Title: Shuffling Out Of Hell

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Rating: NC 17

Pairing(s): Harry and Draco friendship and preslash.

Warnings: Talk of self neglect, self harm, substance abuse and addiction and suicide.

Word Count: ~23,500 words.

Mental Health Issue: Depression. PTSD. Substance Abuse.

Summary: A letter from Narcissa gets Harry thrown into Draco's life in a way he could never have imagined.

Author's Notes: Thank you to Delphi, for the awesome beta, and [info]qumabh for holding my hand, cheering me on, and generally being amazingly encouraging. Thank you Cassie, for the extension and encouragement!

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Provence, April 1999.

Dear Mr Potter,

I am writing to ask whether you would be able to offer me some assistance. As you know, I chose to go into voluntary exile with Lucius after the War Trials. Draco remains in England, and I had hoped he would be able to rebuild his life, free from the shadow of his father's misdeeds. I have grown worried over the

last few months, however. Draco's letters have become perfunctory in content and more despondent in tone, and a few weeks ago they stopped entirely. Under the terms of Lucius's exile I am not allowed to visit England, and I am at a loss as to what to do. I would be exceedingly grateful if you could visit Draco and see if he is well.

According to our ancestral laws at least one Malfoy is required to call the Manor estate home, or the blood wards that protect the house and its magics will dissolve. Draco refuses to live in the Manor, and so he is living in the gamekeeper's cottage on the edge of the estate.

With gratitude,

Narcissa Malfoy.

Harry poured another cup of coffee and reread the letter. After he'd testified at Draco Malfoy's trial and heard the Wizengamot pronounce the verdict of 'acquitted on the grounds of coercion', he'd not given him much thought. Any thought, really. He'd been busy. Funerals, memorials, grieving, they'd all taken time. Glancing up at the date at the top of the letter, he realised it had been nearly a year since the end of the war.

He looked round at his refurbished kitchen. He'd cleaned and tidied and fixed up Grimmauld Place by hand – well, by wand, and a lot of books on carpentry spells, actually. He'd found the process strangely cathartic. Before that, he'd taken Ron and Hermione on holiday to a wizarding resort in the South Pacific. They'd spent a month in paradise, reading books and lying on the beach, before the boredom overcame him. He spent a month in Romania with Charlie, working with dragons by day and learning about his sexuality by night. He smiled at the memories. He had decided to give himself a year to do what he wanted before making up his mind what to do next. His year was nearly up, and the only conclusions he'd come to were that sex was brilliant and he didn't want to be an Auror.

He put his mug in the sink. He didn't have anything else to do today, so hopefully he'd be able to pop in, ascertain Malfoy was still his breathing annoying self, write a reassuring note to Mrs Malfoy, and be done in time for lunch. Easy.

Ignoring the uneasiness in his stomach at the thought of returning to the Malfoy estate, he shoved his feet into his trainers and tied the laces. He still hadn't got used to the feeling of being sucked through a tiny tube and he stumbled as he Apparated in front of the Manor gates. He stared at them, wondering how he was supposed to get in. He pushed on them tentatively. Nothing.

A house elf bearing a startling resemblance to Dobby appeared on the other side of the gate. "How can I be helping please?"

Harry smiled. "I'm here to see Malfoy. Er, Draco Malfoy."

The elf's eyes widened and he shook his head. "Mr Malfoy does not have any visitors. Sorry, but you must be going."

"Oh. Well, you see, Narcissa Malfoy wrote to me and asked me to visit Malfoy. Draco. Asked me to visit Draco." Harry took the folded-up piece of parchment out of his pocket and held it out towards the house elf.

"Mistress Narcissa is asking you to? But Mr Draco says no visitors." The elf looked like he was about to punish himself for this dilemma.

"What's your name?" Harry asked, kindly.

The elf's eyes widened still further. "I is Tibby, sir."

"Hello, Tibby. I'm Harry. Why don't you let me in the gates and show me to Draco's cottage? Then if he opens the door to me, that's his choice."

The elf nodded and the ornate gates opened silently. Harry followed Tibby onto a path that led along the

inside of the estate walls. After about a hundred metres they arrived at a small stone cottage, with an archway around the front door twined with climbing roses. Harry thought it looked very picturesque.

“This is where Mr Malfoy is living, sir.”

“Tibby, are there any wards on the cottage?”

The elf shook his head. “The gates will open for you when you are being leaving.”

“Thank you.” Tibby disappeared, leaving Harry looking at the charming cottage. He realised he was still clutching Mrs Malfoy’s letter. He shoved it back into his pocket and approached the cottage. The front door was painted a cheerful red, and had a heavy old-fashioned knocker. Harry lifted the knocker and rapped several times, the sound reverberating in the stillness.

He stood there with his hands in his pockets waiting for the door to open. When nothing happened, he knocked again. Still there was no response, nor were there any sounds from within. He knocked a third time, forcefully enough to cause the door to vibrate slightly in the frame. Stepping back from the door, he looked more carefully at the cottage. Tibby had given no indication that Malfoy was not in, but Harry noticed that all the curtains were closed.

Walking round the cottage, he saw that all but one of the windows were tightly shut and their curtains closed. A path in the back garden led up to another door with filthy window panes. He wiped one with the sleeve of his jacket and pressed his face up close to the glass. He could see a kitchen, all the surfaces covered with grimy crockery, the floor and walls as soiled as the glass he was looking through.

He turned the door handle, unsurprised to find it locked. “Malfoy!” he shouted. “Are you in there? Open the bloody door, will you?”

Harry made several more circuits of the cottage. The upstairs windows also had their curtains closed. After banging once again on the front door, he returned to the back entrance. Taking off his jacket, he carefully wrapped it round his fist, punched through one of the glass panes of the door, reached in, and turned the key on the inside. The shooting pain in his knuckles made him wonder if he should have used

a spell to get in. Then again, punching stuff was satisfying. He smiled as he remembered the satisfaction he used to get from punching Malfoy at Hogwarts.

Harry murmured reparo and the bits of broken glass flew back into the door. He opened the door and stepped cautiously into the kitchen. “Malfoy? Are you here? Your mother sent me to check you’re still alive!” He pushed the door open slowly and stepped inside, looking round the kitchen in disgust. He was no neat freak, but this stank. A moldy bowl of fruit on the counter swarmed with hundreds of tiny flies. He glanced into the sink and swallowed a retch at the sight of maggots crawling over the abandoned food and dishes.

Harry brought his arm up, pressing his sleeve against his face to cover his mouth and nose and headed through the kitchen door into a hallway. On his right stairs led up to the first floor; to his left, leaning against the inside of the front door, squatted stacks of rolled up newspapers and unread letters. Bending down he recognised several in Mrs Malfoy’s handwriting. He supposed these were the ones that had gone unanswered.

He walked straight ahead, through the other door out of the hallway and found himself in what was probably the sitting room. It didn’t look like anyone had sat in it recently; the sofa and armchair were covered in dirty clothes, coffee-stained books and empty crisp packets. Yet more plates and mugs littered the surfaces and old newspapers and magazines covered the floors and seats. He recognised Malfoy’s Hogwarts trunk, sitting in a corner, covered in a thick layer of dust. Harry saw his own crumpled face staring back at him from a Daily Prophet that had been balled up and thrown into a corner.

The worry that had been forming since his knocking had gone unanswered tightened in his stomach when he saw what looked like blood stains running down the wall beside the fireplace. He walked over and examined them closely, only to let out a relieved sigh when he realised it was red wine, or maybe port. Smashed fragments of glass covered the carpet underneath the stains. The dampness had made the wallpaper start to peel away from the wall, and it smelt musty and mouldy. The whole downstairs smelled sad, somehow.

Harry closed his eyes at the thought of living in this tip. It looked like no one had been down here in weeks, yet the house elf and Narcissa’s letter both confirmed that Malfoy lived here. He supposed they must be right.

Harry walked back out the door of the living room and stared at the staircase. Like the rest of the house it was dusty and dirty. He supposed he would have to go upstairs, but he was beginning to be very uneasy about what he might find. Somehow, this wasn't turning out to be as simple as he had hoped.

Just as on the ground floor, there were two doorways at the top, one on either side of the staircase. Taking out his wand, although he felt a little silly doing so, Harry pushed open the door on the left. It opened into a bathroom, big and potentially airy, though the tightly closed curtains made it seem gloomy and stuffy. Plain white tiles, interspersed with blue ones in a seemingly random pattern covered the floor. The stench was terrible, and glancing in the toilet bowl Harry knew why. The big cast-iron bath was sullied with rings of grime and towels lay scattered all over the floor. The mirror over the sink had been smashed; a few jagged bits of mirror still clung to the frame but most of the broken bits had fallen into the basin. This time Harry was sure that the dark stuff congealed on the edges was blood.

He was now even more certain that this would not be a simple case of reporting back to Mrs Malfoy that her darling son had simply fallen behind on his correspondence. Grimmauld Place had been a bit of a tip when Harry had first started his cleaning and refurbishment programme, but this was a whole different league. He wouldn't have thought it was even possible for people to live like this if he hadn't got embarrassingly addicted to that Muggle telly show, How Clean Is Your House? He maintained to Ron and Hermione that he watched it for the cleaning hints, such as the one which had enabled him to restore his silverware with concoctions made from vinegar, lemons and bicarb, but in fact he took a voyeuristic pleasure it in, and it cheered him to know that Grimmauld Place wasn't in as bad a state as it could have been.

Malfoy must be in the one remaining room, but Harry wondered what sort of state he was in when his house was like this. The knot of worry in his stomach tightened yet further.

He crossed the hallway and stopped in front of the other door. It had once been painted white, but now was as grubby as the rest of the house. What looked like a dent from a kick showed clearly in the bottom panel. Harry rapped the door sharply with his unhurt knuckles .

"Malfoy? It's Harry. Harry Potter. Your mother sent me. Can I come in?" There was no sound in the room. "Malfoy. You must be in there. Open the door, please. Then I can tell your mother you're still alive and go home."

He gently pushed down on the door handle and opened the door slowly. He blinked, and waited for his eyes to adjust to the dim light. He was not surprised to see the curtains closed, but the heavy smell of sweat and despair was unexpected. “Malfoy?”

He came a few steps into the room, kicking aside what looked like the entire contents of Malfoy’s wardrobe and dresser. The room looked like it had been burgled; all the cupboard doors and drawers were open and their contents strewn around the room. Malfoy lay huddled in the double bed which had been pushed right against the wall, in the left hand corner. Harry could just see his hair poking out from under a mass of bedclothes.

As Harry approached the bed, he noticed that the formerly white-blonde hair looked dark and stringy. The bedside table was covered in empty vials. He picked one of them up and read the label: Menier’s Apothecary’s Dreamless Sleep. Including those on the floor at his feet, Harry estimated there must be twenty empty vials littering the table and the floor. He pocketed the one remaining full bottle.

The curtains fluttered in the breeze, and Harry turned to the open window that overlooked the back garden. As he opened the curtains a delivery owl flew in, a large package tied to its leg. He untied the package and tore open the brown paper, revealing another dozen bottles of Menier’s Apothecary’s Dreamless Sleep and an invoice. Harry stared at it in puzzlement. What in Merlin’s name was going on here?

Harry opened all the curtains and the other windows in the hope of getting some air in to dissipate the stench. He knew from experience that waking someone who’d taken a sleeping draught was not easy, especially if they’d taken it in the quantity that Malfoy seemed to have done.

Harry’s heart sped up. What if Malfoy was dead? He hadn’t answered, or even, stirred, and wasn’t taking too much sleeping draught supposed to be dangerous? He felt slightly sick – he really didn’t want to discover anyone dead in bed. Even Malfoy. He walked slowly over to the bed and peered at the body almost hidden by bed covers. Putting his hand in front of Malfoy’s hand he felt little puffs of breath tickle his palm. Harry exhaled noisily. He was breathing.

He walked down the stairs, thoughtfully. He lifted a pile of papers from an armchair and sat down. Reading the invoice carefully he saw that Malfoy had a standing order of a dozen bottles of sleeping draught twice a week. Payment was taken direct from his Gringotts account. What the hell was he doing

with that much sleeping potion? How could he be so weak to just give in and stop living?

Harry chewed on his bottom lip, something Charlie had told him he always did when he was thinking something over. He couldn't exactly write back to Narcissa saying Draco appears to be abusing sleeping potions and the cottage is a hovel. Hope you're well, no love to Lucius. Could he?

It was at times like this that he wished he had a family of his own, some frame of reference to guide his actions. His instinct was to try to help Malfoy, since this was clearly no way to live. But Malfoy was an adult. If he wanted to spend the rest of his life asleep, then maybe he should be allowed to. Yet there seemed something cruel about telling Narcissa the state her son was in, and then simply walking away. She'd told him that she was not allowed to return to Britain, so she was powerless to do anything herself. He imagined Molly's reaction at knowing one of her children was living like this and being unable to do anything about it.

What should he tell Narcissa then? The truth and that he was going to try to help? Or perhaps he should tell her a kind lie, because wouldn't knowing and worrying be worse than not knowing?

When these thoughts kept revolving round but no plan seemed to form, Harry got up and walked over to the bookcase. He brushed off the thick layer of dust so he could see what was written on the book spines, and there it was, just what he was hoping to find: the Potente Potion's Encyclopaedia.

Sitting back down in the chair he flipped to the index, running his finger down the page until he found the entry for Sleeping Draughts. He turned to page 265 and started reading.

Sleeping Draughts.

Sleeping potions are a powerful remedy for insomnia. They induce in the user an almost instant dreamless sleep. Their potency means that they should only be used as an occasional aid to sleep, and for not more than three nights in a row. The ingestion of more than the recommended dose (one fluid ounce every five hours and no more than two fluid ounces in a twenty four hour period) can lead to respiratory failure. Dependency can result from overuse. Prolonged use can lead to addiction. Withdrawal from sleeping draughts is a painful process, characterised by fever-like symptoms. Almost

nothing is known about the long term effects of dependency on sleeping draughts.

The passage continued with the recipe for a basic sleeping draught.

Harry closed the book thoughtfully. The number of vials in Malfoy's bedroom and the standing order with the Apothecary certainly indicated prolonged use. Harry remembered the times he had taken a Sleeping Draught. He could well imagine how the cosy, hazy feeling would be addictive, as well as the guarantee of no nightmares. All of them who had survived the war had more than adequate material for nightmares, but Draco perhaps more than most. But that was just the way it was – war was shit, the aftermath was shit too. Why had Malfoy just given up and let himself slide in to a sedated haze?

He got up and paced the living room. Should he intervene? Would Malfoy even want his help? Yet, Narcissa's letter had involved him in Malfoy's current situation, whether he liked it or not. He wondered why she had chosen to write to him, rather than any other of Malfoy's friends – then again, he dimly remembered most of them choosing to live abroad in the aftermath of the trials, so maybe he had been her only option.

And Narcissa had saved him once. The events in the forest that night came thundering back to him and he sat down abruptly, overwhelmed with the onslaught of memories. Narcissa had defied Voldemort; such was her love for her son. She had saved Harry's life, and now she was asking him to help her. Harry closed his eyes. There was no way he could refuse. Once again, that night, he had been saved by a mother's love for her child; he couldn't cheapen Narcissa's love for Draco by telling her the situation, knowing she was powerless, and then walking away.

Harry looked at the mess around him. Where should he even start? He had absolutely no idea what to do with someone on an addictive potion. Muggles had rehab centres for this sort of thing. Did they even exist in the wizarding world? He thought of Malfoy's pride, and realised that dumping him in a clinic might not go down very well. But what else was he supposed to do? He wasn't a Healer. He re-read the passage. Fuck. It said overdose could lead to respiratory arrest. He didn't really know what that meant, but it sounded serious. Just because Malfoy had been breathing when he checked didn't mean he would go into respiratory arrest, did it? He looked at the vials. Each held five fluid ounces. Shit. He had almost certainly overdosed. Malfoy was going to stop breathing any moment, and he was here, faffing about what to do. The only thing to do was to take Malfoy to St Mungo's and then he was going to tell Narcissa, and then he could go home and get out of this pit.

Harry ran back upstairs and grabbed Malfoy's hand. He concentrated on the emergency entrance at St Mungo's. Nothing happened. He put his arm under Malfoy's shoulder blades. Draco flopped against him. Again he tried to Apparate. Nothing happened. Harry roughly pulled his arm out from under the man in a panic. What the crap was going on here?

He ran downstairs and out onto the patio. "Tibby!" The elf appeared. "I'm trying to Apparate Malfoy to St Mungo's and nothing is happening! He needs a Healer!"

Tibby started wringing his hands. "Mr Malfoy has been changing the wards so he cannot be moved from the estate without consent."

Harry ran a hand through his hair anxiously. "Can you change the wards, Tibby?" He spoke quickly.

"No, sir." The elf's voice was quiet. "Only Mr Malfoy can."

"Fuck! Thank you, Tibby." The elf disappeared. He walked back into the house and sat heavily down on the sofa. Right. He couldn't take Malfoy to St Mungo's, so he would have to get a Healer here. He searched the mantelpiece for a pot of floo powder. Nothing. He tried to light the fireplace with his wand. Nothing. Bloody Malfoy had bloody disabled his floo.

Harry hurried out onto the patio again. "Tibby!"

"How can Tibby be helping, sir?" The elf was still wringing his hands.

"I need to make a fire-call, Tibby. Is there a working floo in the Manor?" Tibby nodded and held out his hand. Harry grasped it, and found himself in a small room, in front of an ornate fireplace. Tibby reached for a pot of floo powder and handed it to him. He threw it in the flames. "St Mungo's."

“How can I be directing your call?” A bored-looking young receptionist’s head was sitting at a desk in front of the fireplace.

“I need to speak to a Healer.” Harry spoke quickly.

“Which Healer?” She didn’t look up from her parchment.

“A Healer in the emergency department.” He was tapping his fingers on the fireplace.

“Emergency Healers don’t do fire-call consultations. Thank you for….”

Harry interrupted her. “I’m Harry Potter and I need to talk to a Healer right now. I have an unconscious friend and I can’t Apparate him there.” He hated using his name like that, but he didn’t know what else to do. She looked up from her parchment and stared at his forehead.

“Putting you through.” Harry increased the pace of his finger tapping. The receptionist and her office swirled away and another office replaced them.

“Emergency department.” A middle aged man in crumpled Healer robes answered the floo, looking distracted.

“I’m sorry, I know this isn’t normal, but I have an unconscious friend and I can’t Apparate him through the wards. He’s taken a lot of sleeping draught and I am worried about respiratory arrest.”

The Healer looked straight at Harry and appeared to be more alert. “How much sleeping draught has he taken?”

“I don’t know. I found twenty empty vials in his room, but I think they've been taken over a period of

weeks." The knot of worry in his stomach loosened now someone was taking this seriously.

"Without examining the patient, Mr Potter, there is little I can tell you. However, the likelihood of suffering respiratory arrest during a sleeping draught overdose is very small, and if it happens at all, it will be immediately after ingestion. Was the patient conscious when you found them?"

"Asleep but breathing." Harry's own breathing began to slow down from the panicked breaths of earlier.

"In that case the risk of respiratory arrest is low. Unfortunately, the only thing to be done is to allow them to sleep it off." A bell started ringing in the background of the Healer's office. "I must go. I strongly suggest the patient come into St Mungo's to be checked over. Thank you."

"Thank you." Harry echoed as the call was cut off. He sat back on his heels, and breathed out a huge sigh of relief. "Tibby?" The elf arrived with a quiet crack. "Please will you take me back to the cottage?" Harry put his hand on the elf's and closed his eyes against the sensation as was his habit. He called a thanks over his shoulder as he went in the back door.

Sitting down on the sofa, he concentrated on steadying his breathing. Now his panic at Malfoy overdosing had subsided, anger began to swell up inside him. What was he thinking, playing with potions like that? He could bloody kill himself. The realisation that maybe that was the point flooded over him and he ran his hands through his hair. Surely not? Was that was Malfoy was trying to do? But, it was Malfoy. Breathing and being annoying was what he did. How could he try to do that? Harry pushed that thought away and stood up purposefully. Narcissa had asked him to help. He'd decided that he was going to help. He couldn't move Malfoy from the house. He was going to have to stay here and do it himself. Bloody Malfoy.

The first thing, he supposed, would be no more potion. Cold turkey or whatever it was called. He could do that. Standing up, he searched his pockets for a quill. He found a rather battered biro in his jacket. That would do. Grabbing the invoice from the apothecary he crossed out the order with a single straight line. He wrote underneath.

I am cancelling this standing order. Please do not send me any more Dreamless Sleep nor take any more

money out of my account.

D. Malfoy.

He knew he'd never be able to forge Malfoy's signature – hell, he didn't even know what Malfoy's signature looked like – so he settled for printing the message as neatly as he could. He held the parchment, wondering what he should do with it now. He hadn't seen any evidence of the eagle owl Malfoy had had at Hogwarts and wondered what had happened to it.

He stepped out of the back door. "Tibby?" he called, in a hopeful voice.

The elf popped up next to him. "Yes, Mr Harry?"

"I'm sorry for shouting earlier, Tibby. I'm going to help Mr Malfoy. I suppose you know he's not very well?"

Tibby looked mournfully down at the ground. "Mr Malfoy has banned us elves from being in the cottage, sir. But we knows he does not leave and we hear the mess he is making. Mr Malfoy has been getting sadder. It is not good to live always being by himself." The elf looked up at Harry. "But I is talking too much…"

"No, Tibby, not at all." Harry smiled. "I understand you must be worried about him. Could you help me help him?"

Tibby looked up at him hopefully. "Anything, Sir. Anything."

Harry held out the parchment and the box of bottles. "Would you please send this by owl to Menier's Apothecary? There is no need for a reply."

“Of course.” Tibby vanished.

Harry smiled. Task one, accomplished. Task two, get the house vaguely habitable. He thought of Malfoy’s stinking room, and the dirty hair he’d seen poking out of the duvet. Cleaning Malfoy was also going to be a priority, which meant – ugh – cleaning the bathroom. He looked round the filthy kitchen he was standing in. He cast a general cleaning spell at the work surfaces. Nothing happen. He cast the charm Molly had taught him for doing the washing up. Nothing happened. His magic felt strange, almost as if it couldn’t leave his wand. Bloody brilliant. Harry closed his eyes and concentrated his magic at the end of the wand. He imagined it was tendrils gently pushing out and exploring the other magics in the room. He found a barrier that prevented housekeeping magic being done in the house except by one specific magical signature. He presumed that Malfoy must have cast that when the elves tried to help from the outside after he’d banned them. Brilliant. He would have to clean by hand.

Harry searched all the kitchen cupboards for cleaning supplies but found nothing. He did find a stack of parchment and a quill in a drawer. He looked round for a clean surface to write on but everything was filthy. Eventually he put his foot up on a chair and rested the parchment on his thigh. He wrote a lengthy list of every cleaning supply he could think of. Dustbin bags, cloths, scourers, polish, disinfectant, the lot. When refurbishing Grimmauld Place he’d discovered a fondness for Muggle cleaning methods rather than spells. They seemed to offer a more thorough clean, he thought. Or perhaps habits ingrained by his aunt just died hard. Regardless, Malfoy’s stupid bloody spell meant he was going to have to clean everything by hand.

“Tibby!” Harry stepped out into the back garden.

Tibby appeared almost instantly. “Yes, sir.”

“Laundry. How does Malfoy do laundry?” Harry asked.

“Mr Malfoy is not doing any laundry since he banned we elves from the house, sir.” Harry nodded.

“So ordinarily you would take his laundry and do it?” Tibby nodded. “If I put the laundry on the step out here, would you take it and do it and return it here?” Tibby nodded again. “Ok, great. I’ll put it in a box or

something and leave it on the path for you. Shall I call you when I've done that?"

"I is knowing when you do that, sir." Tibby looked proud.

"Thank you, Tibby. I'll gather it up right away." Tibby nodded again and vanished.

At least he wasn't going to have to deal with Malfoy's dirty laundry, Harry thought. Not literally, anyway.

Harry padded quietly up the stairs and closed the windows and curtains in Malfoy's room again. Now that he knew the best thing was for him to sleep it off, he didn't want him to wake up just yet. He found a wicker hamper on the landing and gathering up every piece of clothing from the floor, he tossed them into it. Darting into the bathroom he threw all of the towels in it as well. Shoving the list he'd made in his pocket, he pulled his jacket on and hauled the basket down the stairs and out onto the front step.

True to his word, the elf appeared just as he set the basket down. "Here's the laundry, Tibby. I'm just going to get some supplies. Can I Apparate from here?"

The elf nodded. "Because you are being here on Mistress Narcissa's invitation you can Apparate from within the grounds."

"Thanks." Harry closed his eyes and concentrated. A moment later he was shaking his head to clear away the disorientation as he ducked out from behind a set of wheelie bins in the parking lot of a Muggle supermarket. Walking round to the front he grabbed a trolley and went inside. Heading purposefully to the cleaning aisle, he consulted his list. Then, looking at the shelves, he put his list away and simply threw one of everything into his trolley.

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Back at the cottage Harry dumped his bags of supplies on the kitchen table and crept up the stairs. He'd want to know as soon as Malfoy woke; Andromeda had taught him a monitoring charm when he first

started babysitting Teddy that might do the trick. As he looked at Malfoy, unnaturally still in his drugged sleep, he began to wonder how his former enemy would react to finding Harry in his house and no sleeping draughts. He pushed the thought away, was relieved when he was able cast the monitoring spell and went to tackle the kitchen.

He started by throwing away everything that wasn't in a tin or an unopened packet. Then, with the aid of a pair of rubber gloves and no small amount of bravery, he tackled the maggot-infested sink. Harry pulled the dirty plates out and put them on the draining board. The he closed his eyes and shoved his gloved hand in. Opening one eye the tiniest bit he stuck his handful of decomposing food into a bin bag. His entire body shuddered and his stomach rolled uneasily as he felt the maggots squirming around in his hand. After several repetitions of this nauseating experience the sink was mostly empty, and he removed his gloves, tied up the black sack and practically threw it out of the kitchen door. Gasping in lungfuls of clean air, he ducked back into the cess-pit Malfoy called a kitchen, before he could convince himself that he didn't really need to clean a maggot filled kitchen.

Almost an entire bottle of bleach went down the sink before Harry could even contemplate washing dishes in it. When the draining board was full of clean dishes, he opened the cupboards to see where Malfoy kept his crockery; he finally located an empty cupboard which he presumed normally housed the plates and bowls. It was filthy. He reached for his multipurpose cleaner and a new cloth and attacked the dirt with alacrity, scrubbing with intense focus. Only when it was certainly cleaner that it had been since Malfoy had banned the house-elves he did he stand up from his crouch, sweat pooling around the waistband of his trousers.

Rummaging in his bags of cleaning supplies he pulled out a box of sterilising tablets and wondered if sterilising Malfoy's crockery was a step too far. The kitchen had been truly revolting. As he read the instructions on the packet he wondered where this zeal for cleanliness had come from. It had never even occurred to him to sterilise his own kitchen utensils. And surely, as soon as they came out of the solution they were no longer sterile, anyway? For some reason he felt determined that Malfoy should wake up to a clean house. And yet, he realised; at least part of the reason he was immersing himself in chores was to avoid speculating about how Malfoy would react to his presence. Deciding to forego it for the time being, he put the sterilising tablets and the other supplies away in the cupboard under the sink and refilled the sink for the next lot of dishes.

At last Harry had cleaned the kitchen to the point where he was no longer convinced that just standing in it was a health hazard. The surfaces had all been scrubbed of their grime, the windows cleaned on the inside; he could ask the elves to clean the outside of the windows without them disobeying Malfoy's

orders that they were no longer allowed inside the house.

He stepped outside, enjoying the fresh air and light breeze, wiping the sweat off his face with his t-shirt. “Tibby?”

“Yes, sir?”

“Could you please clean the outside of the cottage windows?” The elf bowed and disappeared.

Harry ran his hands through his sweaty hair. He supposed the bathroom was his next priority, since he wanted to get Malfoy in the bath as soon as he woke up. He looked at his watch. Three o’clock. He vaguely registered that he’d worked through lunchtime, but cleaning that kitchen had chased away his appetite most successfully. Without knowing what time Malfoy had last taken the sleeping draught he had no idea what time he would wake up. Still, better get on with the bathroom. It was better than endlessly running over possible scenarios -- none of them good -- that might happen when Malfoy woke up to find him there.

By the time Harry had finished the bathroom he was sweating madly and felt almost as filthy as the house had started out. He sincerely hoped that he would never have to clean a toilet like that again. He looked out the window and saw that the hamper he had left for Tibby had been returned, piled with sweet-smelling, neatly folded clean laundry. He brought it inside the house then, deciding that clean clothes were the least he deserved for winning the fight against the dirt in Malfoy’s bathroom, he pulled out a pair of jogging bottoms and an old Hogwarts t-shirt. He looked at the boxers, folded neatly. No – freshly laundered or not, wearing Malfoy’s boxers was too weird. He would just have to go without. Harry peeled his sweaty clothes off and stepped into Malfoy’s newly cleaned shower.

Harry had showered, dressed and cleaned the landing, the hallway, and the living room when the monitor charm’s bell rang gently, signalling that Malfoy was beginning to wake up. Harry stopped piling up the old Daily Prophets and froze. Should he go upstairs? Tell Malfoy what was going on? Or let him come downstairs and find him? He had no idea what to do and his stomach was twisting into uncomfortable knots. In for a knut, in for a galleon, he thought, and headed up the stairs.

He opened the door to Malfoy’s room as quietly as he could. Sure enough, the lump under the

bedclothes was stirring. A head emerged. Harry could tell when he had awoken completely, because he went still and stared up at the ceiling. Harry thought he heard him murmur something.

“Malfoy? Er, Draco? Can I come in?” Harry advanced a few paces into the room. Malfoy didn’t move, still staring at the ceiling. “Malfoy?”

Malfoy did not seem to have even heard. Harry walked over to the bed and looked down at him. Malfoy’s eyes were strangely unseeing. He knelt down next to the bed, not wanting to seem threatening. “Malfoy.” He spoke quietly, slowly. “Your mother sent me. She’s worried about you. She asked me to help you.” Harry decided a little bit of flexibility with the exact request could be forgiven.

Malfoy said nothing. Harry stared at the figure in the bed, completely at a loss as to what to do. Should he shake him? Prod him? Shout? As he was wondering, Malfoy brought a hand out from under the duvet. “Accio Dreamless Sleep”, he whispered in a raspy voice, making Harry grateful he’d disposed of the full vials. When nothing came flying into his hand he said it again. Only when nothing appeared on his third try did he turn to look on the bedside table.

“Potter?” Malfoy looked at him straight on, and Harry was shocked at how pale and thin he was. He knew he shouldn’t be surprised, since it was obvious Malfoy hadn’t been in the kitchen for days, maybe weeks, but he wasn’t expecting the prominent cheekbones, the sunken eyes, the nearly transparent skin.

He hoped his shock had not shown on his face. He tried to look unaffected. “Yes. It’s me. Your mother asked me to come visit you.”

Malfoy turned his head back to stare at the ceiling. “Where’s my sleeping draught?”

Harry bit his lip. “There’s none left.” It was true, after all. Sort of.

“What?” Malfoy’s voice was a little louder but still raspy, as though it had not been used in days.

“There’s none left. And your mother asked me to help you and you look like you need a bath.” Harry realised he had no idea how to handle this situation.

Malfoy closed his eyes. “Give me my sleeping draught.” His voice was louder.

Harry shifted his weight so he was more comfortable on his knees. “There’s no sleeping draught in the house. You can’t have any more.”

“This is a nightmare. This has to be a nightmare.” Harry didn’t know what to say, so he didn’t say anything. A couple of minutes passed. Harry wondered if Malfoy had gone back to sleep, then the grey eyes opened and he looked at Harry again. “You’re still here. I’m still awake. This isn’t a nightmare.”

Harry fiddled with the frayed hem of the borrowed t-shirt. “No. You’re awake. Your mother asked me to help you, and, y’know, potions abuse is a Bad Thing, so there’s no more sleeping draughts. And you can kill yourself overdosing on that stuff. And you stink so I think you should get out of bed and have a bath.”

Malfoy’s jaw tensed. Harry wondered if he should be kneeling quite so close to the bed; Malfoy didn’t look capable of much physical effort but you never knew… With a sudden wheezy exhale the fight left his face. “Fine. You’re clearly a hallucination and fighting with hallucinations is a sure sign of being crazy, so fine.”

Harry frowned. He had no idea how to deal with Malfoy believing him to be a hallucination, but it was better than being shouted at, so he figured that was a plus. “Are you going to get out of bed?”

Malfoy was back to staring at the ceiling. “No.”

“Can you get out of bed?”

“No.”

Harry sighed. How did he get roped into this? He stood up and pulled the duvet down to the bottom of the bed. Malfoy made no attempt to stop him, perhaps continuing to believe it was all still a hallucination. He was wearing tracksuit bottoms and a jumper, even though the room was muggy and he was clearly sweating. Harry put one arm under his ribs and the other under his knees and lifted him off the bed. He could carry him easily, another sign of how much weight Draco had lost. Manoeuvring out of the room, careful not to bash Malfoy's head or feet on anything, Harry carried him into the bathroom. He noticed that Malfoy had closed his eyes again.

He sat Malfoy down on the closed toilet seat and took off his woolly socks. They might have once been cashmere, but they were encrusted with dirt and the wool had gone all bobbly. Kneeling at Malfoy's feet, the ripe odour of unwashed flesh was overpowering. He watched, alarmed, as Malfoy swayed, but the cistern supported his back and kept him upright. Standing up, he grasped the bottom of Malfoy's jumper. "Up!" he murmured. Without opening his eyes, Malfoy slowly lifted his arms above his head. They shook as he held them up, as if the effort was overwhelming. Harry peeled off one jumper, two t-shirts and a vest top. He tried not to make a noise of surprise as pale skin was revealed, the jutting ribs and concave stomach accentuated by his slouched position. He threw the clothes towards the door to join the socks. Malfoy's arms fell back down, and crossed protectively in front of his middle.

Harry took a deep breath and fixed his eyes on a blue tile above Malfoy's head. Putting his hand either side of Malfoy's ribs, just underneath his arms, he supported him into a standing position. His skin was clammy with sweat but strangely cold to touch. He pulled Malfoy in to his body so he was supporting him with one hand on his side, his breastbone leaning on Harry's shoulder, and with the other hand he pushed Malfoy's trousers down. Leaning down awkwardly, he lifted the toilet seat and sat him down again. Staring at the pile of clothes by the door, he pulled Malfoy's trousers completely off while forcing himself not to look at Malfoy's crotch.

He stood up and turned to the door. "Go to the toilet," he said quietly. There was no need to talk loudly, since they were the only ones in the house, but speaking in more than hushed tones seemed somehow disrespectful. He cringed at the thought of making this whole experience any more humiliating than necessary. He wasn't sure why he felt no desire to humiliate Malfoy. In their school years - when their rivalry was at its peak, before it was eclipsed by the war - he would have welcomed the chance to see Malfoy embarrassed and even to add to it, but now his stomach turned at the thought of it. Now, Malfoy's indifference, self-neglect, and utter loss of his customary pride made Harry shy away from anything that would further humiliate him.

Gathering up the clothes, he put them out on the landing and closed the bathroom door. He saw out of the corner of his eye that Malfoy was shaking. He turned on the heated towel rail and began to run a bath, filling it with a decadent number of bubbles.

“Are you done?” Harry didn’t turn round from testing the temperature of the bath. When there was no reply he turned his head. Malfoy was staring straight ahead, unresponsive.

Harry wiped his wet hands on his borrowed jogging bottoms and tugged Malfoy off the toilet seat. He gently helped him into the bath, relieved when the rail-thin body was covered by the bubbles. He put a flannel in his hand. “Wash. Don’t drown. I’ll be back soon.”

Harry pulled the door to behind him, not wanting to let the warm steamy air out but also wanting to be able to hear Malfoy if he shook himself out of his unresponsive state. Deciding he didn’t have enough time to clean the bedroom by hand, and remembering what Hermione always said about the strength of magic being dependent on the caster, he held his wand in his hand and again imagined his magic searching for the barrier Malfoy had put up. Just as he had thought, it was as weak as Malfoy. When he could feel the tendrils of his magic pushing against the restriction, he imagined that his magic balled up into a fist, and punched through Malfoy’s spell. He took a deep breath, relieved. He muttered “tergeo vestimentum” to send all the clean clothes flying to their homes in the cupboards and rapidly stripped and replaced the bed linen. He pushed the windows open as far as they would go to try and get rid of the smelly, humid air and opened the curtains. Summoning a bin bag from downstairs he cleared up all the rubbish and dropped the tied bag out of the window on to the back path for the elves to dispose of.

He went to the bottom drawer of the chest of drawers – that was where he kept his pyjamas, so he figured it was a good place to look for Malfoy’s. He found a soft fleecy pair and some woollen bed socks. A silk dressing gown hung on the hook on the back of the bedroom door, but Harry opened the wardrobe looking for something warmer. Fever meant someone was hot then cold, right? The potions book had warned that someone coming off of sleeping draught overuse might suffer from feverish symptoms; but it was clear that Malfoy had been cold, even when in bed. The fact that he was skin and bones might be a contributing factor, of course. Tucked in the end of the wardrobe Harry found a faded flannel dressing gown, which he added to the socks and pyjamas.

Harry carried his findings back into the bathroom and put them on the heated towel rail to warm. Glancing at the bath, he saw that Malfoy was in exactly the same position, still with the flannel in his hand.

“Can you wash yourself?” Harry knelt down next to the bath. “Malfoy. Wash yourself.” Malfoy sat still, with no response. Gently taking the flannel, Harry dipped it in the bubbly water and began to wash the arm closest to him. He didn’t know what to say, so he kept silent. When he had washed all of the other’s upper body, he shifted so he was kneeling at the end of the tub and felt his way through the thick bubbles to wash Malfoy’s legs. Finished, Harry paused uncomfortably. “Malfoy? Can you wash…er…the rest of you?” No response. Harry sighed and looked up at the ceiling, embarrassed. Finally, he reached down into the water and washed round Malfoy’s privates, as quickly as he could without being rough, then moved to the top of the freestanding tub. He pushed on Malfoy’s shoulders. “Lean forward.” Malfoy moved, slowly. Harry washed his back, his hand pausing at the mass of scars criss-crossing the pale skin.

Scooping up handfuls of water, he thoroughly dampened the white-blond hair, noticing it was slick to the touch with grease. “Close your eyes. I’m going to wash your hair.” He poured a generous amount of shampoo into his palm and gently massaged the shampoo onto the wet hair. Washing someone else’s hair felt much different to washing his own. He couldn’t tell if he was being too rough, but Malfoy didn’t object. “Dunk.” Malfoy slid down in the tub and leaned back so his hair was in the water. His face looked so different from this angle, almost child like. Harry put another dollop of shampoo on Malfoy’s head as he lifted it out of the water and did another good scrub. Only when the hair squeaked beneath his fingers did he ask Malfoy to dunk again. He read the instructions on the bottle of conditioner that sat next to the shampoo bottle. He didn’t use conditioner on his own hair. Maybe he should. Malfoy’s hair was silky in the water, now it was clean. He gently worked a small amount of conditioner through the hair, then had him rinse again.

The shampoo had dissipated the bubbles in the tub and the water had turned an unpleasant grey. He shuddered, thinking of all that dirt that had come off Malfoy. He didn’t really understand baths (why would you want to sit in your own dirty water?) but Malfoy would never have been able to shower himself in this state, and Harry didn’t fancy sharing one. He closed his eyes for a moment. Not in this situation anyway. He pulled the plug and helped Malfoy sit down on the rim of the tub, so just his feet were in the bath, until the water was gone. “Sit there. I want to refill the bath and I don’t want to burn you doing it.” Harry quickly wiped the ring of grime away from the bath and dropped the dirty flannel on the floor. He refilled the bath with more warm water and bubbles and helped Malfoy lie back down in it.

“Stay there. I won’t be a minute.” Malfoy didn’t acknowledge his words or his departure from the bathroom. Harry stopped outside the door and leant his forehead against it. What was he doing? What was wrong with Malfoy? Why was he not responding? Did he really think Harry was a hallucination? He straightened up and tried to shove those thoughts away. He had no answers and he couldn’t deal with them now. His theory that nobody had eaten anything from that kitchen for days, if not weeks, was confirmed by the evidence of Malfoy’s skinny body. He’d have to make him eat something. He vaguely

remembered that giving people big meals after periods of starvation made them sick, so something light would probably be best.

Downstairs he looked through the kitchen cupboards and found a can of tomato soup that had survived his earlier purge of out-of-date-or-disgustingly-rotten food. Everyone liked tomato soup, didn't they? He poured it into a saucepan and lit the gas underneath it. He found a packet of crackers, took two out, and buttered them generously. They went on two plates, and Harry filled two glasses with juice. When the soup had heated but not boiled he poured it into two bowls and set a warming charm on them.

Harry went back upstairs and knocked on the bathroom door. He wasn't sure why – it wasn't as if he expected a response. He was unsurprised to see Malfoy still sitting motionless in the bath. "Stand up." He pulled the plug and helped Malfoy to stand. Taking a fluffy towel that had been warming on the rail he gently but thoroughly dried Malfoy off including – but without looking at – his groin area. He helped Malfoy climb out of the bath and into the pyjamas and socks he'd picked out, draping a smaller towel around his shoulders to stop his hair dripping on to the clean nightclothes. Malfoy's hair was longer than Harry had ever seen it, almost down to his shoulders. It looked like Lucius's, only messier. Harry felt something like revulsion in his stomach at the thought of Malfoy resembling Lucius. Harry found a comb in the cabinet beneath the sink and dragged it through the wet hair. It was not an easy job as Malfoy didn't make the effort to hold his head still and so it jerked with every pull of the comb through his hair. Eventually Harry decided it was tidy enough, and he helped Malfoy up and into his dressing gown.

"We should eat something. Come downstairs." Malfoy didn't move, so Harry took his hand and led him down the stairs into the kitchen. He sat Malfoy down at the table and fetched cutlery for them both. "Eat. Please. I really don't want to have to feed you." Harry muttered the last bit underneath his breath. Something about the food seemed to awaken Malfoy though, and he began mechanically spooning soup into his mouth. When he had finished the bowl, Harry pushed the plate with the buttered crackers closer to him. By the time he had finished the cream crackers and drunk the juice his head was beginning to droop and his eyes stayed closed longer each time he blinked.

"Right. Well, I guess you've tired yourself out then." Harry stood up and put his arm round Malfoy's waist, lifting him up from his chair. He supported him up the stairs and into his now-clean bedroom, barely having time to take off the dressing gown before Malfoy sagged onto the bed. He lay down and burrowed into the duvet, turning so he faced the wall. Harry laid the dressing gown over the foot of the bed, then glanced back at Malfoy. He looked tiny, encased in fleece and duvet. His breathing was rhythmical already. How had a bath and a meal tired him out? He set the monitoring ward again and went downstairs. He had thinking to do.

In the living room, Harry picked up the potions encyclopaedia and read again the section on sleeping draughts. With no information on the effects of long-term dependency, it was next to useless in telling him what to expect once the feverish withdrawal symptoms stopped. He dropped the book onto the coffee table and put his head in his hands. He had no idea what to expect over the next few days. He couldn't make Malfoy leave the cottage without his explicit consent, and he couldn't get that until he was speaking and coherent. He snorted. If Malfoy had gone to the trouble of changing the wards, he was unlikely to agree to go to St Mungo's just because his former nemesis asked him.

Going into the kitchen, Harry opened the drawer where he'd found the parchment earlier. Taking out a quill and a bottle of ink, he sat down at the table and began writing.

~*~

Part 2Title: Shuffling Out Of Hell, Part 2

Author: [info]alovelycupoftea

Rating: NC 17

Pairing(s): Harry and Draco friendship and preslash.

Warnings: Talk of self neglect, self harm, substance abuse and addiction and suicide.

Word Count: ~23,500 words.

Mental Health Issue: Depression. PTSD. Substance Abuse.

Summary: A letter from Narcissa gets Harry thrown into Draco's life in a way he could never have imagined.

Author's Notes: Thank you to Delphi, for the awesome beta, and [info]qumabh for holding my hand, cheering me on, and generally being amazingly encouraging. Thank you Cassie, for the extension and encouragement!

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consent.

“Tibby?” Harry stood out in the back yard. Although it was April it was chilly to be standing outside in just a t-shirt. Harry fished his watch out of his pocket where he’d put it while bathing Malfoy. Five o’clock. Normally he’d be thinking about what to eat for dinner and what to do that evening. He couldn’t quite believe that it was only this morning that he’d received Mrs Malfoy’s letter.

“Yes, Mr Potter?” the elf appeared in front of him.

“Harry, please. Will you please send this to Healer Crossland? I’m hoping he’ll be able to visit tonight, so if he comes could you bring him straight to the cottage?” The elf nodded. “I think I should probably stay here tonight.”

“Of course, Mr Potter.” Tibby disappeared with a discreet crack.

Harry concentrated on the image of Grimmauld Place and Apparated inside his bedroom. Summoning a holdall, he threw some clothes and toiletries into it. He also grabbed a couple of books from his bedside table, a blank notebook and his good pen. He glanced round the room. That would do. He didn’t want to stay away from the cottage for too long.

Harry Apparated back into Malfoy’s kitchen. He quietly made his way upstairs and opened Malfoy’s bedroom door. He was still asleep. Good – natural sleep had to be far better than the drugged kind. Back in the kitchen, Harry put the kettle on. When he’d made his tea, he sat down at the table with the parchment, quill and ink and tried to decide what to tell Mrs Malfoy.

April 1999

Dear Mrs Malfoy,

I received your letter this morning and went to the estate this afternoon.

The cottage was a complete dump and Malfoy seems to be addicted to sleeping draughts.

Malfoy's in a bit of a state

I have no idea how to help your son and as soon as he awakens from his drugged stupor he'll probably break my nose. Again.

Harry took a contemplative slurp of his tea. Should he wait until the Healer had seen Malfoy? But that might not be until morning. If Narcissa had been worried enough to write to him, she would want an update as soon as possible.

He looked at the scribbled out lines on his piece of parchment. Something he'd heard Professor McGonagall intone on more than one occasion flittered into his mind. 'Honesty is the best policy, Potter.' He picked up the quill again.

I don't really know what to tell you, knowing you can't come back to England. Draco is not well. He seems to have been using sleeping draughts to an unhealthy level. I found your most recent letters unopened. I have asked a Healer to come and give his opinion. I will keep you updated.

Harry copied out his letter onto a fresh sheet of parchment. Rummaging round in the drawer that had yielded the parchment and quill he found some sealing wax and sealed the flap, wondering as he did every time he wrote a letter why the wizarding world had not embraced envelopes. He handed the letter

to Tibby, made another cup of tea and sat down to wait for a reply from Healer Crossland.

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He was sitting in the living room struggling with the Daily Prophet crossword when he heard a knock on the front door. He opened it to find Tibby standing on the step.

“I is sorry to be making you answer the door to me but Mr Malfoy does not allow us in the house.” Tibby looked mournfully down at his feet.

“Yes, I remember. Don’t worry. I’ll try to persuade Mr Malfoy to rescind that order when he wakes up.”

Tibby looked up. “There is two letters arrived for you, Mr Potter. One is from Mistress Narcissa.”

Harry raised his eyebrows in surprise and took the letters from Tibby. “That was fast. Thank you, Tibby.”

Sitting back down on the sofa, Harry opened the letter from Mrs Malfoy first. It was brief.

Mr Potter,

I can assure you that your honest updates will be better than my worried imaginings, so please don’t feel obliged to censor yourself. If the Healer you have engaged sends his bills to me, I will ensure he is paid. If you incur any expenses let me know so I can reimburse you.

Thank you for going to visit him.

Narcissa Malfoy.

Thank Merlin Mrs Malfoy was going to pay for Malfoy's treatment. No doubt a Malfoy would prefer to see a Healer privately, rather than going to St Mungo's, but it wasn't a cheap option. And at least this way, the Healer could see him in his bed, if necessary. He himself had seen Healer Crossland just after the war. He was trained in psychiatry as well as the wizarding healing courses, and was something of an expert in veterans and mental health issues.

He opened the second letter.

Mr Potter,

I will visit Mr Malfoy for an assessment tomorrow morning at 10am.

I hope you are keeping well,

Healer Ernest Crossland.

A surge of disappointment swept over Harry at the delay. He hated waiting around once he had made a decision.

"Tibby?" Harry stepped out of the front door.

"Yes, Mr Potter?" Tibby appeared with a pop.

“Healer Crossland will be arriving to see Malfoy tomorrow morning. Please can you show him to the cottage?”

“Of course, Mr Potter. Is there anything else I can be doing?”

“No, thank you.” The elf Disapparated.

Harry went back inside. Looking at his watch he saw it was just ten o’clock. He was exhausted. Walking slowly up the stairs into the bathroom, he rummaged in the large cupboard where he had found clean linen for Malfoy’s bed. He took out bedding for himself, took it downstairs, made up a bed on the sofa, and was asleep in a few minutes.

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Harry awoke, suddenly. He had been back in the bathroom at Hogwarts, watching, horrified, unable to move as Malfoy lay in a puddle of blood. He had filled with self-disgust for causing such harm with a whispered word and a wave of his wand. He blinked to try and clear his head of the images. He hadn’t such a vivid nightmare for months. He stared at the ceiling, methodically breathing in and out. He knew he wouldn’t be able to get back to sleep; he never did after nightmares.

He quietly made his way upstairs and got in the shower, letting the hot water wash away the feelings of horror and shock that the dream had left behind. When he was dressed he went downstairs and made tea in the kitchen. It was only seven o’clock. He had peeked in on the sleeping Malfoy upstairs. He wondered what time he should wake him. Should he wake him at all?

Taking his tea into the living room, Harry tidied up his bedding and made a space on the sofa to sit down. He picked up the Daily Prophet crossword he’d abandoned last night.

An hour later he filled in the last clue and put the paper on the pile he’d tidied up into the corner of the room. Eight o’clock. He wandered into the kitchen and starting wiping the already clean surfaces. Searching in the freezer, he found a frozen loaf of bread. He made a piece of toast and crunched it absentmindedly. He ought to go shopping. There wasn’t enough tinned and frozen food to last long. He

didn’t feel very inclined to stock Malfoy’s kitchen, though. He shook his head. How did he get himself in these sorts of situations? Thinking about that led to speculating about how Malfoy would react when he woke. The bell from the ward rang gently, indicating that Malfoy was stirring. Wiping his hands on his jeans, Harry figured this would at least end his speculations.

He knocked on Malfoy’s door. “Malfoy? Can I come in?” When he heard no response, he slowly opened the door. Malfoy lay in bed, staring up at the ceiling.

“Malfoy. Er, good morning." Unsure if Malfoy remembered anything from the day before, he added, "Your mother sent me to see if you were all right. She was worried.” Malfoy turned his head towards Harry. His eyes looked more alert than yesterday’s dullness.

“Potter?” His voice was still raspy. “Potter?”

Harry looked at the floor, then back at the bed. “Er, hi.”

“What are you doing in my bedroom?”

“Er. Like I said, your mother sent me. To check on you. So here I am.” Harry was determined not to feel embarrassed.

“Well, I’m alive, so bugger off.” He sounded not defiant but defeated.

Harry made no move to leave. He could not have said why Narcissa's request -- or plea -- had had such an effect on him; surely that was hardly enough to wipe out the fact that the Malfoy family had between them tormented him for six years at Hogwarts, killed his godfather and nearly caused Ginny’s death, not to mention betraying everything Harry believed in. Yet here he was, trying to help one of them.

“You’re still here? Why are you still here?”

“Your mother asked me to help you. And y’know, you’re not very well. So, yeah. I’m still here.” Harry straightened a little.

Malfoy took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Opening them again, he looked crossly at Harry. “I don’t want your help. Go away.”

“No.” Harry shoved his hands in the pocket of his jeans.

“I’m fine. Go away.”

“No.”

“Piss off, Potter.”

“No. You’re not fine. Fine people don’t use twenty four bottles of sleeping draught a week.” Was it was a good idea to mention that? He didn't know.

“Piss. Off. Potter. It’s my life. And it’s none of your business.” Malfoy turned his face to the wall.

“It is my business. Your mother is worried enough about you to write to me. Merlin knows why she chose me, but she did.” Saying this, Harry wondered whether Mrs Malfoy had known that Harry would feel obliged to help her after the events of the Forbidden Forest. Regardless, now was definitely not the time to mention that. “So, here I am. This is now my business.”

“I’m telling you it’s not. Now sod off like a good boy.” Malfoy continued his staring match with the wall.

“No.”

Malfoy turned to look at Potter. His grey eyes were full of anger and pain. “Just go away. Please. I just want to be left alone.”

Harry took a tentative step towards the bed. “I can’t. I owe it to your mother to help her. And that means helping you. You could have killed yourself with that much potion.” As he said that last bit, he felt himself getting angry again.

“PISS OFF!!” The hoarse shout surprised Harry. “I don’t want help. I definitely don’t want help from you.”

Harry fought not to raise his voice, but something about Malfoy enraged him. It always had. “Oh no? Twenty four bottles of Dreamless Sleep a week, Malfoy. You were so out of it you couldn’t even wash yourself last night. You need help. And right now, I’m the only one offering it.” He realised he had been gesticulating a bit wildly at Malfoy during that speech.

A flush rose up to cover Malfoy’s face. His blond hair contrasted with it, making his face look even redder. “FUCK OFF OUT OF MY FUCKING HOUSE, GIT!” he shouted.

Furious, Harry turned to leave, then paused, with his hand on the door knob. “There’s a Healer coming at ten o’clock to see you. You can get out of bed and see him downstairs, or he’ll see you up here.” Harry resisted the urge to slam the door as he walked out. He stood there for a moment, seething with anger and frustration. He’d cleaned maggots in the kitchen to be treated like this? He turned around, ready to go back and shout at Malfoy. But Malfoy wasn’t himself, it wasn’t his fault. Staring at the door, he noticed the dent in the bottom panel. A little kick from him wouldn’t make any difference, he reckoned. He settled for stomping down the stairs instead.

~*~

Harry made a pot of coffee and took a mug of it outside with today’s Daily Prophet. The patio had a pretty cast iron table and chairs which he hadn’t noticed last night. He sat down and opened the paper with a sigh. When he got to page ten and realised he hadn’t absorbed any of the articles, he gave up and

set it down on the table. The confrontation with Malfoy kept replaying itself in his mind. Should he have handled it differently? Conversation had to be better than Malfoy thinking him a hallucination, but neither option had been pleasant. He poured another cup of coffee and looked at his watch. At least it was nearly time for Healer Crossland to arrive. He felt desperately out of his depth.

Harry was contemplating whether to make himself another pot of coffee when Tibby arrived round the side of the house followed by Healer Crossland, a tall thin man with a compassionate gaze. He had always made Harry say far more than he intended without a word.

Harry stood up, and held out his hand to the Healer. “Thank you for coming.”

Crossland shook his hand with a firm grip. “Mr Potter, how nice to see you again. I hope you are doing well?”

Harry smiled. “Fine, thank you.” Tibby bowed and disappeared. “Er, shall I show you up? I expect he’s still in bed. He woke up earlier, and er, well, told me to piss off. I told him you were coming, though.” Healer Crossland just smiled. “Or would you like a drink first? Tea? Coffee?”

“No, thank you. I’ll see him at once.” He gestured for Harry to precede him.

Harry led him through the house and up the stairs. “When I arrived yesterday, this was a complete tip. I’m not sure how long he’s been holed up in his room.” He stopped outside Malfoy’s room, and knocked. “Malfoy? Healer Crossland is here to see you.”

There was a muffled noise which might have been ‘piss off, Potter’. Harry smiled nervously and opened the door for the Healer. “I’ll be downstairs.”

~*~

Downstairs, Harry fetched his notebook and good pen from his holdall and returned to the garden.

Looking at his watch, he realised that it was at this time yesterday morning he'd read Mrs Malfoy's letter and this whole mess had started for him. He couldn't stop replaying his conversation with Malfoy in his head. Each time he edited his part slightly differently. He didn't lose his temper, or he didn't mention the sleeping draughts, or he said something that didn't get an expletive in reply. He picked up his pen and started twiddling it as he thought. He thought about the first time he'd met Malfoy, how as soon as he'd opened his snotty mouth and spewed out a seemingly endless torrent of words – each of which had made Harry feel less confident than the last – he had disliked the boy. He thought about how Malfoy had just continued to give him reasons to dislike him throughout their early school years. He thought of the proud arrogant git who had spat that Harry would pay for making Lucius face justice. He thought how their school career moved from being tainted by hints of sinister events to being entirely sinister. That pride and arrogance had been shredded, transforming him into a terrified thin boy and Harry had watched him for a year and not even noticed. He thought about how Voldemort had been the cause of so much terror and sadness in his own life, and how that could so easily have consumed him. How -- even after Voldemort's defeat -- it nearly had, until he met Healer Crossland. He thought about how Ron and Hermione and Luna and Neville and Seamus and Dean and all his other friends had stayed in touch as a group, had made the effort to meet up and keep an eye out for each other. How they had supported each other in turn. He didn't even know if any of Malfoy's classmates were still in the country. He definitely didn't seem to have had any visitors. And surely, if he was still in touch with someone, Narcissa wouldn't have had to turn to him. Harry turned to a clean page in his notebook, smiling when he remembered that it had been Healer Crossland who had suggested he write down his thoughts when they got too frantic or overwhelming.

Harry had just finished shading a rather intricate oblong around the words 'bloody Malfoy' when the Healer stepped out into the garden.

"Healer." Harry stood up from his chair and gestured for Crossland to take a seat. "Would you like something to drink? Tea? Coffee?" Harry had just been thinking about making a pot of tea.

"Tea would be much appreciated, please." No sooner had he finished his sentence, Tibby appeared next to the table with a tea tray and a 'pop'. Harry raised his eyebrows and wondered if he would ever stop being surprised by house elves.

He and the Healer stared at the tea set for a minute while it brewed. Only when Harry had poured them each a cup and they had added milk and taken a testing sip did Healer Crossland speak.

"Mr Potter, you must understand that as you are not Mr Malfoy's next of kin there is little information

that I can share with you, although it was you who arranged this initial assessment. I spoke to Mrs Malfoy by Floo, and at her request, I have agreed to act as Mr Malfoy's Healer. I informed her that, whilst I strongly encourage him to enter some sort of residential facility, he is refusing to do so. We have compromised by agreeing that he can stay here, but not alone. Mrs Malfoy requested that I ask you to stay."

Harry opened his mouth to object, then closed it abruptly. Narcissa was beginning to take the piss surely? Checking on Malfoy was one thing, staying with him was quite another.

"Mr Potter." At this point, Healer Crossland steepled his fingers together. "You are not under any obligation to agree. Mr Malfoy is going through a period of withdrawal from a highly addictive potion and he is not a well man. Living with him will require an immense amount of patience and calm, neither of which –" he fixed Harry with a humorous eye, " – are qualities you are known for."

"I know I am not obliged, Healer. But I will." Harry hadn't planned to say that. It had just sort of happened. He wondered whether perhaps it was himself who should be taken to some sort of residential facility. Agreeing to live with Malfoy had to be a sign of madness, didn't it? That had been the opportune moment to walk away from this inevitably disastrous situation.

"Very well. It is rather unorthodox for a patient to undergo withdrawal from an addictive substance anywhere other than a hospital or clinic, but still…. I will visit each afternoon. A Mediwitch therapist will come in the mornings for an hour. Your responsibility will be to ensure that whatever routine Mr Malfoy and the Mediwitch therapist decide on is kept. Is that acceptable?" Healer Crossland picked up his cup and drained it.

"Yeah, ok." Harry shifted in his seat.

"Both of you need to eat three good tasty nutritious meals a day. And get regular sleep." Healer Crossland poured him and Harry more tea.

"Right now the house elves aren't allowed into the cottage. I'm hoping that Malfoy will un-ban them so they can help too." Harry added milk to his tea and stirred.

“One more thing, Mr Potter.” Harry raised his eyes to meet the Healer’s, wondering what other impossible thing he would be asked to do. “Don’t take anything Mr Malfoy says personally. He is very ill, and patience and a calm smile are the best comebacks.”

Harry practised his most patient smile on the Healer. “Patience and calm smiles have never been in my and Malfoy’s repertoire. But I’ll try.”

“Mrs Malfoy assures me you’re the best person for the job. Thank you for the tea, Mr Potter. I’ll be by tomorrow afternoon, I’m not sure exactly when.” Healer Crossland stood up and Tibby ‘popped’ in to show him to the gates.

~*~

Harry stood up, stretched and looked at his watch. It was just gone noon. He supposed he ought to find them something “tasty and nutritious” to eat. He listlessly inspected the kitchen cupboards, then stepped outside and called for Tibby.

“Tibby, what’s Malfoy’s favourite food?”

Tibby tilted his head as he considered. “He likes pasta. He doesn’t like seafood. He likes all vegetables except for courgettes.” Tibby paused to think.

“Thank you, Tibby. That’s helpful. Do you think you could write down his favourite meals for me please?” Tibby nodded and Disapparated.

Harry went back into the kitchen with determination. He could do pasta. He was even quite inventive about adding things to it. Remembering the Healer’s exhortation to eat healthily, Harry took some chicken out of the fridge and switched on the oven. As the chicken baked he chopped some fresh tomatoes and basil. Setting the kettle to boil, he headed up the stairs.

Taking a deep breath, Harry knocked on the bedroom door. “Malfoy. Lunch in fifteen minutes. I’ll see you downstairs.” Without waiting for a reply, he fled.

He was just testing a piece of pasta when Malfoy shuffled into the kitchen. Shuffled was the only way to describe it. He moved slowly, without picking his feet up off the floor. He wore thick socks, a pair of jogging bottoms and an oversized hooded top. His hood was up and he stared at his feet. He sat down at one of the laid places without a word.

Harry put a bowl containing a small portion of pasta, chopped chicken and tomatoes in front of him. He poured them both a glass of juice.

Malfoy stared at his bowl and picked up his fork. Each forkful seemed to take an age to reach his mouth. He set the empty fork back in the bowl before he started chewing. He chewed so slowly that the food was likely to dissolve before he got round to swallowing.

Harry ate his own pasta, watching Malfoy discreetly. He noticed that Malfoy’s hand was shaking so much that he had difficulty keeping any food on his fork.

Just as Harry took the last bite of his pasta a knock sounded at the back door. He stood up quickly, relieved to have an excuse to leave the table and not watch Malfoy push his food around and eat agonisingly slowly.

Tibby stood on the step holding a package and a letter. “This arrived for you, Mr Potter.”

Harry took the package to the table and sat down. Pushing his dish to the side, he opened the letter first. “It’s from Healer Crossland.” Malfoy did not acknowledge his words. “He’s sent a week’s supply of medication for you, with instructions. He also says you are not allowed back in bed before eight o’clock this evening at the earliest. The Mediwitch therapist will be here at ten o’clock tomorrow morning for your first session. Her name is Dahlia Merriweather.” Harry smiled. “Funny name. Anyway, he wants you to go for a walk this afternoon, and suggests you try and read, or maybe do a puzzle or something.”

Malfoy showed no sign of having heard and continued to eat his lunch at a torturously slow pace.

Harry hid a sigh and opened the package. Inside was an array of potion vials and boxes, along with the instructions for administering them. “He says he’s already explained to you what he’s prescribed but it’s all written out, just in case.”

Malfoy took the last forkful of food from his small portion. “There’s more,” Harry said. “Would you like more?” Malfoy said nothing and pushed his plate away.

“Ok. Well, do you want to wash or dry?” Maybe if Malfoy shared the chores, it would encourage him to let the elves back in. Malfoy didn’t reply, but got up from his chair and picked up a tea towel hanging from a drawer handle. “I’ll wash then, shall I?”

Harry filled the washing up bowl and began methodically washing their lunch things. Malfoy dried each one at the same slow pace as he had eaten, his hands shaking all the time. When he put them away they rattled against each other so loudly that Harry feared for their unbroken existence.

When the kitchen was tidy, Harry spoke again. “I suppose we ought to go for that walk. Are you ready?” Malfoy pointed at his socks. “Go put some shoes on then. I’ll wait here.”

He shuffled out. Harry found the endless silence tiring. It wasn’t that he preferred being yelled at and insulted, but Malfoy’s lifelessness made him uncomfortable. It was like living with someone under Imperius. His whole personality seemed to have been taken away from him.

He put his shoes on and sat down at the table to wait for Malfoy. He was astonished that Malfoy was so compliant. Silent, but compliant. What could Healer Crossland possibly have said to him in their appointment?

Malfoy arrived in the kitchen much faster than Harry expected. He’d put on a pair of boots, which looked most bizarre teamed with jogging bottoms. Harry opened the door with a flourish, and “After you,

Malfoy." It didn't even get the hint of a smile.

They stood in the garden. "Where would you like to walk?" Malfoy shrugged. Harry was quite pleased. A shrug was a step up from no acknowledgement at all. Harry started along the path that led to the main gates. He had no idea of the layout of the estate grounds and didn't want to blunder blindly somewhere.

Malfoy walking painfully slowly, but the boots meant he had to lift his feet up, at least a little. He still had an odd gait; he sort of lifted his toes but dragged his heels. It was uncomfortable for Harry to match his laborious pace. By they time they reached the Manor gates, a distance of a hundred metres or so, Malfoy was breathing heavily.

"Up to the house and round, or straight back?" Harry stood awkwardly with his hands in his pockets, trying not to notice that Malfoy was puffed out.

"Back."

The whispered word took Harry by surprise. He nodded and turned round down the path they'd just walked down. He decided to try and press Malfoy a bit further. "I think it would be helpful if you could let the elves back in the cottage. I know how much you love washing up, but I think Tibby is feeling deprived by not waiting on you!" Harry tried to make a joke out of it.

Malfoy nodded. "Tibby?" Though he spoke in a whisper, Tibby arrived immediately. "You can come in the cottage."

Tibby bowed deeply. "Thank you, Mr Malfoy, Sir." He shot a grateful look at Harry before popping out.

They started the interminably slow walk back to the cottage. Harry's pleasure about the elves being allowed back in the cottage was matched by his pleasure at hearing Malfoy speak. Somehow the silence had been more disconcerting than the sweating and the shakes and the filthy clothes.

Back in the kitchen Harry put the kettle on. “Tea?” Malfoy nodded and took his boots off by the door before shambling off into the living room. “Tibby?” The elf appeared in the kitchen. “Healer Crossland suggested Malfoy try reading and puzzles and so on, something to make him think a bit. Are there any in the Manor you can bring us? And can you also restock the kitchen please?” Tibby nodded and disappeared.

Harry set a tea tray with a jug of milk and the sugar bowl. He brewed the tea and took it into the living room. “I didn’t know how you liked your tea so I brought it in.”

Malfoy nodded and poured himself some tea. He added milk and put the mug on the coffee table.

They sat in silence for a few minutes then, when Harry had drunk half of his tea, he asked the question that he’d been wondering about all afternoon. “Er, Malfoy? You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to, but what’s changed? This morning, you were, er, different.” Harry stared down at his tea. He didn’t know how to phrase his thoughts. Malfoy didn’t answer. “Was it Healer Crossland? He’s great. I had a lot of nightmares, you know, after the war. I suppose everyone did. I withdrew, hid in my room. I’ve never been very good with grief. Hermione made an appointment without me knowing and took me to his office. I saw him several times. He was good. Made me get a handle on things before they consumed me.” Harry busied himself topping up his mug.

“Hope.” Malfoy’s quiet voice made him jump. He hadn’t expected an answer. “He told me I didn’t have to live like I was.”

“Oh.” Harry didn’t know what to say. “Well you don’t have to. You deserve to be happy just as much as anyone else does.”

Malfoy’s head jerked up. He looked at Harry in astonishment. Just then, Tibby appeared in the living room with a pile of puzzles and books which he laid on the coffee table. He bowed. “I chose some you used to like to do with your mother, Mr Malfoy, sir.” Malfoy nodded and Tibby disappeared.

Harry put his mug down and knelt by the coffee table to inspect the pile of boxes. “Do you know, I’m not sure I’ve ever done a jigsaw puzzle. Can I do one with you?”

Malfoy nodded. Harry pulled a box from the middle of the pile. He smiled in surprise. “It’s Hogwarts! Look, it’s Hogwarts in the snow! Can we do this one?” It was a bit silly to be so excited by a jigsaw puzzle, but Harry had never thought about what wizarding puzzles would be like. It made sense that they would have famous wizarding places on them.

Harry cleared the boxes and books off the coffee table “I’ll have to enlarge the table so it fits. Do you mind?” Malfoy shook his head and Harry whispered a spell and flicked his wand. The table doubled in width and length.

Malfoy moved slowly off the sofa to sit on the floor with his legs tucked under him. His oversized clothes could not disguise the mass of sharp angles Malfoy had become. His tucked up position emphasised his thin frame. Harry emptied the pieces out of the box and Malfoy helped turn them over so they were all picture side up.

~*~

Harry had fitted together the Quidditch pitch and the lake and Malfoy had done almost all of the sky when Harry’s stomach rumbled, making him laugh. “I suppose it is tea time. Are you hungry?” Malfoy shrugged. “How about a sandwich then? And some hot chocolate? Looking at all this snow has given me a craving for a warm drink.” Malfoy nodded and Harry stood up stiffly to go to the kitchen.

~*~

Harry awoke to the sound of his alarm chiming. Malfoy had to take his first potion before breakfast. Healer Crossland had explained that it would help the detoxification process, but that it might also cause more of the shaking that Malfoy had displayed yesterday. Harry turned his alarm off and lay on the sofa for a few moments, stretching his legs out. Sitting quietly with Malfoy the night before had been strangely enjoyable. He hadn’t thought they would be able to just sit together, but his presence was oddly comfortable. Harry couldn’t quite figure it out. The whole situation was bizarre.

He went down to the kitchen and made tea. When it was brewed he carried a cup upstairs and knocked

on Malfoy's bedroom door. "Potion time, Malfoy!" He entered the room and saw Malfoy was asleep. "Malfoy." He didn't stir. "Malfoy!" Harry raised his voice. Malfoy rolled over so he was facing the room. Harry picked up the vial with the morning's potion dose and went to the bed. "Come on, potion time!" This try was rewarded with a grunt. "Malfoy!" One eye opened. "You have to take this." Malfoy slowly moved into a sitting position and swallowed the potion. Harry put the cup of tea on the bedside table. "Breakfast at nine and you've got the lady with the funny name at ten. Time to get up!" Malfoy lay back down and grunted again.

Back in the kitchen Harry found butter and jam and put them on the table with glasses and a carton of juice. He sliced some bread and made a pot of coffee. When the kitchen clock said five to nine and Harry had heard no noise from upstairs he went back up. Entering Malfoy's bedroom he saw he'd gone back to sleep. "Malfoy! Breakfast in five minutes! Come on. Time to get out of bed! Breakfast then time to get ready for the Mediwitch." Harry picked up the untouched cup of tea.

Malfoy poked his head out of the cocoon of bedding. "Don't want to." His mumble sounded distinctly bad-tempered.

"Well, you have to. Healer Crossland said three meals a day and a session with the lady."

"Can't." Malfoy's grumble was even quieter.

Harry crossed the room and drew back the curtains. He opened one of the windows too, hoping some of the crisp April air would rouse Malfoy. "Look. It's nearly nine o'clock. You have to eat some breakfast and shower before Mediwitch Merriweather arrives at ten."

Malfoy's head lifted slight off his pillow. "I feel like shit." His voice was quiet and sad.

Harry's face softened. "I can imagine. Well no, I probably can't. But getting up can't make you feel any worse. And I've made a pot of coffee. And, er…" Harry couldn't think of anything else encouraging to say.

“Mmph,” was his only reply.

“All right. I’ll be downstairs with breakfast.” Harry left the room.

~*~

Sooner than he expected Malfoy came shuffling into the kitchen. “Good morning! Toast?”

Malfoy shook his head. “Sick.”

“Coffee?” Harry brought the pot over to the table and filled his own mug. Malfoy nodded.

Harry consulted the parchment sent by the Healer. “It could be the potion that’s making you feel a bit sick. But you only have to take it for three days and the nausea should pass. You have to eat something, though. There’s a tablet you have to take, but you’re not supposed to take it on an empty stomach.” Harry put two slices of bread in the toaster. When they popped up, he brought one over for Malfoy and one for himself. Malfoy put the tiniest smear of butter on his and ate it slowly.

Harry resisted the temptation to say ‘well done’. Patronising Malfoy wouldn’t go down very well. Instead he silently handed over a tablet. Malfoy swallowed it with his juice and grimaced.

“If you go and shower, I’ll tidy the living room so you and the Mediwitch can have your chat in there.”

Malfoy nodded and slowly walked out of the kitchen. Harry let out a relieved sigh when he heard the shower start running. He really didn’t want to have to wash Malfoy. Ever again.

He had just put the table with their unfinished jigsaw in the corner of the room when there was a knock on the front door and Tibby came in, escorting a cheerful looking lady with a brown curly hair.

“Mediwitch Merriweather.” Tibby announced and Disapparated.

Harry stepped forward and extended his hand. “Mediwitch, hello. I’m Harry Potter.”

She smiled and said, “Please call me Dahlia, Mr Potter. It’s nice to meet you.”

Harry led her into the living room. “Would you like a drink?" He gestured for her to sit down.

“No, thank you. I'd like to see Mr Malfoy straight away, if that's all right.” She took a notebook out of her voluminous bag.

“Ok. I’ll just go tell him.” Harry went up the stairs and knocked on Malfoy’s door. “The Mediwitch is here, Malfoy.” He heard a mumble from inside.

~*~

Harry stood in the kitchen, wondering what he should do while Malfoy talked with Mediwitch Merriweather. He couldn’t go in the lounge and the sky was grey enough that sitting outside didn’t seem inviting. He decided to go home and see if anything interesting had arrived in the post. Hopefully there would be no further letters from the mothers of ex-rivals.

Harry concentrated and Apparated inside No. 12 Grimmauld Place. His post was sitting on the kitchen table. He ignored the bills and opened a letter from Ron and Hermione, an invitation to dinner on Friday.

He took it into the living room and sat down at the fireplace to Floo Hermione and Ron. Hermione answered. “Harry, hi! Ron, it’s Harry.” He heard Ron’s footsteps and then saw him as he knelt down next to Hermione.

“Mate, how are you? We haven’t spoken to you in a few days.”

Harry shifted so he was sitting more comfortably. “Er, no. Something’s come up. I don’t think I can come to dinner.”

Hermione’s face took on her concerned expression. “Everything all right, Harry?”

Harry grimaced. Maybe he should just tell them everything. It would be easier, and Hermione would get the whole story out of him eventually anyway. “Yeah. Well, no. Er, so I got a letter from Narcissa Malfoy the day before yesterday.” Harry broke off when he saw Ron’s face turn puzzled.

“Mrs Malfoy wrote to you?” His voice wasn’t hostile, just curious. “What about?”

“Well, you know she moved to France when Lucius was exiled? She isn’t allowed back in the country, or something. I’m not sure. She wrote asking if I’d check on Malfoy. He wasn’t answering letters and she was worried.”

“She asked you to check on the ferret?” Ron sounded surprised.

“Don’t call him that, Ron. Did you go?” Hermione’s voice was curious too.

“Yeah. He’s living in a cottage on the edge of the Manor estate. Doesn’t want to live in the Manor.”

Ron shuddered. “Can’t imagine why. Bloody awful place.”

Harry nodded. “Yeah. So, he was in a right state. I mean, I’ve never seen anything like it, guys. He’s really ill. So anyway, short story, I have to stay with him for a while.”

“What?!”

Ron’s exclamation was about what Harry had expected. “Yeah. He really should be in hospital, but he won’t go. And the Healer and Mrs Malfoy agreed that he could only stay in the cottage if someone stays with him, and she asked me, and I couldn’t say no.” Harry realized how strange this must sound, him babysitting his worst enemy. Luckily Hermione was in one of her practical moods.

Hermione nodded. “Of course you couldn’t. What’s wrong with him?”

Harry ran his hand through his hair. “Well, it’s difficult, because the Healer can’t really tell me. Patient confidentiality and all that. But when I got there he was drugged up to the eyeballs on sleeping draughts. I don’t think he’d left his bed for weeks. And I’m not sure, but it looks a lot like depression to me. You remember that book you made me read about surviving trauma, Hermione?”

She nodded. “You know I was just worried….”

“I know. And you were right to be. But anyway, it talked about how depression is common after trauma and stuff. And well, he lived with Voldemort. And had to make the choice of killing Dumbledore or having his parents killed. Not to mention we fought a war and half the people he grew up with are dead. That’s a pretty massive trauma.”

Hermione looked thoughtful. “Add to that his parents being exiled to France. I don’t think I’ve seen him since the trials. Being all alone, all the time can’t be healthy.”

“But, but…” Ron didn’t finish his sentence. “Bloody hell. I mean, why you, Harry?”

Harry sighed. “I don’t know. Maybe after what she did in the Forest she didn’t think I’d say no. Maybe there is no-one else. I don’t know what happened to the other Slytherins in Malfoy’s year.”

“I think Daphne Greengrass is the only one left in England. I’m not sure about Zabini. But Pansy and Goyle went abroad I think.” Hermione chewed the edge of her thumb, thoughtfully.

“I know you want to help, mate. But I can’t imagine you and Malfoy living together is a very good idea. I mean, surely, you’ll just fight.” Ron looked worried and Harry felt a rush of affection for his friends.

“I dunno. When he’s not yelling at me, and to be fair, that’s only happened once, he’s generally silent. And oddly good company.” Harry shrugged. "It's a bit weird, I know, but..." he trailed off.

Hermione nodded. “Look, you don’t have to decide about dinner yet. By Friday you might be desperate for a change of scene. And,” she looked at Ron, “if he’s feeling better, why don’t you invite him too?” Ron yelped and Hermione elbowed him. “Being isolated isn’t good for anyone, Ron. If all of his friends are abroad, that’s got to be pretty hard on him. And you know what, the war’s over. School’s over. We always talk about how we have to build bridges to ensure it never happens again. So, let’s put our knuts in our mouths and all that.” Harry grinned at Ron’s indulgent smile at Hermione’s mangling of wizarding sayings. She always seemed to combine them with the Muggle proverbs she’d grown up with.

“You’ve been listening to Shacklebolt on the WWN again, haven’t you, Hermione?” She smiled. “You’re right, as usual. I’ll let you know Friday morning, all right?”

“Of course.” They both smiled. Harry thanked Merlin he had friends like them. He didn’t know where he’d be without them – imploded like Malfoy, probably.

“Look, I’d better be heading back. He’s having sessions with this Mediwitch every morning at ten so I’ll call again in a few days. They use the lounge and the cottage is pretty tiny so I feel a bit uncomfortable hanging round.”

Harry ended the call and went to fetch some clean clothes from his bedroom. He also picked up the pile of novels he’d been planning on reading. He’d have a lot of time on his hands in the next few weeks.

~*~

He arrived back at the cottage just in time to see the Mediwitch out. She departed with a cheery “See you tomorrow!” Malfoy looked less than thrilled at the prospect.

“Tea?”

Malfoy nodded and sat back down in the living room. When the tea was brewed Harry took Malfoy a mug. He was doing something that involved a big piece of parchment and lots of different coloured pencils, so Harry left him to it, relieved to see him doing something on his own initiative. Surely that was a good sign?

~*~

Part 3Title: Shuffling Out Of Hell, Part 3

Author: [info]alovelycupoftea

Rating: NC 17

Pairing(s): Harry and Draco friendship and preslash.

Warnings: Talk of self neglect, self harm, substance abuse and addiction and suicide.

Word Count: ~23,500 words.

Mental Health Issue: Depression. PTSD. Substance Abuse.

Summary: A letter from Narcissa gets Harry thrown into Draco’s life in a way he could never have imagined.

Author's Notes: Thank you to Delphi, for the awesome beta, and [info]qumabh for holding my hand, cheering me on, and generally being amazingly encouraging. Thank you Cassie, for the extension and encouragement!

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Harry had just finished assembling two sandwiches when Malfoy shuffled into the kitchen. He murmured a sticking charm and attached the large piece of parchment to the wall behind the table, next to the window.

Harry eyed it. “What’s that?” There was a grid on the parchment, covered in different coloured squares.

“My routine.” There was more than a note of scepticism in Malfoy’s voice on the word ‘routine’.

“Oh.” Harry wasn’t sure what to say. “What time is lunch in your routine? I’ve just made some sandwiches.”

Malfoy peered at the chart. “Twelve.”

The clock on the kitchen wall said it was three minutes past twelve. “Good timing.”

They sat down at the table. Malfoy sat with his back to the chart. His eating pace had increased from torturously slow to just painfully slow. Harry hoped that was a sign of improvement. He squinted at the brown square below the red square that said ‘lunch’. It said ‘walk’. Looking to the left hand column Harry realised Malfoy had allocated a whole hour for their walk. Definitely time for more than just to the gates and back.

“Malfoy, is there a village or something nearby? I don’t think I actually know where we are. The Manor, obviously. But I don’t know where it is.” Harry shut up before he sounded like more of a prat.

Malfoy shook his head. “Nothing in walking distance,” he mumbled.

“Oh. Well, where should we go then?” Harry finished his sandwich.

“Round the lake?” Malfoy didn’t look up from his plate.

“You have a lake?” Harry knew he shouldn’t be astonished. Grandeur was pretty much implied by the name ‘Malfoy Manor’. Malfoy made no answer, just shrugged. “Round the lake it is. I didn’t bring my wellies, so no paddling.” Malfoy gave him blank look. Maybe it was a bit soon for jokes.

Harry stood up. “Do you want to wash or dry?”

“Tibby.” Malfoy spoke quietly. “Will you do the washing up for us, please?” Harry swallowed a chuckle. “We’re going for a walk round the lake. Can we have a pot of tea when we come back, please?”

Tibby, delighted to have orders from a Malfoy again, nodded and bowed deeply.

Harry put the plates on the side and said, “I’ll just go and put my shoes on then. And maybe a jacket. It looks a bit grey out.” Malfoy nodded and slowly walked out of the kitchen.

~*~

Harry was waiting by the front door with his coat on when Malfoy came downstairs. The hooded top from yesterday was back on, with the hood up and a jacket over the top. He had again added battered boots to his jogging bottoms. Harry couldn’t reconcile this indifference with the Malfoy he’d known at school, whose robes had always been tidy to the point of primness. He opened the door. “Lead on!”

~*~

When they reached the gravelled driveway Harry paused and looked towards the main house. The curve of the driveway was designed to draw one's eyes to the majestic structure. Malfoy, breathing deeply, had turned away so he was not looking at the Manor. Harry gazed at the enormous and beautiful building, made of some pale coloured stone. It was the first time he'd ever seen the Manor in daylight; it had been dark when they had arrived with the Snatchers, and Harry had been too scared to pay attention to the architecture.

"How long have your family lived here, Malfoy?" he asked.

"Since the 900s." Malfoy still hadn't turned to face the house.

"It's beautiful." Harry thought of the wreckage of the cottage in Godric's Hollow and felt deeply sad. Even though Malfoy couldn't bear to look at his home, Harry felt a little jealous. He thought of all the tangible connections to family, the Malfoy history and ancestry it represented. He had so little in comparison.

"I know I only saw a tiny fraction of the horrors Voldemort inflicted…" Malfoy shuddered at the name, "…in your house," Harry said slowly, beginning to realize the complicated web that wound around Draco. Voldemort was gone, but for Draco he was still there, still shadowing his life. "But as long as you stay out of the Manor, he's still winning. He's still controlling you." Harry paused. "It shouldn't be that way, Malfoy. That's been the home of the Malfoys for over a thousand years. Don't let him take that away from you."

Harry thought he saw Malfoy's head nod, ever so slightly. They started slowly across the grass. As they reached the top of a small incline, Harry saw a lake in front of them, wide and still and with rushes growing around the sides. "Did you ever swim in here?"

Malfoy smiled a tiny smile. "As a child. Cold."

"It must have been fun." Malfoy nodded. "If we have a warm summer we could give it a try." Another tiny smile. Harry felt disproportionately pleased to have wrested two smiles from Malfoy in one walk.

Malfoy sighed and spoke quietly. “Tired. Back?” Harry nodded and they headed back to the drive.

~*~

Tibby was waiting with a pot of tea and a homemade cake back at the cottage. Harry had finished his second slice of cake when Tibby announced Healer Crossland. Tibby poured him a cup of tea and he sat down at the kitchen table opposite Malfoy. Harry greeted the Healer, then took his mug and plate to the sink and went into the living room to give them some privacy.

Just as he sat down on the sofa, Tibby appeared with a package. “This arrived for you, Mr Potter.” He bowed and Disapparated.

Harry turned the parcel over with interest. He recognised Hermione’s handwriting on the address: Mr H. Potter, c/o Malfoy Manor. He wondered what she was sending him. Opening the brown paper, he took out a book entitled “Living with Depression: a guide for spouses and relatives”. He turned it over to read the blurb, and saw a post-it note from Hermione.

Harry,

They didn’t have a book entitled “Living with Depression: a guide for schoolboy rivals and ex-nemeses” so I had to make do with this one.

Love,

Hermione

Harry grinned. When in doubt, throw a book at it, that was Hermione. He turned to the introduction and started to read.

He had just finished the first chapter when Healer Crossland knocked gently on the open living room door. “May I come in, Mr Potter?”

Harry put the book down on the coffee table. “Of course. Please have a seat.”

The Healer sat down in the armchair, his long legs crossed at the ankle in front of him. “Mr Malfoy is responding well to the detox treatment. By tomorrow, there should be no traces of sleeping draughts left in his bloodstream. Tomorrow morning he will take the last dose of the potion he takes before breakfast. Tomorrow night will be the first time he has slept without the aid of potions for a considerable while, and you should be aware that the reasons Mr Malfoy started taking the sleeping draughts may well reappear.”

Harry leaned forwards. “You mean nightmares?”

Healer Crossland nodded. “Yes. The Mediwitch will be helping Mr Malfoy with the trauma that is causing the nightmares, but this is a slow process. Dreams and what happens to the brain when we sleep are something we do not know very much about. The medical consensus is that dreams are the brain’s way of processing the thoughts and emotions of the day. It is likely that during the therapeutic process, when Mr Malfoy is confronting the traumas he experienced, his dreams may be more vivid and more disturbing. I know this is something you can empathise with, Mr Potter, and I urge you to be gentle with him. Mr Malfoy seems determined to stop shielding himself from the past with drugs, but the nightmares may make the difficult process of recovery seem impossible, and he may become discouraged.”

“Okay.” Harry paused, thoughtful. Something about the Healer’s manner invited confidences, as Harry had realised in their past interactions. He felt uncomfortable admitting his doubts, but he could not stop himself from expressing them. “I have no idea what I’m doing here, Healer. Malfoy doesn’t really talk, and I don’t know what’s going on in his head. I have no idea if I’m doing the right thing by staying with him. I mean, I know nothing about depression, and I don’t know what to say or what to do and… it sounds weird but I just want the old Malfoy back. I mean, we were rotten to each other at school. I thought he was a spoiled brat and he seemed to be everything I hated. And now here I am cooking his meals and doing jigsaw puzzles with him and I have no idea what’s going on! I’d do anything to have the arrogant git back to his old self." He gave a short laugh. "At least I knew where I was with that Malfoy.”

Healer Crossland shifted in the armchair. “Depression is for many people like losing oneself. The misery, the despair, the blackness seems to consume everything that they are. I think that your 'wanting the old Malfoy back' as you say makes you ideally suited to this role. You need to know, however, that you won’t get the old Malfoy back, not exactly. That person is gone. You will get a different version, a version that has been put back together, remade. But he’s the only person who can repair himself. All any of us can do is offer a helping hand.” Healer Crossland stood up. “I’ll be back tomorrow to see how he is. Take care of yourself as well, Mr Potter. Be sure you have some time for you each day.”

Harry smiled and stood up. “Thank you, Healer. A helping hand I think I can manage. Tibby!” As usual, the elf appeared instantly. “Please could you show Healer Crossland out? Then I would appreciate it if you could cook us some dinner.” The elf bowed, and led the Healer out.

Harry sat back down on the sofa and thought about what they’d just said. The Healer had made him feel better about staying here with no idea what to do, but he was still anxious about what was to come. Each time he’d seen Malfoy his mood had been completely different from all their previous interactions. He wasn’t sure he had the energy for this responsibility. He remembered what the Healer had said yesterday about patience and calm smiles. He snorted. He wasn’t exactly patient at the best of times, and he’d never been patient with Malfoy. Despite all that, he didn’t think of walking away. He’d made a commitment now.

~*~

He had covered two pages of his notebook in doodles when Tibby appeared in the doorway. “Dinner will be at six, Mr Potter.”

“Thank you, Tibby. I’ll tell Malfoy.” Harry put his notebook away in his holdall and went upstairs. He knocked on the bedroom door. “Malfoy?” He opened the door, slowly. Malfoy was sitting cross legged on his bed, picking at a hole in the sleeve of his jumper. “Malfoy?” He looked up. “Dinner’s at six. That’s an hour away. Do you want to do some more of the jigsaw?” He shook his head. “Read the Prophet?” Another head shake. “Do one of the other puzzles?” Another negative. “Well, what do you want to do?”

“Die.” It was whispered so quietly that Harry only just heard it. His heart sped up and his stomach started fluttering.

Harry looked at Malfoy, properly looked at him. He looked so sad, so lacking in anything that used to characterise him as Malfoy. Harry remembered what the Healer had said about people feeling that they'd lost themselves.

A well of pity and concern surged up in Harry. He felt as if he would do anything to lessen his companion's wretchedness. It was this compassion that moved his shocked body over to the bed, and sat him down beside Draco. Without consciously intending to, his arms wrapped round the tiny frail skeletal figure that had once been Malfoy.

Malfoy kept his arms crossed tightly around his middle, tense in Harry's arms. The only thought running through Harry's brain, the only thing he could put into words, was 'please don't die, please don't die, please don't die'.

A litany, a prayer, a mantra.

As Harry rocked him gently in his arms, all the while whispering his plea into the pale silky hair, a single great hiccupping sob wracked Malfoy's body. Then, as if the walls that had kept this emotion in had finally been broken through, a storm of sobs and tears and wails came flooding out. Harry pulled him closer to his chest and Malfoy uncrossed his arms and snaked them round Harry's ribs, gripping with almost painful tightness. Only when the heaving painful sobs had died down and Harry's entire shirt front was wet with tears was Harry able to make out the continuous mumble coming from Malfoy's lips.

"I can't do this, I can't do this, I can't do this."

Unbelievably, yet more pain suffused Harry's chest at these words. He wanted to shake Malfoy, to tell him that he could, to shock him out of this state. But he also wanted to take all of that pain away, to carry the weight that had smothered this once proud boy into this broken man.

A flash of hatred coursed through Harry's body. Hatred for Voldemort, hatred for everyone who had forced children to fight a war that had nearly destroyed their world. A war that was still destroying those who had lived through it. Unconsciously, Harry squeezed the weeping Draco tighter.

Malfoy’s sobs stopped at last, his muttered words fading to wheezy breaths. He’d cried himself to sleep. Harry slowly untangled their arms and laid him carefully back down on the bed. But when Harry stood up, a hand reached out to him, groping for the comfort of a human touch. Harry froze for a moment, then, carefully, lay down on his back on the bed next to Malfoy, who rolled towards him and buried his head in Harry’s side. Awkwardly, Harry brought his arm round so his hand was resting on Malfoy’s hip.

He lay there, trying to clear his mind and centre his own breathing, until he too fell asleep.

~*~

Harry woke with a pounding head and a stiff back. He looked around, confused. At the sight of the sleeping man next to him, the memory of Malfoy's defeated face as he had seen it earlier filled his mind. Looking at his watch he saw they’d slept for three hours. Gently lifting Malfoy’s arm from his waist, he stood up and quietly left the room.

When he reached the kitchen he called, “Tibby?”

The elf appeared. “I saw you was sleeping so dinner is in the fridge.”

Harry smiled at the elf’s thoughtfulness and thanked him for not waking them. “Can we have some hot chocolate please? And some cake?” Tibby nodded.

~*~

Harry made his way upstairs and went to the bathroom. He wondered whether he should wake Malfoy. They had fallen asleep about six, and if he let him sleep longer now he probably wouldn’t sleep through the night. Healer Crossland had assured him that regular sleep was one of the most important things to establish. As he stood outside Malfoy’s room, wondering what to do, Tibby appeared next to him with a deferential bow. “It is ready, Mr Potter.” .

Harry opened the door and softly walked over to the bed. Kneeling down next to it, he gently placed a hand on Malfoy's arm. "Malfoy." Malfoy stirred. He obviously hadn't been sleeping very deeply.

"Mmmm?" Malfoy opened one eye.

"There's some supper downstairs." Harry watched as Malfoy rubbed his eyes. He could well imagine they felt prickly after his crying. "Do you want to have a bath or something, then get into your pyjamas?"

Malfoy nodded. He was sleepy and compliant again. Harry stood up. "I'll run you a bath."

As he went into the bathroom, he could not help but remember the last time he had done this. Shaking his head, as if to clear the memories he started the taps and added bubble bath. Malfoy appeared in his dressing gown in the doorway. Harry stood up. "I'll, er, leave you to it."

Malfoy shook his head, and his eyes looked scared. "Stay, "he whispered.

Harry nodded. "Ok. You get in the bath. I'll just go and get the newspaper."

He grabbed that day's Prophet from the living room, trying not to think too hard about the even more bizarre turn their situation had taken. Returning to the bathroom, he put the loo seat down and perched on the closed lid, which placed him behind Malfoy's head. He glanced through the news items and rejected them as too serious. Instead he turned to the Quidditch pages and began reading aloud an article about the results of medical tests on the Magpies's

Chaser who had been hit by a Bludger in Sunday's match.

By the time he'd read the whole sports section, he thought the bath water must have gone cold. "Let's go have some supper, shall we? Tibby's made hot chocolate and I think there might be cake." Malfoy nodded, and Harry passed him one of the big fluffy towels. He had intended to avert his eyes when Malfoy stood up in the bath, but he couldn't help notice the line of his back and how much his spine

stood out. He'd try to make Malfoy eat two slices of cake.

Harry had taken the warming charm off the hot chocolate and cut a generous slice of cake for them both by the time Malfoy shuffled downstairs in his pyjamas, dressing gown and slippers. He sat down at the table and curled his hands around the mug of chocolate Harry had poured for him as if seeking the warmth.

Malfoy had eaten half of the cake when he paused and mumbled, "Thank you."

Harry felt himself blush. "I didn't do anything."

Malfoy looked straight at him. "Yes, you did." He returned his attention to his cake.

Harry watched Malfoy eat his cake in the same slow, painful manner he ate everything. Harry just wanted to fix him. Healer Crossland telling him that that was the one thing he couldn't do, that nobody could do except Malfoy, just made him feel more frustrated. He squashed down that feeling to examine later.

When Malfoy had finished his last mouthful of cake, he set his fork down deliberately. He looked exhausted.

"Bed?" Harry asked.

Malfoy nodded and walked upstairs even more slowly than usual. When he reached his bedroom door, he turned and looked down the stairs to where Harry was standing at the bottom. They gazed at each other in silence for a moment, then Harry spoke. "Breakfast at nine, as timetabled?" Malfoy nodded and went into his room.

~*~

Harry's sleep was filled with images and memories from the war in a way it had not been since the immediate aftermath. He awoke with a jerk, breathing deeply. He'd been back on the Astronomy Tower, only this time Malfoy had accepted Dumbledore's offer of help. But it had all been in vain since Bellatrix had cast the killing curse with a gleeful laugh and sent them both plunging to the ground.

He looked at his alarm clock, reminding himself that it was just a dream. It was just gone eight. He went upstairs and showered but found himself unable to erase the image of Malfoy and Dumbledore both falling off the Tower. Thinking about Malfoy actually dying led him back to the previous evening. Despite all his best efforts to clear his mind after dinner, he had fallen asleep still turning it over. Now, as then, his thoughts darted round, never quite settling properly on one element. Almost as if he was seeing it from an outsider's perspective, the image of himself holding the sobbing despairing man was the background over which his thoughts fluttered. He couldn't understand how their past could possibly have led them to such a point. He was angry with Dumbledore for not trying harder to help Malfoy, to find him a way out. He was angry with himself for not seeing the pain and desperation radiating off him in that disastrous encounter in the bathroom. He wanted to fix Malfoy and simultaneously knew the truth: that he couldn't. He both understood and was infuriated by the fact that Malfoy had refused to ask for help, had holed himself up and shut out the world while he drowned.

These thoughts continued to circle as he shaved and dressed. A particularly vicious swipe with his razor while thinking about the continuing destructive power of Voldemort left him with a stinging cut on his jaw that throbbed as he knocked on Malfoy's door (a grunt was the only response). Downstairs he found Tibby and their breakfast things ready set out. Tibby put a mug of tea for him on the table while Harry fetched his notebook and pen. He tried to order his thoughts, linking sentences with lines and circling prominent thoughts, in a code that made sense only to him. When he had filled several pages, he felt no closer to resolution, but could at least focus on other things. He summoned a piece of parchment and began composing an update to Mrs Malfoy.

~*~

That afternoon, they reached the lake on their daily walk when Malfoy turned to Harry and spoke.

"You know the Mediwitch therapist?" Harry nodded. "She thinks I should leave the grounds."

Harry could tell Malfoy was torn about this. His face looked worried, but his voice was determined. “When was the last time you went out?” Harry tried not to make the question sound accusing.

“I can’t remember.” Draco gave a humourless laugh. “It's not like I have anywhere I want to go. I thought maybe you had a suggestion.”

Harry was unexpectedly touched that Malfoy was asking for his help. He hadn’t really worked out what Malfoy felt about him staying there, but this seemed positive. “Well, Ron and Hermione have asked me to have dinner with them on Friday. They told me to invite you as well. Would you like to come?”

Draco’s face looked pained. “I’m not sure that’s...appropriate.”

“We’re grown ups now. They're great people. And school and the war are over.” Harry wasn't sure what would convince him. “I’m sure if you gave them a chance, you’d probably like them.”

Draco turned his face away and mumbled something.

“Sorry?”

He kept his face turned away, but spoke a little louder. “I said, they won’t like me.”

Harry was struck speechless for a moment by this fresh evidence of the profound changes in Malfoy. Where had the Malfoy pride gone? This defeated man was nothing like the haughty, swaggering boy he’d once known. “You don’t know that.” Harry touched Draco’s arm. “Look at me.” Draco slowly turned his face to look at Harry. “They invited you, Draco. They aren't holding any grudges. They want to start again. We’ve all changed. There’s no reason why they won’t like you.”

Draco’s face flushed with sudden anger. “I poisoned Weasley!” His shout was almost hysterical. “I spent years mocking and insulting both of them! I was a complete shit to them and they won’t forgive me and they shouldn’t forgive me because I don’t deserve it! I don’t deserve friends and I don’t deserve a fresh

start and you telling me they want to give me one makes me feel like crap because I sure as hell wouldn't if I was in their place!" Malfoy glared at him, furiously wiping tears from his cheeks with the back of his hands, then broke away and ran back towards the house.

Harry watched him until he disappeared into the distant cottage and sighed. What had just happened? He could not possibly be helping Malfoy with his clumsy suggestions. He slowly walked towards the cottage, trying to think of somewhere they could go which would not provoke such a reaction.

~*~

Draco was not in the kitchen or the living room when Harry returned to the cottage. He poured some tea from the pot Tibby had made and took it into the sitting room with the Daily Prophet. He was in the middle of an article about the rising popularity of football in the wizarding world when Draco entered the room, clutching a mug tightly. He sat down on the edge of the armchair and looked at the floor.

"Harry, I want to apologise for my reaction earlier. If you're still willing to take me, I would like to have dinner with Ron and Hermione." Draco's voice was quiet and it sounded strange to hear him use their given names.

Harry folded the paper and put it on the coffee table. "I'd like that. It's Friday, at their flat."

Malfoy nodded and sipped his tea. Harry noticed his hands relaxed a little around the mug.

"Look, about what you said about, er, not deserving forgiveness and friends..." Harry was hesitant about broaching the subject, in case it got the same reaction.

Malfoy looked up, surprised. "There's nothing to say. I'm a terrible person and I did terrible things and because of that I don't deserve friends or forgiveness." His voice was matter of fact, as though he were saying that water was wet and fire was hot.

Harry felt pain well up in his chest at both the words and the resigned tone. How could he think that? How could he see himself as so worthless? The war had convinced Harry that good people did terrible deeds, and Snape's life had proved to him that condemning someone based on their past could be a catastrophic mistake. He took his time getting his thoughts in order so he could reply coherently. He wasn't sure he could make Malfoy understand, but for some reason he was not yet ready to examine, it was very important that he try.

"No," he said finally, his voice determined. "I'm not going to argue that you did some terrible things. But we all did. We were fighting a war, Malfoy!" Harry paused, overwhelmed by the memories he tried to keep locked away; memories of words and deeds that made him cringe with shame, even hate himself a little, giving him a taste of the self-loathing Malfoy was drowning in. "But I refuse to accept that what we did in the war and as children define us as adults. It can't." His voice had got louder as he tried to convince Malfoy of things it had taken him a long time to accept. "You're not a terrible person. And you have the rest of your life to not do terrible things."

Malfoy was staring at him. "That's easy for you to say! You didn't try to kill Dumbledore, or poison your classmates, or torture people, or -- " Draco broke off with a sob, and angrily wiped his face with his sleeve.

Harry stood up, his emotions roiling. "For fuck's sake, Malfoy! You're not the only person who did awful things! I did, too! We all did!" Harry ran his hand through his hair, angry at Malfoy's attitude, at his seeming inability to accept that the war had been horrendous but that it was over. "But at least we're alive! People died, Malfoy." Harry blinked back tears of his own and his voice dropped. "Our classmates died. Our friends. But I didn't, and you didn't. We're still here. But you're not living, are you? You're locked up in this tiny house, refusing to live, refusing to be a part of this world that people died to protect. They died so we could live in freedom, and here you are, a captive in a self imposed prison." Harry couldn't stop the tears from falling now, and the lump in his throat choked off whatever else he might have said. He turned and strode out of the room.

He stood in the garden, trying to steady his breathing and work out why he'd gotten so enraged. By the time his breath was deep and even, he still didn't know why he'd reacted so angrily. He hadn't realised how strongly Malfoy's refusal to live any kind of real life had affected him. He'd been caught up in the shock of being thrown in to Malfoy's life, the chores he'd been doing. He had been so absorbed by the situation that he hadn't examined how he felt about it all. Now that he'd recognised his anger it seemed to subside, replaced by an overwhelming feeling of pity. He knew the feeling of hating himself for his deeds, of being secretly convinced they would always define him, those things he'd done or not done that had hurt or betrayed others. But most of the time he recognized that fear as just a fear, not reality,

and it only descended on bad days, in moments of self doubt. To live with it every day, to be convinced of its truth? He couldn't imagine how anyone could survive in that blackness of self-hatred.

As he thought about their discussion, the advice from Healer Crossland popped into his mind. 'Patience and calm smiles' he had said would be needed. He had not said 'anger and shouting.' Harry walked back into the cottage determined to try them out. He shook his head in amazement at the realization that he honestly wanted to lessen Malfoy's pain, something he could not have even imagined wanting a few years ago.

Harry quietly entered the living room. Malfoy was sitting in the same chair, but he had brought his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms round them, a small forlorn clump of hopelessness. His forehead rested on his knees, and his shoulders shook with sobs. Harry stopped next to the chair and placed an awkward hand on Draco's shoulder.

"I'm sorry for shouting at you, Draco. But I'm not going to apologise for what I said. People died fighting for freedom for our world, and we all did terrible things in the course of that fight. But you're alive." He sat down on the sofa and fiddled with his jumper. He felt a bit self conscious; he didn't want to sound like he was lecturing. "You've got to take these chances that are being offered to you to go on, get beyond those things that we never should have had to go through in the first place. Seeing the Healer and the Mediwitch and not taking sleeping potions anymore are a good start. But maybe you should take the next step, yeah?"

Malfoy lifted his head from his knees and looked straight ahead. His eyes were red and there were tears running down his cheeks. "It's hard. I feel so lost. And when I try to reach beyond it, there's nothing there. Nothing to take hold of. Just...nothing."

Harry felt his stomach clench at the despair on Malfoy's face. "But can't you see? A week ago you were spending your life asleep. Now you're up and dressed and eating and talking and getting help. And that's amazing." Harry remembered what the Healer had said to him. "This takes time, Malfoy. But you have to keep going."

Draco nodded and wiped his eyes. "Can we do something distracting?"

“Yeah.” Harry smiled, relieved that Draco seemed to have taken in what he was saying and that the conversation was over. “Another jigsaw?”

~*~

Later that night, Harry lay on the sofa, now thankfully transfigured into a proper bed, thinking over the conversation with Malfoy about whether terrible deeds made a terrible person. He didn’t think he’d explained himself very well, but he wasn't sure he'd want to bring it up again. It had been exhausting, and revived all kinds of memories for him, memories he tended to keep locked away. Malfoy had clearly found it tiring too; he had been quiet to the point of monosyllabic for the rest of the afternoon and evening. Harry fluffed his pillow, and turned over. He wanted to go to sleep, not get lost in memories of the war.

A sudden scream had Harry up and his wand out in seconds. He grabbed his glasses and padded up the stairs. Memories of his own nightmares -- blood, terror, torment, his friends dying before his eyes while he was powerless to save them -- flickered through his mind. He knocked on the door. “Malfoy? It’s me. Are you ok?” There was no reply. Turning the handle, he gently pushed open the door. Malfoy was in bed, with the tangled covers kicked down to the bottom, thrashing about, his hands covering his face, as if to shield him from a beating.

Harry wondered briefly if that was what he looked liked during nightmares and hurried over to the bed. “Malfoy!” Harry shook his shoulder. “Malfoy, wake up! You’re having a nightmare.”

Draco woke up with a shout, his eyes wide, and his hand shot under the pillow for his wand. He levelled it at Harry, panting and terrified. Harry stuck his wand in the waistband of his boxers and held his hands up. “Easy. You were having a nightmare. I woke you up.”

Draco's breathing slowly returned to normal. “Oh.” He slipped his wand back under the pillow. Harry switched on the lamp on the bedside table and turned away to give him a little privacy. He had hated it when he had woken up from nightmares to find Ron or Hermione peering anxiously at him.

When he turned back around, Draco was sitting up in bed, the covers pulled up and wrapped around him. Harry realised he was standing there in his underwear and felt a bit self conscious. “Will you be able

to get back to sleep? Should I, er, go?"

Draco shook his head and watched his hand as it idly traced a pattern on the duvet cover.

"All right. Tibby?" The house-elf appeared next to Harry. "Can we have some hot chocolate please?" The elf bowed and Disapparated. Harry looked round the room for somewhere to sit. Draco silently lifted up the other end of his duvet, inviting Harry to sit at the end of the bed. Harry sat down on the mattress facing the headboard and covered his crossed legs with Draco's duvet. Tibby reappeared and handed them both warm mugs of cocoa.

Harry cradled his mug and smiled. We must look ridiculous, he thought. Two ex-rivals, sitting top and tail in a bed in the middle of the night drinking cocoa. "Remus used to say chocolate was good for shocks. I think it applies to nightmares too." Harry took a slurp. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Draco shook his head. Harry searched round in his mind for an innocuous topic of conversation. "What's your favourite colour?" He winced. Oh lovely. That was a rubbish conversation starter. Malfoy looked up from his study of the duvet and frowned, slightly quizzically. "Um. Blue, I guess. I like all the different shades of blue. How they all feel different."

Harry nodded. He hadn't expected Malfoy to answer the question, never mind answer it honestly.

By the time they finished their cocoa Harry had learnt all sorts of trivia about Malfoy. Malfoy hadn't asked any questions of his own, but had seemed content to allow Harry to distract him from his nightmare.

Harry climbed stiffly out of bed and held out his hand for Malfoy's mug. "Try and sleep, yeah?" From the doorway, he watched Draco lie down on his side and bring the covers up to his chin, then turned off the lamp with a whispered spell.

~*~

While Draco was with the Mediwitch next morning, Harry Apparated back to Grimmauld Place and went to the off-licence in the high street and bought a bottle of wine to take to Hermione and Ron's that evening. He walked down the street, enjoying the crisp spring sunshine and stopped at the florist. He wandered round the shop, picking up any flowers that took his fancy and had the florist arrange them in a bouquet for him. Looking at his watch, he saw he still had half an hour before Malfoy was finished with his therapy session. Ducking into an alleyway, he Apparated to Grimmauld Place and picked up some clean clothes. By the time he'd read his post and replied to a few letters, it was time to go back to Malfoy's cottage.

~*~

"Are you ok?" They were supposedly doing a jigsaw but Malfoy was tapping the edge of the piece he was holding against the table in an erratic rhythm.

"What time are we leaving?" Draco stopped his tapping and started fiddling with the sleeve of his jumper instead.

Harry looked at his watch. "They said seven o'clock, so we'll Apparate from here about five to I guess. Is that ok?"

Malfoy nodded, tersely. "What time is it now?"

"It's three o'clock." Malfoy nodded again and went back to tapping his jigsaw piece. Harry took a deep breath and tried not to let it annoy him.

~*~

"What time is it now?" Draco had increased the tempo of his tapping.

“It’s ten past four.” Harry swallowed a sigh of annoyance. Patience and smiles, patience and smiles, he chanted inwardly.

~*~

“What time is it, Potter?”

Harry looked at his watch. “It’s four-thirty.”

Draco dropped the jigsaw piece he was holding and stood up. “I’m going to get ready.” He walked out of the room.

Harry stared after him. Malfoy was definitely agitated about this evening. Harry hoped it wouldn’t go horribly wrong.

~*~

At six twenty Harry had a quick shower. By six forty he was shaved and dressed.

“Malfoy?” Harry knocked on his door. “Ok to leave in ten minutes?”

Draco opened the door. He wore black woollen trousers and a black cashmere jumper. His face was drawn, and he was running his hands repeatedly through his hair. “No. This is a mental idea.”

Harry put a soothing hand on Draco’s arm where it was holding the door open. “No, it’s not. You look great. Are you ready?”

Draco crossed the room to his chest of drawers. He extracted a black ribbon from the top drawer. “I need to tie my hair back. It’s too long.” His words rushed together.

Harry moved out of the doorway so Draco could cross to the bathroom. He watched as Malfoy stood in front of the mirror and attempted to tie his hair back, but his shaking hands couldn’t knot the ribbon. It hurt to watch him.

“Let me help,” he offered.

Draco turned towards Harry and bit his lip. “Okay.”

~*~

At six fifty-five they Apparated together to the landing outside Ron and Hermione’s flat. “Are you ok?” Harry eyed Draco carefully. He looked a little unsteady.

“Yeah.” Malfoy coughed. “It’s just been a little while since I Apparated anywhere.”

Harry looked at Draco in his smart clothes. His jumper had felt rich and soft when he had taken Draco’s arm to Apparate. This was more like the Malfoy Harry remembered from school, neat and smart looking. The clothes were obviously loose on him, but he looked much better than his usual outfit of faded jogging bottoms and oversized hoodies. Harry noticed that he was standing straighter and held his head up, though he was plainly edgy and uncomfortable. “Are you ready?”

Draco nodded and Harry handed him the bunch of flowers. “They’re for Hermione.”

“I didn’t even think about a gift!” Draco looked upset.

“Don’t worry. I’ve got a bottle of wine as well, and anyway they're both from both of us." It hadn't occurred to Harry that Draco would feel badly about not bringing something and he was glad he'd brought both wine and flowers. "Really. Don’t worry about it.”

Draco nodded and Harry knocked on the door. As they waited for it to open, Harry glanced at Draco. He looked terrified -- although he was hiding it well, Harry could see it in the tenseness of his jaw and in his eyes. Harry placed a hand on the small of his back, in a gesture of reassurance.

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“So, has living with Harry driven you mad yet?” Ron asked. Hermione had opened the door and exclaimed in delight at Draco's flowers, then ushered them into the living room before rushing back to the kitchen, leaving the three men in a slightly tense silence.

Draco’s eyes widened at Ron’s conversation opener, before smoothing his hands on his trousers. “I was mad before he arrived, Ron. I think -- astonishing as it sounds -- he’s made me saner.” Harry watched Ron’s expression turn bemused before Draco's small smile indicated he was trying to ease the tension by making light of the situation, and that it was all right to laugh.

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Harry finished his meal and leaned back in his chair, surveying the table. Draco was still nervous but hiding it well, and he had made several efforts to join in the conversation during the dinner. Hermione had been unusually gentle in her manner all evening, and had carefully chosen conversation topics that were light-hearted. And Ron? Harry realised all over again why their friendship had lasted. Ron had not once called Malfoy ‘ferret’ or ‘git’, and even though he’d not sounded delighted when Harry had floo’d saying Malfoy would like to come, he had welcomed him into his home with an openness that had surprised Harry at first. He couldn’t hold in a smile as he looked round the dinner table.

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They Apparated back into Malfoy's living room and stood in silence for a moment. "Well," Draco said diffidently, "I think I'll go to bed."

"Wait." Harry reached out and put a hand on Draco's arm. "I, er, I don't want to sound patronising or anything, but I'm really proud of you."

Draco looked up and smiled a small but genuine smile. For the first time Harry thought he saw a flicker of hope in the grey eyes. "Me too."

fin (for now)