Quickly, he reinforced his armor. "You 'like' me, eh, Potter?" he sneered. "Strange word choice, considering that not two seconds ago you called me a 'git' and implied I was capable of evil plans." He told himself that watching Potter bite on his bottom lip in response was *not* sexy. At all.

"Well, you *are* … I mean … er.… Wait, I didn't mean…"

A flustered Potter was a delectable Potter, a voice in Draco's mind whispered. The blush of embarrassment bore a remarkable resemblance to the flush of arousal, and it was beginning to call an answering warmth from Draco's body. He squelched the thought quickly. "You didn't? Somehow, I don't believe that. Well, well, who would have guessed? Perfect Potter likes evil gits. I can't wait to spread this around the school…."

"No! I mean.…" Sweat broke out on Harry's brow. "Malfoy, don't you … you know … feel something too?"

Draco eyed a sweat droplet as it ran down Harry's cheek and neck, to disappear into the collar of his robes. Every instinct suddenly cried out to follow the damp trail with his tongue, to pull aside the robe so he could follow the droplet as it slid lower … lower…

No! Control. Cocking an eyebrow again, he retorted, "Feel what, Potter?" He was pulling out all the stops, relying on every bit of innate Slytherin craft he possessed to keep Harry frustrated and angry, and himself firmly behind his own walls. "You mean something … *romantic?*" He drew the word out, sneeringly. "Where would you get such a ridiculous notion?"

Harry didn't reply. Draco could see he was mentally cursing whoever *had* given him the impression that Draco felt something for him. He wondered briefly who it was, thinking that he'd better start watching himself more carefully in the future.

"Look, Potter," he drawled, ready to end this little interview and return to the safety of the Slytherin common room, "don't beat yourself up. I mean, look at me. I already know I'm the secret bedroom fantasy of half the school. So, even though you've obviously been woefully misinformed, I'll give you some credit for having great ta-"

"Shhhh!" Harry suddenly jumped, all confusion and woe wiped from his face. "Someone's coming!" In one swift gesture, he grabbed the invisibility cloak off the floor and threw it over the two of them, hiding them from view.

"Potter, if this is just some lame excuse to get close-"

"Will you shut up?" Harry hissed. "I heard footsteps."

Sure enough, within seconds the sound of heavy feet could easily be heard making their way down the corridor. The two boys held their breath, waiting.

Actually, Draco was finding it hard to breathe at all. With no means of shielding himself verbally, pressed against Potter from nose to toe, his defenses were crumbling. Filch came into view, wearing his usual scowl and peering suspiciously into dark corners, but Draco hardly noticed that danger. He was much more aware of the danger posed by breathing in Potter's clean, almost woodsy scent, and feeling the pounding rhythm of the dark-haired boy's heart beat against his own chest. Their thighs were pressed together and-

"Ok, I think it's safe now," Harry whispered shakily, after Filch abruptly disappeared down a side stairwell, and the footsteps had faded into the night. He let the invisibility cloak fall to the ground again.

Draco didn't move. *Safe ... safe ...* No, he wasn't safe. His armor was gone, his control completely shaken. Damn Potter.

Harry turned to face him, heaving a great sigh as he did so. "Look, Malfoy. Clearly this whole thing was a bad idea. I have homework to do and someone to pound, and I need to find a way to transfigure myself into a rock before you can humiliate me tomorrow, so if you'll just excuse me-" He turned to go.

"Hang on a minute, Potter," Draco called. Harry paused, turning his head back to look.

"Let's make one thing perfectly clear." Draco closed the space between them in a few short strides. "If you ever, ***ever*** speak to anyone about what happened here tonight, I will send humiliating Howlers to you every day for the next year. Got that, Potter?"

Harry gave a short laugh. "You don't have to worry, Malfoy. Why would I want to tell anyone what an ass I made of myself tonight? Besides," he frowned, "what are you so worried about? What did you do that could possibly have spoiled your precious reputation?"

"This." Before he could change his mind, before the other boy could turn away again, Draco grasped Harry's robes and pulled him in until their lips met in a searing kiss.

TBC

Heh. Are you all happier now that there's been a big ol' smooch? vbeg What? You want more? Greedy, aren't we? Well, all right. I think I can be persuaded, considering I already have a few things in mind. To quote my fabulous beta-reader, hah, "Will Harry tell Ron? Will our two cloaked lovers meet in mystery? Stayed tuned." Yep - Stay tuned. All will be revealed in the next (and probably final) chapter.

Many thanks to : Lelio (see - you don't need to hang me!), Sheli (wow, thank you!), Rhysenn (always the Queen), Bennie (brave woman!), Padfootsgirl, CrystalStarGuardian, excuetee, Emily (I hurried as much as I could!), Cat Samwise, Tani, ZX, Prongs (wow, I'm honored), Lady Ebonsong, Padfoot Lover, Ruka-chan, kellie (gotta love mutual admiration!), and anime_angel2000 (1 of only 2? I'm blushing. Thank you). Your encouragement and feedback really make a difference. Special thanks go to my beta-readers hah and Bennie. And positive, happy thoughts for Rhysenn, as she finishes her exams.

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Chapter: 4

Certain, part 4: All's Fair…
Certain, part 4: All's Fair….

Disclaimer: JKRowling owns Harry Potter. Lucky woman.

A/N: I heartily apologize for the loooonnnggg delay in getting Part 4 out. I know some of you have threatened to break down the gates and throttle me if I didn't hurry up. Blame my Muse - shortly after posting part 3, she took off for Tahiti, and no amount of Chocolate Frogs was enough to seduce her back. Not only that, but my life recently got quite busy, so I didn't have as much time to devote to Muse-bribing. But here, at last, is part 4. As it turns out, it's not the final chapter after all…. Oh, and it's Harry POV again.

Malfoy - Draco - was kissing him. Was. Kissing. Him. He felt like his brain was still trying to process it all - the feel of Malfoy's warm lips against his own, the way his hand came up behind Harry's neck, pulling them even closer together. At first, Harry was too surprised to respond, but his body quickly overtook his stunned brain. His lips molded to the blond boy's, and they kissed for one, long, lingering moment before finally pulling away. Green eyes locked on gray, questioning.

"What was that?" Harry finally choked out.

Draco rolled his eyes. "Don't tell me you don't know what a kiss is. I'm sure you've seen Granger and Weasley do it often enough."

"I *know* what a kiss is. I just wasn't expecting one from *you*."

"No? Why were you telling me your lovesick story, then?"

The thrill of the kiss was quickly dissipating in the onslaught of annoyance. "Well, I thought … I'd *heard* … that you'd been … that you might feel the same way about me. But then you pretty much told me I was being ridiculous, so-"

Draco crossed his arms over his chest. "Fine, I admit it," he grumbled. "Your little informant, whoever he or she is, actually got something right. I've been watching you, Potter. Have been for years."

Harry's eyes widened. "Y-you have?"

"Yeah. But I meant what I said earlier - if you tell *anyone*, I'll still send you a Howler every day. My reputation as a Slytherin and as a Malfoy would be ruined if people found out."

"So that's it," Harry said bitterly, crossing his own arms and glaring. "You're just going to kiss me once, and then throw me away in favor of your precious reputation."

"I didn't say that."

Harry furrowed his brow. He felt almost as befuddled as he did in Trelawney's incense-filled tower. "So, what are you saying, then?"

"What I'm saying is," Draco replied, a note of exasperation in his voice, "you do know how to keep a secret, don't you, Potter?"

"Yes, I know how to keep a secret," Harry mimicked. "Do you have to be so irritating?"

"I could ask the same thing about you, you know. Don't be a dimwit - I assume you've got brains in there somewhere, or you couldn't have pulled off all those capers over the years. Do I have to spell it out for you?"

Draco stepped in and pressed another brief kiss to Harry's lips. "It means," he said, turning to whisper against the dark-haired boy's ear, "that I'll see you here tomorrow night. Bring the cloak. And keep your mouth shut." And with that, the blond boy stepped back, gave Harry a quick, suggestive smirk, then swiftly turned on his heel and disappeared down the side stairwell.

Harry tottered back to the Gryffindor common room in a daze. He wasn't entirely certain what had just happened, but two things were readily apparent. One - Draco had kissed him; two - the Slytherin boy wanted to meet with him again. For more kissing? Harry wasn't sure - it *seemed* like that was the general intention, anyway. His heart started pounding again at the memory of their first two kisses, and he had to stop and compose himself as he reached the Fat Lady's portrait.

"Bunny slippers" he said, and the painting swung forward to let him in.

The common room was fairly empty by then, most of the others having given up on studying in favor of going to bed. A few Gryffindors remained huddled around a table in the corner, pausing every now and then to measure the length of their parchment before sighing wearily and continuing to write. And there, ensconced in one of the squashy armchairs near the fireplace,

were Ron and Hermione. They hadn't noticed his return yet, as they were too wrapped up in their own snog session. Harry thought briefly of slipping past them so he could get to bed without having to endure their questioning, but the temptation to have some fun proved too great.

Bending down, he retrieved one of the books which had fallen on the floor, held it open above their heads, and slammed it shut with a **bang**.

Ron and Hermione sprang apart in surprise.

"Ehrm… Hi, Harry," Ron stammered, as Hermione tried to shift surreptitiously off his lap. "Hermione and I were just … uh …"

"Practicing sucking poison out, in case Snape makes us ingest our potions next week?" Harry suggested sweetly. "Good idea. You know, I bet Neville would appreciate having that knowledge, too. Let me just go upstairs and get him so you can all pract-"

"All right, Harry, you got us," Ron interrupted, his face crimson with embarrassment. "Well, it's not like we could go behind Giuseppe tonight, what with you being there and all."

"How'd things go, anyway?" Hermione asked. She had quickly composed herself, and was now smoothing her rumpled robes with a casual hand.

Harry abruptly remembered he wasn't supposed to mention what had actually happened; he groaned inwardly at the thought of keeping something this momentous a secret from his two best friends, especially since, against all odds, they had been proven right. But a promise was a promise, and he had no doubt Draco would follow through on his Howler threat if Harry revealed the truth.

He bit his lip and took on a crestfallen expression. "Nothing happened," he murmured.

Hermione looked astonished. *"Nothing?"*

"Nothing."

"Nothing, as in he didn't show up? Or nothing as in … nothing?"

"Oh, he showed up all right," Harry said. "I did what you said - I told him what I felt. And he"-Harry did some quick thinking-"he said it was a ridiculous notion and threatened to send me a daily Howler." Well, it was the truth. Just not the *entire* truth.

Hermione frowned. "Stupid git. I guess he really is the horrible little toad he always seemed to be." Then she looked up at her best friend with worried eyes. "I'm sorry, Harry. We shouldn't have encouraged you to have anything to do with him. I know you're attracted to him and all but … you can do a lot better than Malfoy."

"You want me to hex him for you?" Ron asked, hopefully. "Hermione found a really cool-sounding one the other day. *Verdus otocillius*, or something like that."

"Ron," she said reproachfully, "Malfoy might look better with curly green ear-hair, but I hardly think that will help the situation any. He'll do a lot worse than send a daily Howler if you do that."

Ron sagged in disappointment. "Oh, all right," he finally conceded. "But I want to learn that hex anyway - revenge for whatever prank Fred and George decide to pull the next time I go home."

"You know we're not supposed to do magic at home-" Hermione began, but trailed off as Ron rolled his eyes. "Fine, I'll teach you. But not now." She turned back to Harry. "Sorry, Harry. We got a little off-track there. How are you doing? Do you want to talk about it?"

"Hmmm?" Harry was running the invisibility cloak through his fingers, remembering the feel of Draco pressed against him as they had hidden from Filch. Realizing Hermione had asked him a question, he added hurriedly, "Oh. No, no, I'm fine. In fact, I think the less I talk about it, the better."

"You sure?" Hermione peered at him intently. "You still seem rather distracted. You're not mad at us, are you?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. Look, I appreciate your sympathy, but it's really not necessary. I'll be fine." He gave a small smile, hoping it conveyed the appropriate balance of 'fine' and not '*too* fine'. "And no, I'm not mad. You meant well, after all. Look," he added, yawning hugely, "I'm just going to go to bed now. You two go back to what you were doing. See you at breakfast."

Quickly, before they could object or question him further, Harry disappeared up the stairs to the dormitory, crawled into bed, and pulled the velvet curtains shut. He ran the entire meeting with Draco over again in his head, his stomach lurching as he replayed their first kiss. Then he fell back against the pillows with a sigh, feeling all the day's tensions and emotional highs and lows beginning to drain out of him at last. The note, the anticipation and worry, putting up with Malfoy's usual attitude, and then gut-wrenching embarrassment, heart-pounding ecstasy, and confusion galore. What a day.

Harry yawned again, genuinely this time. Exhaustion was closing in on him, fast. Sleepily, he brushed his fingers against his lips, remembering the imprint of Draco's warm mouth. He tried to think about the Slytherin's cryptic instructions for their next meeting, but was too wrung out to do more than absently wonder what the heck he was getting himself into. Then, with Neville's snores providing their usual background buzz, Harry succumbed to his fatigue and he slept.

In the following days and weeks, Harry discovered exactly what was meant by a "love-hate relationship". After their second meeting, when Draco had made it *quite* clear that snogging was high on his list of priorities, they had begun a clandestine affair. Odd nooks, faked errands and late-night trips to the broom shed all became part of their secret life. At the same time, they

continued to snipe at each other in public as they always had, and with just as much genuine dislike. Draco still drove Harry crazy with his uppity attitudes, tendencies for mischief, and ridicule of just about everything. And it seemed that Draco still despised Harry's fame, choice of friends, muggle connections, and stance against the dark arts.

Either way, Harry observed wryly, their emotions could only be described as passionate - irritation and attraction each provoked their own sort of heated exchange. And, increasingly, he found the line between the two getting very blurry indeed.

"Are we making clothing potions or something?" Ron asked, puzzled, as they took their seats one morning.

Harry pulled his eyes away from the ingredient list in front of him to look at his friend. "What are you talking about?"

Ron held up a button. "I found this on the table."

Harry took the button from Ron and pretended to study it. "Someone probably just cut it off accidentally while they were chopping ingredients," he said, casually pocketing the fastener. He began to unpack his supplies, but not before catching sight of Draco, sitting just one row up. Even from behind, he could tell that the blond boy's ears had turned pink - clearly, Draco had overheard Ron's discovery. Neither of them acknowledged the other, but Harry smiled inwardly as he set up his cauldron, remembering:

The two boys stumbled into the Potions classroom, hardly aware of their surroundings, focused as they were on each other; they bumped into a table with a dull thump. "Shhhh. I heard Snape patrols the dungeons at night," Harry whispered against Draco's mouth. He was fumbling with the fastenings on the Slytherin's robes.

"Not tonight," Draco murmured back. "I overheard him tell Professor Sprout that he'd be at her rooms promptly at nine, and did she prefer cognac or sherry."

Harry pulled back in surprise. "You don't mean …? Yeccchhh!"

"Yeah, I know." Draco grimaced, tugging Harry's robes off. "He could do so much better." Then he silenced Harry's next words with another kiss. "Forget them."

Harry had no problem wiping Snape out of his thoughts as Draco nudged him onto the nearest table surface and impatiently yanked at his shirt buttons….

He fingered the small fastener in his pocket as he listened to Snape explain the day's lesson.

"Today we are going to learn how to analyze a potion's properties. Very useful when someone's used an unmarked substance and you need to know what you're up against. I have here some leaves from one of Professor Sprouts' latest acquisitions, which she gave me last night."

Harry barely managed to choke back a snort.

"You will combine them with the other ingredients on your list in the prescribed amounts. If, by some miracle, you all manage to successfully follow the simple instructions, you should be able to tell me, in precise terms, exactly what effect this plant has." Snape glared beadily around the room. "I think," he drawled "some groups might benefit from a *new* perspective. With other partners." Swiftly, he rearranged the students, putting Hermione with Millicent Bulstrode, Ron with Crabbe, and Harry with Draco. No one dared complain, although most people rolled their eyes as they repositioned themselves. Neville looked almost paralyzed with fear as he moved his belongings over to Goyle's table, but the Slytherin boy just grunted dully.

It was a miracle anyone got anything accomplished at all. Hermione and Millicent spent the lesson glaring at each other, while Ron and Neville struggled to get any assistance from their dim-witted partners. Meanwhile, at their table, Harry and Draco bickered every step at the way. Draco didn't like the way Harry chopped the leaves; Harry told Draco he was stirring too slowly, and neither was willing to budge on his opinion of what the mystery substance was.

"What the heck were you pulling in there?" Harry snarled, the minute class was over and they were safely in the hall and away from Snape's omnipresent stare.

Draco Malfoy turned his cool gray gaze on his accuser. "Me? Potter, you're delusional. If there was a problem, it was all your fault."

Harry gave a derisive snort. "You think you can get away with anything, even doing the stupid analysis *wrong*, just because you're Snape's pet."

"Pretty strong words coming from someone who's used his fame to get away with practically everything." Malfoy was starting to lose his cool demeanor, his gray eyes sparking in the torchlit hallway.

"What? I've never-"

"Never asked for special treatment," the Slytherin boy filled in, mockingly. "Yeah, yeah, you say that all the time. But it doesn't matter, Potter - you get it anyway. Heaven forbid Snape treat you like a mere mortal. You just can't handle the fact that I was right."

The two boys were nearly shouting now. Eyes locking on eyes, chests heaving with indignation, stepping closer and closer with each volley…. Fire was raging through Harry's veins; his emotions demanded an outlet. Malfoy opened his mouth to say something else and Harry was suddenly overwhelmed with the impulse to shut him up with a kiss, to find release for his storm in the person who had caused it in the first place. His gaze shifted to Malfoy's lips as he stepped forward and-

"Harry, forget him," Hermione interjected worriedly, appearing at Harry's side. "Snape's going to

hear you any minute, and you know whose side he'll take."

Harry blinked. He'd forgotten they were in full view of everyone. And he'd almost-

"Come on," she urged, "He's not worth it." Hermione shot Draco a look of pure poison as she tugged Harry away by his arm. "Let's just go get some lunch, ok?"

"You know, Potter," Draco taunted, as Harry walked away, "you're not nearly as interesting an adversary on the ground as you are on a broom."

Harry spun around. "Funny you should say that," he snapped. "If you recall, when we're on brooms, I always win."

He turned back to join the others as they made their way to the Great Hall and listened as Hermione chattered excitedly about the new troll uprisings they'd be learning about in their next class. But inside he was already anticipating meeting Malfoy in the broom shed that night.

TBC

I know I said this would be the last chapter, but when I was writing it, it just kept growing and growing and…. So in the interest of posting before you all lynched me for the extended delay, I decided to chop it into 2 parts. Chapter 5 (which is already half-written!) should be the last. I think. ;-) Alas, you'll have to imagine what happens at the broom shed yourself - Ch. 5 skips ahead in time a little. Will Ron and Hermione ever learn the truth? What will happen to our boys as the school year comes to an end? Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Ok, so I probably won't be able to answer that last one, lol - but the others … well, you'll have to wait and see!

Thank you so much to **lore** (you'll find out next chapter!), **Gabrielle, Eternal Haven** (yes, my Ron is probably a little OOC, but I wanted to focus on his friendship with Harry), **ZX, Allie Potter, CrystalStarGuardian** (see, it ended up not being the end after all!), **Mei mangartist 2001** (see - embarrassing R/H!), **SophieB** (of course it will work out!), **Brightstar, Misako** (I remembered you this time!), **Ms. Gwyn** (let us know if you write something), **Padfoot Lover, Prongs, Cat Samwise, GIGO, Tani, UserFriendly, Lelio, PyroR., Ema Lee, Su Yi** (I'm honored that you've been re-reading it!), **California Love** (I'm glad you were enjoying yourself despite the fact that it's slash), **PepperjackCandy** (hi!), **Escagirl** (no outright sex in this fic - but you can imagine all you want! g), **Di-chan** (hmmm. Surprised Draco. Interesting idea! Although Harry made the first verbal move here, at least), **Raven Mars, Tiami kireitennyo** (thank you - I'm glad you've enjoyed it), **Shadow Maxwell-Yuy, Pink Bunny, Banance, SilvaraMaxwell, Robin, Draco Skywalker** (fabulous username! - and thank you for making this a favorite!), and **Tabitha** (I love mutual admiration, don't you? g). Your feedback means more to me than words can say; I'm honored that you've followed this story and hung in there during the long wait for part 4. Thank you!

Special thank yous to my beta-readers **hah** and my HP-slash-queen **Rhysenn**. And to **Bennie**, who gave me feedback along the way, encouraging my Muse to finally return. A large bar of

Honeyduke's chocolate to you all!

Please leave a review; it only takes a minute, and means a lot to me. :-)

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Chapter: 5

Certain, part 5: Resolution

Rating: PG

Disclaimer: Always and forevermore, J.K. Rowling owns Harry Potter.

A/N: Here, at last, is the final installment of Certain. Alternating Harry and Draco POV. Many thanks to *everyone* who encouraged me throughout this series. Major appreciation goes to HP slash queen Rhysenn, and also to hah and Bennie for their beta-reading skills.

Harry paused outside the portrait hole and checked that his robes were straight and his hair … well, that his hair wasn't any more mussed than usual. He gave the new password, ("Hornswoggle") and slipped into the common room.

"Hey, Harry, where've you been? The rest of the team came back over an hour ago!" Ron called from his place by the fire.

"I stayed behind to polish my broom and get it ready for Saturday's match," Harry lied smoothly. In the last couple of months he'd gotten rather good at that; the thought made him grimace mentally - perhaps he'd have made a good Slytherin after all.

"For an hour?" Hermione pulled her nose out of her book and looked at him questioningly.

"Oh, sure," Ron said, before Harry had a chance to think of a good reply. "You know how valuable his Firebolt is - Harry needs to take good care of it if he wants it to last. Can't just go running around buying new ones, you know." Then he rolled his eyes. "Well, *you* probably could, Harry, but - really! Much better to use your zillions of galleons to keep Honeyduke's and Zonko's in business, eh?"

Harry smiled. He knew how much Ron loved his favorite shops. "Exactly." Then he checked his watch and sighed. "I suppose I should get some studying done before bed. Hang on, let me get my books."

Once upstairs, Harry shut the dormitory door and leaned against it with a groan. He was starting

to feel confused and was wishing he had someone to talk to. "I need a shrink," he said, turning around to face the small mirror that hung on the back of the door.

"Now, now, dear, that's a bit harsh, don't you think?" his reflection replied soothingly.

Harry ran his hands through his hair in frustration. "I'm involved with someone who is a complete git," he muttered. "Once I found out how Draco felt about me, I thought getting together with him would change things; you know, that we'd start to find common ground and forget our differences and stuff like that. Be friends, even if we couldn't act like it in public. But nothing's changed, not really. And I still want him. I want him and I hate him, all at once. Doesn't that sound like someone who needs therapy?"

His reflection only shrugged unhelpfully.

With a sigh, Harry turned away from the mirror and began to gather his books and writing materials. Everything seemed to remind him of his predicament, taunting him. His unfinished essay for Potions. The Care of Magical Creatures assignment on dragons. What was left of a torn piece of parchment; he'd ripped off a small scrap to write Malfoy a note explaining why he'd be late to one of their assignations. "Why me?" he muttered. "Why couldn't I just find some nice Hufflepuff or something?"

"Who're you talking to, Harry?"

Harry spun around at the sound of Ron's voice. "Er … no one. I mean … I was just talking to myself."

"Ah. Well, you know, you really only need to worry when you start answering back," Ron quipped. Then he sobered a little. "Anything wrong?"

"No."

"Oh, come off it, Harry. I can tell you're lying." Ron came further into the room and sat on the edge of Harry's bed. "What's up?"

"I've just … I've just got something on my mind," Harry stalled. "Nothing you need to worry about."

"So I shouldn't worry about your twisted little affair with Malfoy?"

"What?" Harry stared at Ron. "That's ridic- You couldn't possibly mean- I have no idea what-" The red-headed boy merely grinned knowingly at him. "How-how did you know?" he finally mumbled.

Ron shrugged. "Your dreams."

"Dreams?"

"Yeah, you've been having some pretty … er … interesting dreams lately, I daresay. Very restless. And you've moaned Malfoy's name a couple of times." Ron shuddered. "After the first couple of times, I figured it wasn't a nightmare - you'd have told us if he was threatening you or something."

Harry buried his face in his hands. "Oh, God. Did anyone else hear? Did I say anything else?"

"To answer both questions, not that I've heard. You know Neville - he sleeps like a dead man. And his snores drown out just about everything else, so I doubt Seamus or Dean noticed your … er … behavior, either. Besides, I only heard you the first night because I'd gotten up to get a drink of water. Like I said, I thought maybe you might be in trouble or something, so I made a point to keep one ear open after that."

"Damn," Harry muttered, pulling his hands away to look at his friend. "So, I guess that's why you covered for me when Hermione questioned my excuse tonight."

"Wellllll…."

Harry looked at Ron suspiciously. "What?"

"Er … Hermione already knows." Ron looked uncomfortable. "Ok, ok, fine. I told her the bit about your 'nightmares', 'cause I thought Malfoy had found some way to haunt you. I thought maybe she'd know some subtle, untraceable curse we could put on him to make him stop. But she was the one who guessed what was really going on."

"So - you guys knew I was lying all along? You were just making sport tonight?"

"Yeah, basically. Well, for the last couple of weeks, anyway." Ron grinned as Harry scowled. "Oh, come off it, Harry. You've been deceiving us for ages, and you've ribbed us plenty of times about *our* relationship. We deserved to have a bit of fun."

Harry merely *harumphhed* in response. Ron had a point, but still….

"So, it's really true, then," Ron asked, breaking into Harry's grumpy thoughts. "You and … and … Malfoy?"

Harry shrugged. "Yeah, I guess."

"You *guess?* You don't know? You're just going around snogging people in the dark, without knowing who they are?"

"No, it's Malfoy, all right," he sighed. "But it's just so messed up. I mean, I think he gets hotter every day, and when we're together it's just-"

"Whoa! Waaaayyy too much information, Harry," Ron interrupted with a shudder. "There are some things about you, and *definitely* things about Malfoy I never want to know, ok?"

"Sorry," Harry looked chagrined. "It's just that - well, you've seen us. We can't stop sniping at each other, no matter what else goes on between us."

"You mean all that bickering is for real, still? We figured you were just faking it, once we guessed what was really going on."

Harry sighed. "No, it's real all right. I'm beginning to think all the sparring is like a twisted form of foreplay, for the effect it seems to have on us." He smiled ruefully as Ron turned slightly green. "Sorry, Ron."

"Um… Maybe I should just let you talk to Hermione about this," Ron said, getting up. "I think if I get too many images of you and Malfoy … together … *I'll* be the one having nightmares."

"Gee, thanks." Harry rolled his eyes.

Ron shrugged apologetically. "I'm sorry, Harry. I know you're together and all, and I want you to be happy. But he just- He's … well, he's *Malfoy*, you know? And I just can't seem to get past that. Talk to Hermione; I'll always be your friend - you know that, right? - but she's the better listener when it comes to this sort of stuff." He gave a small smile. "Although she probably won't hesitate to just haul off and slug him again if she thinks you're unhappy. Remember when she did that, back in our third year?"

Harry smiled at the memory.

The hallways were crowded, packed with a sea of black-robed students making their escape after morning classes. Draco Malfoy grimaced as he made his way down the corridor toward the Great Hall for lunch, constantly adjusting his steps to avoid being bowled over by the lumbering Goyle. It had taken him a long time to get used to all the jostling, and he still wasn't that thrilled by it. He was used to space. The Malfoy mansion was huge; he had his own room at home, an enormous chamber that took up nearly an entire wing. And because most wizards feared and respected the Malfoy name, he had always been given a wide berth by everyone, both at school and away. No one got too close, either emotionally or physically. Well, Harry had crossed that physical barrier, but-

Something or someone suddenly yanked at his left sleeve, *hard*. Caught off-guard and off-balance, Draco was unable to stop the momentum as he tumbled into a small storage closet, which had just opened up. Someone slammed the door shut, plunging everything into darkness.

Draco whipped out his wand. *"Lumos,"* he hissed. Harry's face immediately came into view, his green eyes glittering in the wandlight.

"Potter, it's broad daylight and there are a million people around." Draco grumbled, reaching out to ignite the candle stub that sat on a nearby shelf. He extinguished his wand and stuffed it back in his pocket. "Couldn't you have just sent me a note if you wanted to move our next … meeting …up?"

Wordlessly, Harry held up the invisibility cloak and then let it drop. "Relax. No one saw anything," he snapped.

"Yeah, but I'm sure going to have some explaining to do about why I didn't show up for lunch," Draco countered. Then he paused as he took in the way the low light illuminated Harry's features; nearly all their meetings had been at night, and his body was well conditioned to react whenever Harry and dim lighting coincided. Suddenly, his appearance at the Slytherin table seemed a lot less important. "On the other hand," he murmured silkily, pushing Harry up against the closed door and pressing close, "Crabbe and Goyle will probably be too distracted by the promise of steak and kidney pie to notice if I'm a bit late."

He leaned in to kiss Harry, feeling the familiar jolt run through his body as their lips met. No matter how many times they did this, there were always plenty of sparks between them. It was almost as if their polar-opposite traits and high-adrenaline encounters fueled a true electricity when the two boys came together.

But just as Draco was starting to lose himself in the kiss, the Gryffindor boy suddenly put a hand up against Draco's chest and pushed him back.

"Malfoy," he whispered, panting a little, "that's not why I dragged you in here."

Draco stepped back, covering the unexpected sting of rejection with his trademark protection - sarcasm. "Of course not, Potter," he drawled, exchanging his purr for a harsher tone. "I know how you like to build up your snitch-catching muscles by randomly yanking people into dark closets. It's well-known all over the school."

"Be serious," Harry replied, a little more steadily. "I just - I wanted to talk to you."

Draco folded his arms across his chest. "Well? Go on, then."

Harry bit his lip. "Do you like me?"

"In case you somehow failed to notice, I was just trying to kiss you. Does that normally mean something different to you?"

"Yeah, I know you like me - physically. But what about the rest of me? Do you still hate me for … well, for all the reasons you seemed to hate me before we started all this?" Harry ran a hand through his hair. "I guess what I'm trying to ask is - is this all there's going to be between us?"

"What, you want a marriage proposal or something?"

"No! Damn you - see, this is what I'm talking about. We have this 'relationship', for lack of a better word, going on in private, but whenever we're not - you know…."

"Bringing each other to new levels of sexual rapture?" Draco said bitingly, rolling his eyes at Harry's sudden prudishness. "Come on, Potter, you're a big boy now. You can say it."

"Fine," he snapped. "When we're not immersed in major make-out sessions, we're constantly biting each other's heads off."

Harry's last words brought an immediate image to Draco's mind, and he leered suggestively in the other boy's direction.

"Come off it, Malfoy. You know what I mean." Harry sighed. "It just seems so twisted to hate each other by day, and be stripping each other naked in some dark corner by night. I- I just wondered if there was any way we could be find some middle ground. You know - maybe even be friends."

A new image sprang to Draco's mind, this one not at all suggestive. A picture of himself and Harry going around with cheery, joined-at-the-hip chumminess; just like the relationship Harry currently had with Weasley and Granger. Always together, hardly ever a moment's trouble between them. Booorrrring. The thought of morphing his electric, spiced-up situation with Harry into something so nauseatingly clean-cut was appalling. His reaction was instant and instinctive.

"I should have known," he spat, stepping as far away as the cramped confines would allow. "You really *are* a goody-goody through and through, aren't you, Potter? I thought you were having fun, taking this walk on the wild side. Giving in to your baser instincts for a change. But now you want to turn it into something boringly domestic. Yeah, I can see that working real well. Sorry, Potter, I don't think I can come to your tea parties and play nice with your little friends." He bent down to retrieve the invisibility cloak, which he threw at Harry. "Here, put this on. I'm leaving."

Harry looked dazed, but his Quidditch reflexes remained intact; he caught the cloak without looking, his bewildered eyes fixed on Draco. "But-"

Draco gave Harry one final glance over his shoulder as he started to turn the doorknob. "I am who I am, Potter, and that's a Malfoy and a Slytherin. You want more, go find it with some kiss-ass Hufflepuff or something. We're through."

And without another word, he slipped out of the closet and rejoined the cocoon of his fellow Slytherins in the Great Hall. He should have known better than to get involved with a Gryffindor. It would be good for him to devote all his time to his housemates again. They, at least, knew the importance of Slytherin pride and power. And distance.

In the following weeks, however, Draco found, to his consternation, that he was actually frustrated by the homogeny of Slytherin attitude. After the near daily contact with his antithesis,

he found his housemates' uniformly elitist attitude…. Well, it was comforting, in a way, but also boring - as boring as he'd imagined Harry's proposal to be. In Slytherin, no one challenged him - no one dared to. They were all too interested in being his friend, as if some of the Malfoy image would rub off on them by their proximity.

Friend. Draco snorted, ignoring the sideways glances of the other students in his common room. He had always called Crabbe and Goyle and many of his other housemates "friends", but, when he really stopped to think about it, it was all a matter of power. Everyone was always jostling for power, for control, for the top position. And, true to their Slytherin nature, they would use any means to achieve their goal. Draco liked the challenge of jockeying for, and maintaining, his position; for the first time, however, he actually began to wish someone would just be with him for *him*, not for the prestige and honor a Malfoy associate got. Had anyone ever just wanted to know Draco?

He shook his head angrily. God, now he was beginning to *sound* like Potter. He didn't want to become some namby-pamby Gryffindor. He. Was. A. Slytherin. Dammit. And a Malfoy. He liked space. Emotional space and physical space. Honor and privacy. Since when did he care about frivolous relationships? About other people liking him for reasons other than power? About people getting to know him?

Since Harry.

His stomach still knotted up just thinking about the goody-goody relationships Harry seemed to have. But - there wasn't any other sort, was there? A middle ground between power plays and sugary sweetness? Harry had suggested such a thing. But Harry also honestly drove him crazy at times - ok, a lot of times - with his stubbornness and Gryffindor-based views; their differences were undeniable. Draco stopped to consider the situation. He hadn't exchanged more than ten words with the black-haired boy since that day in the closet, and even then it had only been about their most recent in-class Potions assignment. Could they really get along outside of a purely physical relationship?

Was it worth finding out?

As the weeks passed and final exams loomed, Draco decided it was.

"Harry, I think we're going to go inside for a bit," Ron said with a yawn. "It's kind of hot out here; it's making me sleepy."

"Yes, and we should practice the Incoquo Charm some more," Hermione noted, packing her things into her bag. "I didn't want to do it out here, since Filch would skin us alive for turning the grass blue - or any color, really - but I know I really need to practice. Flitwick said he'd give bonus points for certain colors, and my periwinkle needs work. We can't afford to fall asleep now." She rose to stand beside Ron. "Coming, Harry?"

Harry didn't bother looking up from his Transfiguration book. "In a minute," he replied. "I just

want to finish my notes for this chapter. I'll come in as soon as I'm done."

"All right," Hermione replied, as she walked away with Ron. "Don't be long. But don't skip the bit about transfiguring poisonous creatures, either. That's important."

"I won't." Harry stretched out on his stomach to read the rest of his chapter, scratching out notes on his parchment as he went. Then, with just two pages to go, a shadow suddenly fell over him.

"Hang on, I'm coming," he muttered, a little crossly. Honestly, Hermione's enthusiasm for Charms practice got a little out of hand sometimes.

"Really, Potter? Out here in the open? How crass."

Harry looked up at the sound of the voice. "Oh, it's you, Malfoy," he grimaced. "I should have known you'd twist my words. So, to what do I owe this honor?"

Draco Malfoy dropped gracefully to the grass near Harry's side. "Well, to quote you, 'I just wanted to talk to you.'"

"About?" Despite his anger, his stomach flipped, as it always did, to have the sleek, blond-haired boy so near.

"You know all that stuff you said to me a few weeks back? About middle ground? What did you mean by that?"

Harry rolled to his back and propped himself up on his elbows. "Pretty much what it sounds like - something between hating each other and secret snog sessions. Talking. Hanging out. Things like that."

"Would we have to be nicey-nice all the time like you are with Granger and Weasley?"

Harry snorted. "You obviously haven't watched us that carefully. There've been times over the years when we've hardly spoken to each other." Then he shrugged. "But, to answer your question - I hardly think that's likely, do you, Malfoy? 'Nice' isn't really in your vocabulary. Besides, I thought you didn't want to have anything to do with me."

"I changed my mind."

"So that's it? You insulted my friends and my idea, and said we were through. And now you're back saying you changed your mind? Why should I believe you?"

"Fine, don't." Draco started to get up. "I just thought maybe you had a point with that middle ground idea, but I guess not."

Harry watched him prepare to leave, feeling the familiar frustration rising within him. What was

it about Malfoy - about them together - that drew such strong reactions from them both? Strong attraction and strong conflict. And yet … Draco had been willing to make a step toward the middle. Harry could only imagine what that must have cost him. How could he offer any less? "Wait," he said quickly, before Draco could get very far.

Draco turned at the sound of Harry's voice and looked at him, gray eyes questioning. "Yes?"

"Were you serious about wanting us to spend more time together? Try to be friends?

The Slytherin boy walked back to where Harry sat. "I'm always serious, Potter."

Yes, Harry realized, he was. Draco took everything seriously, even his troublemaking.

He thought for a moment. "Come visit me this summer."

"What?"

"Come visit me. At my aunt and uncle's house. Look, no one will know you there, so you won't have to worry about anyone seeing us or anything. We can just hang out and do stuff."

Draco seemed to still be processing the concept. Come visit you - in a muggle home?" He wrinkled his nose a little.

"Hey, you wanted to know more about me, so here's your chance. Besides, I hate these particular muggles. You can insult them all you like. In fact, be my guest."

Draco laughed. And it was a genuine laugh, not a cruel or mocking one. It was the first open expression of amusement Harry had ever seen on the Slytherin boy. "Hmmm. That could be fun."

"Yeah. And if I mention that you come from a powerful wizarding family, they'll probably be too scared to fight back. They'll just leave us alone." Harry tried not to dwell on how true this statement was, nor on the fact that that power had traditionally supported Harry's worst enemy.

Malfoy's expression shifted from amused to suggestive. "How alone?"

Harry grinned, his focus back on Draco. "Alone enough." He realized he was going to have to do some fancy footwork when he first got back to the Dursleys, to get them to agree to this visit in the first place. A few well-placed Sirius-references would probably get him grudging permission. But …

"What about your dad, though? I'm sure he won't be too keen on your spending any time with me."

Draco waved a hand dismissively. "I'll deal with it." Then he looked serious again. "Are you sure about this, Potter?"

Harry didn't immediately reply. Instead, he got up and pulled Draco behind a nearby hedgerow. After a quickly whispered *Averto* Charm to ensure privacy, he leaned in and gave Draco a long kiss. Then he smiled. "I'm certain."

End.

7/31/01 (Harry's birthday!)

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