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Chapter: 1

High Priced

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," Harry snapped. He was seated in Headmistress McGonagall's office, although McGonagall was nowhere in sight, having conveniently bolted before the news could be delivered. Thankfully, Dumbledore's portrait had insisted Harry sit before the wise old, bloody manipulative bastard could impart the latest hellish, unforeseen complication to plague Harry's heretofore entirely too complicated life.

Dumbledore chuckled, and Harry wondered if burning the portrait would help. No more Dumbledore, no more interesting tidbits about Harry's life.

"I'm afraid not, Harry."

Harry clutched fistfuls of hair with both hands, in order to restrain the urge to scream. He strove for calm.

"You're saying the reason I've been so wired lately, and have trouble sleeping, and have no interest in eating—along with assorted other problems we will not go into right now—is because I'm part Veela?"

Dumbledore nodded. "On your father's side, yes."

"My father was a Veela?" Harry was mortified.

"*Part* Veela," Dumbledore corrected.

"No one ever thought it might be important to mention this to me?" Harry said, managing to maintain a steady tone, although the need to shout was rising.

"It sometimes does not manifest. We had hoped…"

Harry gave up tearing at his hair and considered slamming his head into the desk a few times. Maybe if he whacked it hard enough, he could smash out the Veela.

"You had hoped."

Dumbledore smiled benignly. Harry began to understand why Snape had not hesitated on the Tower.

"Are there any more surprises in my future of which I should be aware?" Harry asked bitterly.

Dumbledore shook his head.

"No more prophecies? Nothing that will cause my certain death at age 25? Some other horrific villain trying to kill me, or some other genetic defect like being a goddamn Veela?"

"No, Harry," Dumbledore said and chuckled. Harry glared. Dumbledore had a really lousy history when it came to withholding important information from Harry. Why he had expected that to stop just because Dumbledore was dead…? He sighed heavily. Trying to pry the whole truth out of Dumbledore was a huge waste of time.

"All right, let's stick with the bad news regarding this latest fascinating revelation," Harry said tiredly.

"It's not as bad as that, Harry. After all, since you are only part Veela, and male, the effects will be minimal."

"Minimal. Somehow I believe our ideas of 'minimal' will be leagues apart. I'm not going to sprout a beak and bloody *wings*, am I?"

"No, no, Harry. No wings. The consequences for you will be largely hormonal."

"Hormonal. Why does that not fill me with confidence?"

"Fear not, Harry. You will be largely unchanged. As long as you locate your mate, that is."

There was a long silence as Harry pretended he had not heard what he had heard. However, Dumbledore, being a painting, had limitless patience, while Harry had… well, none.

"My what?"

"Your mate, although perhaps 'mate' is a bit of an archaic way of putting it. In the past, Veela were required to mate for life, and take steps to permanently bond with their partner, but things are not so drastic in these liberal times, particularly for those with minimal Veela blood. You will

not, of course, be subject to any of the Veela laws, being mostly human. They will not interest themselves with you."

Harry allowed Dumbledore to ramble, although, frankly, he was terrified to learn more.

"All you should require from your mate… or your soulmate, as it were, is touch."

"I require touch." Harry realized he was repeating Dumbledore's words to the point of stupidity, but he couldn't seem to help himself.

"Yes, Harry. The simple act of clasping hands or accepting an embrace. Perhaps a chaste kiss, although such actions tend to inflame those with Veela blood… but I digress. Once you locate your soulmate, you needs must only touch them regularly."

"Or?" Harry gritted, waiting for the shoe to drop. Dumbledore's portrait was silent for a long moment.

"Well… you could sicken and die. But I'm quite certain that won't happen, Harry. You are a young, strong, virile lad. I wouldn't be at all surprised if your soulmate chose to consummate your bond."

"*Consummate*?" Harry asked in alarm.

"My, my, is that the time? I promised Phineus Nigellus I'd have tea with him in the Hall of Famous Wizards. We shall talk later, Harry, my boy."

With that, Dumbledore fled from the portrait, leaving Harry in a fine Veela snit.

"Fucking great. I have to find and *touch* my soulmate, or I will sicken and die. Nice of you to leave before letting me know exactly how I'm supposed to find this bloody soulmate, and it had better be someone I like! Was I put on this planet as some sort of universal laughingstock?" Harry glared around, realizing his voice had risen, but all of the other Headmaster portraits seemed to have fled their own frames, as well. The damned cowards.

Harry got up and went to find Hermione.

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A month later, Harry was beginning to panic. His work was suffering dreadfully, due to his inability to sleep, or eat, or concentrate. Harry had nearly been killed on his last assignment, prompting Kingsley to confine him to desk duty, and Harry had been forced to tell him about his little Veela problem.

The Minister had been supportive to the point of driving Harry nearly insane. Kingsley and Hermione had conspired to ensure that Harry find his soulmate as quickly as possible by

touching every witch (and wizard) in Britain. It had been Hermione's brilliant deduction (based on endless Veela lore she had consumed with bookish glee) that Harry's soulmate was not necessarily female. Harry had not been amused, but he had willingly acquiesced to the plan of shaking the hand of every single Ministry official on what Kingsley had described as "Meeting Day."

"Meeting Day" had been a disastrous flop, leaving Harry with nothing but sore knuckles, and the urge to scour his hands raw to remove the traces of some of the creepier hand-shakers. Some of those Unspeakables were downright scary.

Undaunted, Hermione and Kingsley had cooked up function after function, meeting after meeting. Harry had shaken hand after hand, and pecked cheek after cheek—to no avail. Every person he touched felt no different from any other person he touched. Harry had seriously expected his soulmate to be someone he knew, but none of the Weasleys, nor Hermione, nor any of his old Gryffindor friends, had triggered any special Veela feelings. Harry would have called the whole matter a load of bollocks but for his worsening symptoms.

The latest function was killing him. Harry leaned against the wall and rubbed his eyes after scanning the crowded room for Hermione. He had lost her for the moment, but he was certain she would return soon to drag him off for another round of useless hand-clasping. All Harry wanted to do was sleep. He was bone weary. Sleep, however, was a waste of time due to tortured dreams that wakened him every thirty minutes, panicked and sweating with the need to find something—or someone.

Harry thought he saw Hermione's bushy head bouncing through the crowd and bolted, heading for the loo to seek a moment of peace, at least until she sent Kingsley to find him. Harry was in a distracted rush as he rounded the potted palm that half-concealed the dark passage leading to the gents. Thus it was that he walked directly into a man exiting. Their chests bumped and the fellow staggered.

Harry instinctively reached out to steady the man, and inadvertently touched his neck. A shock that was almost electric traveled from Harry's hand straight to his brain, filling it with white-hot light and a bell-like chiming sound. He felt something click into place, and instinctively moved closer to the source of the exquisite magic.

Chaotic thoughts tumbled through Harry's mind. *Bloody hell, I've finally found…* him*? Okay, so it's a him. Him is good. Him is fine, as long as I can touch and touch and touch…*

The man cursed and tried to fight his way free, but Harry was relentless, pressing the man into the wall and rubbing his face against the man's smooth cheek. God, he felt good. He felt amazing. He even *smelled* good, and Harry knew without a doubt that he would also *taste* good. He turned his head slightly to press his lips against the perfect neck, and touched his tongue lightly to—

The action seemed to break the other man's astonishment, and he shoved Harry away an oath.

Harry felt like his flesh had been physically torn free as he caught himself against the opposite wall. The two men stared at each other with identical expressions of shock.

"Potter! What the fuck are you about? Are you drunk?"

"*Malfoy*?" Harry could barely reconcile his conflicting emotions. Part of him wanted to hex the hateful git into a pile of ash. A larger part wanted to launch himself forward and devour those beautiful, incredible lips that gaped at him so invitingly. "Malfoy. This has got to be some incredible cosmic joke."

Malfoy drew himself up haughtily. "A joke. Right, then. You shall hear from my legal counsel, Potter." With that, Malfoy Disapparated, leaving Harry grinning like a loon, mostly from the sheer ridiculousness of the situation, but also because of the overwhelming, languid sense of peace that filled him.

He had found his goddamned soulmate. Now he could sleep. Harry slid down the wall, propped his arms on his knees, lay his head atop his arms, and fell into his first dreamless sleep in weeks.

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Harry awoke in his own flat with Hermione hovering over him.

"Harry! Thank goodness! We were afraid you would never awaken! What happened?"

Harry stretched languidly. "I'm starved. And thirsty."

Hermione gnawed her lip, obviously dying to ask a hundred more questions, but she hurried out of the room and returned with a huge tray. Harry drank three glasses of water and two bottles of butterbeer before devouring half a chicken, two beef pasties, and a quarter round of Havarti.

"Better?" she asked when he finally pushed the tray away.

"God, yes. I feel fantastic. Better than I have in ages!"

"But, why? Did you find—?"

Some of Harry's giddiness deflated. He frowned.

"Well, yes. I found my bloody soulmate, and of course, it would have to be the most wretched possible—"

"It's Draco Malfoy, isn't it?" she asked.

Harry waited, knowing that leap of logic had to have sprung from something. Hermione twisted a lock of hair around a finger.

"Well?" he finally prodded.

"Malfoy… is suing the Ministry, stating that you attacked him. He's claiming all sorts of crazy things—Assault, Improper Advances, Public Deviancy, Unlawful Touching of Persons Malfoy… We're not certain the last two are even real violations, but with some of the more archaic laws; well, you never know. I've had my team researching it for the two days you've been out cold."

"Two days?"

"Yes. So. I'm assuming you… touched…?"

"Yes, I touched Malfoy. Bumped into him, actually, which is probably a good thing, because the only way we would have touched willingly is with fists."

"Then Malfoy's claims are valid?"

"Pay them," Harry said.

"But we can fight him in court! Your extenuating circumstances are clearly—"

"Pay them," Harry repeated brusquely, and threw his covers aside. He needed to get back to work, now that he was finally clearheaded. "Whatever damages Malfoy is asking, just pay them. I can't afford to get on his bad side."

Hermione's face was set in her Injustice Pout. Harry ignored it. He was amazed that he could feel like his old self after just a stupid touch and a hell of a lot of sleep.

"But what about… going forward?"

"I'll worry about that when the time comes. Now that I know it's him, and a simple touch will do the trick, I'll most likely just provoke him into a fistfight. Let him pound me a couple times, and I'll be good."

"That doesn't sound healthy at all, Harry. Why don't you just explain it to him? It's possible he can be reasonable."

Harry pecked Hermione on the cheek and ignored her worried glare. He wondered vaguely how long his Malfoy-induced euphoria would last.

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Less than two weeks, as it turned out. The sleeplessness slowly returned, and although the dreams had begun anew, they had changed. Instead of a burning need to find a nameless someone, Harry had an uncontrollable desire to find *Malfoy*. His subconscious managed to

dredge up every memory Harry had of the git: Malfoy on a broom; Malfoy in Quidditch gear; Malfoy smirking at him with wand raised; Malfoy clinging to him as they fled the burning Room of Requirement…

Harry swore roundly and slammed his palm against the wall of the shower. Each of the memories had become horribly twisted. Malfoy on a broom was grace personified—his blond hair blew gently in the breeze, sweeping over the smooth forehead and silvery eyes. Malfoy in Quidditch gear—god, that whole image was just wrong, especially the way Harry wanted to peel away the leather—*fuck*! He was *not* thinking erotic thoughts about Draco Malfoy. He was not, not, *not*!

His erection begged to differ. It seemed to find the whole idea of Malfoy extremely appealing, so Harry wanked away his frustration, cursing when every conjured image of a voluptuous female turned into a platinum-blond man with smirking grey eyes.

"'Oh, and Harry, along with needing to touch your soulmate, you will have the uncontrollable urge to shag the living shit out of them, heedless of how repugnant you think they are.' Dumbledore could not have mentioned *that* little tidbit, could he?"

Harry turned off the shower, cursing his Veela blood for the nth time.

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Hermione had been nagging him mercilessly about "the Malfoy situation", but Harry had no answers. He thought about going to see the horrible prat, or drafting a letter to him, or something, but his indecision always ended with Harry putting it off for another day.

Kingsley, thankfully, left him alone, since Harry's job performance had returned to its normal sterling level. Harry had cleared three cases in a week, and felt fabulous, at least until the annoying symptoms returned. He knew Hermione would pick up on it instantly, so on his day off he got up early and Apparated to Diagon Alley. Harry always put off shopping until he was out of nearly everything, so it took him until nearly noon to restock on potion supplies, broom conditioning materials, books he planned to read when time allowed, and even a few robes.

After sending his supplies home by various means, Harry decided to stop by Gringotts and pick up some more "walking around Galleons". Harry walked up the steps and into the huge bank, where he halted abruptly.

An unmistakable figure in black stood nearby, facing away from Harry as he spoke to a goblin attendant. Harry's mind went inexplicably blank. He moved forward as if drawn by a magnet, walked up behind the blond, and slid his arms around Malfoy's waist. The proximity alone was like a heady drug.

"Come here for a minute, Malfoy," Harry said, not recognizing his own voice for the dulcet tones it contained. He drew Malfoy toward the front doors. Strangely, Malfoy did not resist the guiding hand around his waist. The instant they exited the wards surrounding Gringotts, Harry

Disapparated them straight to his flat. He did not release Malfoy, he merely shifted slightly until he stood in front of the blond, who watched him with a slightly dazed expression.

Harry breathed in the scent of him for only an instant before pressing Malfoy back against the door and touching their lips together. The white-hot brilliance Harry had felt before seemed magnified a hundredfold this time.

Surely this was paradise. Harry's hands gripped the exquisite neck and his thumbs traced the curve of Malfoy's jaw while his lips tasted the unbelievable sweetness of his mouth. Harry's tongue drew lightly over Malfoy's lips, willing them to part. He pressed harder with a whimper, pleading for a response.

The one he received was not what he had hoped for. Malfoy twisted a hand in Harry's thick hair and pulled, tearing their lips apart. Harry had to step back or risk having his hair ripped out. Malfoy's other fist caught him in the midsection, forcing Harry's breath out with a grunt of pain.

Malfoy released him and Harry doubled over, fighting for air.

"I am not amused, Potter. You'll be hearing from my solicitor—again. I suggest you pay attention this time."

Malfoy Disapparated with a crack, and Harry made his way to the couch. All in all, he felt pretty damned good, except for the back of his head… and his battered diaphragm. He was also completely mortified that he had attacked Malfoy in broad daylight in a public place. The whole thing was turning into a serious fuck-up.

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It soon became clear just how large a fuck-up it was. Hermione Flooed into his flat before he had even finished brewing his morning tea. Harry blinked at her blearily and began to prepare a second cup.

"What were you thinking, Harry?" she yelled, startling him.

"I was thinking Earl Grey, but if you'd prefer—"

"Not the tea! This!" She brandished a sheaf of papers under his nose. Harry scowled, not wanting her to disrupt his pleasant mood. He had enjoyed a brilliant night's sleep for the first time in days, and with no bloody dreams, either.

Hermione was undaunted by his lack of interest.

"Malfoy has filed a Restraining Order against you, Harry. A *Restraining Order*! You are not allowed within ten meters of him! I thought you were going to speak with him and explain the situation! What happened?"

Harry flushed at the memory. He hadn't really considered what he'd done in a rational light. Harry had attacked Malfoy, dragged him bodily to his flat, and snogged him. Malfoy likely thought Harry had gone completely round the bend.

"Restraining Order?" he said blankly.

"Yes, he's filed another bloody sheaf of complaints, which you'll no doubt want paid immediately," she said scathingly. "What did you do?"

Shit. Restraining Order. How the hell was he supposed to touch Malfoy now? Harry would end up in Azkaban if he kept this up.

"Damn it. We've got to find a way to break this curse."

"It's not a curse, Harry, it's genetics, it's—"

"Whatever! There has to be a spell, or a potion, or *something* that will get rid of it!"

Hermione shook her head and sat down across from him. She accepted the tea, but did not drink. "That isn't all, Harry." She pulled something from the bottom of her stack and slid it across the table toward him. "Someone at the Daily Prophet has gotten hold of Malfoy's court documents. There's an article questioning your behavior and speculating on your relationship with Malfoy, among other things."

"Rita Skeeter," Harry said flatly.

"Most likely. The article is not attributed, but her beetleprints are all over it."

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Harry paid Malfoy's damages and threw himself into work, taking the riskiest assignments and countering his growing Veela symptoms with an assortment of potions. Sleeping potions to knock him out at night, and energy potions to keep him going during the day. He could barely eat, and started taking supplements with nutrient potions to keep from collapsing with hunger.

Every free moment he spent researching Veela and everything even remotely associated with them, hoping against hope to find a way out. He refused to see Malfoy again, knowing he could not control himself around the blond git, and also knowing Malfoy would gladly have him tossed into Azkaban.

Harry avoided Hermione by spending all possible time away from home. While at the Ministry, he purposefully stayed out of his office unless absolutely necessary. At home, he warded his fireplace to keep out all visitors via Floo. He knew Hermione would never dare Apparate in directly, having distinct ideas regarding privacy, and Harry was careful to answer all of her owls

to keep her from violating those ideals. He simply made up excuse after excuse to keep from meeting with her.

As the fifth week after his last attack on Malfoy approached, Harry felt as if a brush fire had swept through his soul, leaving an empty husk.

Harry woke up on the couch. He had largely given up sleeping in his bed, because he normally woke every twenty minutes or so and paced, or brewed a cup of tea that would sit on the counter until it grew cold while he stared at the wall in dull misery.

He suddenly knew that someone was in his flat, and Summoned his wand in a heartbeat.

"Going to hex me, Potter?" a dry voice drawled. Harry's wand sagged, and he sat back heavily on the couch from his half-rising stance. He dropped his wand on the floor and buried his head in his hands.

"Malfoy," he said hoarsely, ignoring the trembling that had already begun in his limbs merely at the knowledge that Malfoy was close enough to touch with a few short strides. "What are you doing here?"

"You brought me here once, Potter, quite against my will. I sort of assumed I had an open invitation."

Harry let the words slowly shuffle through his mind. They told him absolutely nothing. He sensed Malfoy's approach, but dared not ask any more questions. It took all of Harry's restraint not to launch himself at the Slytherin. The sofa moved as Malfoy sat next to him, and then Harry felt a hand—oh god—a hand reach out and rest on the back of his neck. The touch was like rain falling on parched earth.

Harry fought to breathe as the brilliance flooded through him, leaving languid peace in its wake. The touch was like balm to Harry's ravaged soul. He leaned into Malfoy's hand and sighed in contentment when Malfoy maneuvered him until his head rested on the Slytherin's shoulder. Harry's forehead tucked into Malfoy's neck, and he was too tired even to press soft kisses there, although he desperately wanted to.

Harry no longer cared why Malfoy was there, it was enough that he *was*. Wrapped in Malfoy's strange but welcome embrace, Harry drifted into blissful oblivion.

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Harry woke when his bed moved beneath him. He reared up in surprise, with his Auror instincts on full alert.

He froze in utter astonishment when he saw Draco Malfoy beneath him. The grey eyes were open and unamused.

"You're crushing me, Potter," he said.

"I thought you were a dream," Harry said in wonder, suddenly aware of the warm body beneath his.

"Unfortunately not," Malfoy drawled. "Now that I have done my good deed for the *century*, perhaps you will be so kind as to get the hell off of me."

Harry nearly complied. They were stretched out on Harry's couch. From the light filtering through the shades, it looked to be full daylight. Malfoy shifted, expecting Harry to rise, which turned out to be a huge mistake. Something *woke up* inside Harry, like a dragon stirring from a long winter's sleep, fully alert and ravenous.

Harry was suddenly aware of every molecule of Malfoy that touched him, even through their clothing, but those clothes were immediately an unwelcome barrier to something Harry wanted with a savagery that took his breath away.

Malfoy must have felt the electric charge, or seen the effect in Harry's eyes. The silver eyes widened and the chest beneath Harry's heaved sharply in a gasp.

"Potter," he hissed. "Get the fuck off of me this instant."

"You know, I don't think I will," Harry said languidly, and noted with some surprise that his voice sounded like aural sex. He lowered his mouth to taste those gorgeous lips, only to have Malfoy twist his head sharply. Harry's lips met the edge of Malfoy's jaw instead, which was just fine. Harry nibbled at it, working his way to the soft hollow just beneath Malfoy's ear. He licked it experimentally and opened his mouth to take a taste of Malfoy's earlobe—

And found himself on the floor. Malfoy stood over him, looking like a vengeful angel. The platinum hair was disheveled, and he looked gorgeously rumpled, but the black wand pointed at Harry was rock-steady.

"Damn you, Potter, unless you want to be hexed six ways from Sunday, you had better get a bloody handle on your fucking Veela hormones."

Harry blinked at him and got to his feet.

"You know?" he said stupidly.

"Yes, I know, thanks to your friend Granger. It would have been nice to know why you kept attacking me, you stupid prat. Could you not have picked up a quill?"

Harry sat on the couch, trying not to drink in the tantalizing sight of Malfoy, and failing. The Veela-infected part of his mind began to plot ways to overcome the Slytherin.

"I had hoped… to find a way out of it," Harry said lamely.

"That worked out well, didn't it? By the look of you, I think you would have been dead in a week."

Harry had to admit it was true. Oddly, his infusion of Malfoy had nearly brought him back to tip-top shape. He was still tired, and starved, but every nerve ending tingled. He felt gloriously alive. And suddenly suspicious.

"Why are you here?" he asked sharply. Despite Malfoy's mention of a good deed, there had to be more to it than that. Malfoys did not perform good deeds. Not without ulterior motives.

Malfoy sneered. "Don't think I'm here for your sake, Potter."

Harry laughed, although the sound was rather hollow in his ears. The ridiculous—probably Veela—part of him had hoped Malfoy really had come to help him. *Idiot. The day Draco Malfoy comes to rescue you of his own volition is the day pink elephants will rain from the sky*.

"All right then," Malfoy said as he moved to seat himself in a chair near the window. Despite his relaxed pose, the wand did not waver. Harry's glance flicked to his own wand on a nearby table. He knew it could be in his hand, with Malfoy disarmed, in a trice. "I have a business proposition for you, Potter."

The words snapped Harry out of his contemplation, although the idea of taking away Malfoy's wand and climbing all over him did not completely leave his fevered brain.

"Business proposition?" Harry asked.

"Indeed. Since you apparently require my touch to keep from pining away unto death, and since I have no reason whatsoever to grant you the use of my… flesh, shall we say…"

Harry thought Malfoy should possibly have chosen a different turn of phrase, because the words "use of my flesh" set up an orchestra of excited images in Harry's mind, each crying for attention. Most of them featured a naked Malfoy stretched out on various soft objects, and it was long minutes before a rational part of Harry's mind realized that Malfoy was still talking, and not just sitting in a patch of sunlight looking like a Potter buffet.

"Potter, sit down!" Malfoy snapped. "Are you even listening to me?"

Harry backed up a few steps and sat. His body had apparently begun to stalk Malfoy without his consent. Although if consent was required, Harry would grant it, because it seemed like a fine idea.

Malfoy glared. "As I was saying, I've decided to help you with your little problem… for a price."

The last word caught Harry's attention, and he stopped ogling Malfoy for a moment.

"A price," he repeated.

"Several prices, actually," Malfoy said with a nod. "I've made a list." Although he barely spoke a word, a piece of parchment detached itself from Malfoy's dark cape, which was draped casually over a chair. Malfoy floated the small scroll over to Harry, who took it, and unrolled it curiously.

Amusement was Harry's first response, and then shock, and finally something akin to horror. His eyes scanned the list.

Touch – Per finger, 1 Galleon, 1 minute maximum

Full hand – 6 Galleons, 1 minute maximum

Stroke – 10 Galleons minimum – may vary by type and location

Massage – 50 Galleons, upper body only, 15 minute maximum

Kiss – No tongue – 50 Galleons

With tongue – 100 Galleons

As soon as he read those words, Harry began to calculate how long it would take to empty his Gringott's vault on kisses alone, and nearly Apparated directly there to begin transferring the funds into Malfoy's account. That rash action was halted by the next few words on the page.

Oral sex – Performed by Potter – 200 Galleons

Performed by Draco – <u>not enough Galleons in the world</u>

Harry scowled and read the final line.

Other sex – Forget it, Veela-boy

Harry's excitement steadied itself into a fine rage. He quelled his stubborn disappointment at the "no sex" rule, remembering that this was *Malfoy*, and if it weren't for his stupid Veela genes, he would hate the bastard with all of his might. Shagging was not an option.

"Even without the sex, doesn't this make you some sort of… prostitute?" Harry asked.

Malfoy shrugged. "As I see it, I'm merely performing a service, rather like a medi-wizard or a therapist." Malfoy stood gracefully. "Needless to say, I have removed the restraining order."

Harry's lip twisted bitterly. "And what do I owe you for last night?"

The blond grinned wickedly. "I'll send you a bill."

With that, he wisely collected his cloak and departed before Harry could decide what hex to use. He settled for blasting an antique vase into powder as soon as the Slytherin had gone.

Then he got up, unlocked his Floo, and went to find Hermione.

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Harry's determination to die before seeking out Malfoy lasted only four days. Even while daydreaming, his mind kept tripping over Malfoy's list, and falling flat on the part about oral sex. Once the horrified outrage died out, his Veela genes cheerfully provided images of Harry kneeling before Malfoy, until the idea was not only *not* repugnant, but became fucking tantalizing.

Logic demanded he do something, and since Logic's name was Hermione Granger, it had a loud and strident voice. Harry also knew Logic would not shut up until Logic was satisfied. Harry decided to settle for simple handshakes from Malfoy, hoping a regular program of casual touch would satisfy his Veela side and put a halt to the disturbing visions.

Harry made a formal appointment, and Apparated to the front gates of Malfoy Manor at the perfectly respectable hour of 4 pm. The gates opened of their own volition, and Harry passed the exotic birds that peered at him in feathered disinterest as he walked to the front doors. A house-elf led him to a large room that probably had some formal name, like parlour, or drawing room, or study. Malfoy, true to form, made Harry wait until he was near-dead of boredom, and had begun to recite counter-curses by rote merely to pass the time.

Malfoy strode in, looking every inch the lord of the manor, haughty and impatient.

"I'm quite busy today, Potter," he said condescendingly as Harry stood. "What shall it be?"

Harry had intended to ask for nothing more than a bloody handclasp, but Malfoy's snobbish, overbearing attitude made him bristle immediately. It was bad enough that Harry had to humble himself to come here, but the fucking prat did not have to make it even more difficult. Harry was suddenly ready to do anything to knock that smug look from the Slytherin's face.

"A kiss," Harry snapped. "*With tongue*."

Malfoy blanched, giving Harry a moment of satisfaction before his intelligence caught up with his Gryffindor pride. Fuck, was he completely insane?

Malfoy recovered quickly, and shrugged. "Fine."

He didn't move, and neither did Harry. Malfoy scowled.

"I sure as hell won't come to you, Potter, so get on with it."

Harry stalked forward angrily, curled a hand behind Malfoy's neck, and fastened his lips to the Slytherin's. Half a breath later, Harry thought his heart might stop. It resembled the time Harry had kissed Malfoy at his flat, but then Malfoy had been shocked and unresponsive. This time, Malfoy was at least receptive, and stood placidly while Harry tried to devour his lips. A sensation unlike anything he'd ever felt began to rush through him. He unwittingly softened the kiss, and his hand gentled on Malfoy's neck.

Harry tipped his head slightly and nearly moaned when Malfoy's lips parted to give Harry access. Harry's tongue swept in, and the first touch against Malfoy's was like a crescendo of pleasure. Nothing could ever be better than this. Harry licked, and tasted, and drank in Malfoy as the blood pounded in his ears until everything went stark white.

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Harry opened his eyes and nearly climbed out of his skin. He Summoned his wand with a yelp and scrambled upright, registering Malfoy's presence in the nick of time. The house-elf whose frightening face had hovered over Harry upon waking leaped back with a cry of alarm.

Malfoy sat in a chair across from Harry, watching him expressionlessly.

"If you're going to faint after a single kiss, perhaps you should request something less… dangerous."

Harry wondered if there was a spell that would cause the ground to open up and swallow him whole. He had fainted. From a kiss. It seemed the universe had united itself in a cause—to make Harry Potter look like a complete bloody fool in front of Draco fucking Malfoy.

He got to his feet. "I think I've humiliated myself enough for one day," he said without looking at the Slytherin. "Thank you for your time, Malfoy. Be sure to send me your… you know… bill."

"I will, Potter," Harry heard Malfoy say. Strangely, his voice did not sound smug or taunting. Harry could not define the tone, but he was too eager to escape to spend time analyzing it. He walked quickly to the front door and departed.

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Harry threw himself into work with reckless abandon, rather like he had before, but this time with a better chance of survival. Twenty eight hours after kissing Malfoy, he Apparated back to his flat dead tired, scraped and scratched beyond rationality. He had spent the entire day trailing a rogue forest ghoul, and wanted nothing more than to crawl into his bed. He showered and lounged on his couch for a bit, fully intending to have nothing whatsoever to do with Malfoy. He

felt fine, but for a niggling sense of disquiet that would likely prevent him from sleeping, and he had to get back on the trail of the ghoul first thing the next morning.

After forty minutes of self-debate, Harry stuck his head into the fireplace. An endless wait and a short conversation later, Harry stepped out of the fire into what looked like a library. Malfoy sat in a chair, watching him. The blond was dressed in soft-looking robes of ice blue. The color made him look ethereal and almost fragile, although by no means more approachable.

"What will it be tonight, Potter?" Malfoy asked and set aside a glass he had been holding. Ice clinked when the glass settled on the table. The liquid looked like Firewhisky. Harry had a sudden avaricious yearning to kiss Malfoy's lips and taste the cold alcohol. He forced the thought away angrily.

"Just hands," Harry said shortly. "I won't be long; I'm far too tired. I'd hoped it would help me sleep."

Malfoy sighed and held out his hands like a sleepwalker, without bothering to rise. Harry walked forward and dropped to his knees, not even feeling a trace of shame at the motion. He had already debased himself. A bit more would hardly matter.

He took both of the proffered hands in his own and managed not to sigh with pleasure.

"So…" Malfoy said after a moment. "How was your day?"

"Wretched," Harry admitted. He briefly described the ordeal of tracking a magical creature through rugged, treacherous terrain while waiting for it to leap from hiding and rend him with claws and teeth. Malfoy laughed when he finished the story, which was not the response Harry had expected.

"That's so… *you*, Potter."

"What do you mean?"

"You know you love it. Hunting down evil and punishing wrongdoers. It's so very Gryffindor."

Harry grinned. "Thanks."

Malfoy sniffed. "That was not a compliment. What would you do if you could not be an Auror? I believe you would curl up and die."

"I would not. I would… play Quidditch, or something."

"I'm somewhat surprised you chose the Auror route over Quidditch, actually."

"Why?"

"More fame, greater glory with Quidditch," Malfoy said.

Harry snatched his hands away, more stung than he would admit. He got to his feet.

"I never wanted that. Never." He walked to the fireplace and glanced back over his shoulder. "Thank you for seeing me on such short notice."

He did not wait for a response, but tossed a handful of powder and Flooed home.

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Three days later, Harry staggered home bruised and bloody. He had found the horrific creature, which had put up a hellish fight. Attempting to subdue it had only succeeded in nearly getting him killed, so he had finally cast the curse to end the creature's existence. God, but ghouls were stupid. Normal ghouls were bad enough, but forest ghouls were huge, vicious, and nearly non-intelligent.

Harry had sent an owl to Malfoy from the Ministry while trying to write his report through crossing eyes. Hermione, thankfully, had sent him home after pulling a Pensieve memory of the event out of his head and promising to write his report for him.

"If I didn't have stupid Veela genes, Hermione, I'd marry you," Harry had said gratefully.

"I'm already married, Harry. Now go home and get some rest. I'll have a word with Kingsley tomorrow for sending you off alone like that, too."

"Dean is on holiday," Harry had muttered.

"I don't care. Go home."

Harry exited the shower and spotted Malfoy's monstrous owl fluttering at the sill. Harry opened the window and had to avoid the creature's inclination to bite while Harry tried to remove the message. He waved the vicious thing away angrily and opened the scroll.

I won't be home until 11 pm, but you are welcome to drop by after that.

Thirty-five minutes. Harry dropped onto the couch, certain he would be asleep long before then, but sleep evaded him regardless of his exhaustion. Harry hated the irritable, edgy sensation prickling over his skin cause by prolonged absence from Malfoy.

When the clock struck eleven, Harry Flooed over. The gongs had not even died away from the clock on Malfoy's mantle.

"Punctual," Malfoy said in a tone that conveyed a different meaning entirely. Harry wished he

hadn't come. Malfoy seemed to be feeling just as tetchy as Harry. The blond stood near the window, looking out at the grounds.

Harry hovered by the fireplace awkwardly.

"For Merlin's sake, sit down, Potter," Malfoy snapped. Harry walked to the couch and sat. He ran a hand over the soft velvet, which was palest green threaded with an emerald pattern. He glanced at Malfoy, who was more formally dressed than last time Harry had seen him. Malfoy wore robes so dark they might have been black. Harry wondered where Malfoy had been. Out on a date, perhaps? A flare of purest jealousy snarled through Harry, leaving him dazed by the strength of it. *Oh shit, this is bad*, Harry thought.

Malfoy huffed a sigh and walked over to sit next to Harry, leaving a distance of slightly more than a handspan between them. Malfoy's hand rested on his own thigh, and looked even paler against the fabric—violet, Harry noted. Malfoy turned his hand until the palm faced up, a silent invitation. Harry gratefully placed his hand atop Malfoy's, linking their fingers. He was disgusted by the level of his gratitude.

Malfoy's touch was worth it, though.

They sat silently for a few minutes, saying nothing, but the silence was oddly comfortable. Harry wondered if Malfoy mentally counted the minutes to tally up Harry's bill. He sighed and leaned his head back, glad that Malfoy's sofa had a high enough rise for comfort. Harry shut his eyes and let soothing peace steal over him. He wasn't certain he would have the strength to rise.

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Harry awoke in completely unfamiliar surroundings, but the bed felt like a cloud of brilliant softness, so he stayed where he was and let his eyes take in the room.

Great, he thought. *I fell asleep. Malfoy will probably charge me a thousand Galleons, and then tell me his house is not an inn*.

The room was incredible, he had to admit. It was, without a doubt, the most opulent room Harry had ever been in. The furniture looked centuries old, but remained in pristine condition. Harry wondered how much of it had never been used. He pictured an assortment of pale, haughty Malfoys adorning the room, sitting at the writing table, lounging against the bedpost, and pulling back the thick brocade curtains.

Each image morphed into Draco, and Harry found himself wishing the blond were in the room. He frowned, annoyed that the thought was far more enticing than it should have been, particularly when his libido seized on the idea and conjured a vision of Malfoy leaning over the bed to press a kiss to Harry's lips. His sudden erection was alarming.

Harry tossed the thick covers back and sat up, to find he was dressed only in his boxers. His

hard-on did not deflate at all at the idea of Malfoy undressing him. *Control yourself, Harry*, he though angrily. *Malfoy probably had a house-elf do it*. That thought helped immensely, and his skin crawled slightly, but Harry's erection diminished enough that he could comfortably tug on his jeans. They had apparently been cleaned, and were neatly folded upon a nearby table.

A house-elf popped up behind him as he was buttoning his shirt, nearly causing Harry to hex the creature in a knee-jerk Auror reflex.

"Master Draco will see you in the Red Dining Room," the house-elf said tonelessly. Harry smiled wryly at the words, as if Harry had made an appointment.

"I should just go," Harry said and slipped his wand into the leather sheath on his forearm.

"Harry Potter will follow Wyrm now," the house-elf said as though Harry had not spoken. Harry sighed and put his shoes on before obediently trekking after the house-elf. The walk to the "Red Dining Room" seemed to take forever. Malfoy Manor was like a bloody palace. He wondered where Malfoy's rooms were, and decided he would rather not know. If he repeated that enough times, perhaps he would even believe it.

The Red Dining Room was definitely red, although the color was far more evocative of a Tuscan sunset than the Gryffindor common room. Wyrm waited pointedly until Harry pulled out a chair and sat down. The house-elf disappeared just as Malfoy strolled in.

"Morning, Potter," he said pleasantly, as though breaking fast with Harry happened every day.

"Good morning," Harry replied after a moment of surprise.

"Sleep well?" the blond asked with a hint of his usual smirk. He seated himself across from Harry.

A hoard of house-elves appeared and placed an obscene amount of food on the table. When they vanished, Harry opened his mouth to speak.

"Just eat, Potter. Then you can pop off to the Ministry and pretend nothing happened last night."

Harry gaped at him. "Nothing did happen!"

Malfoy's grin could have rivaled Mephistopheles'.

"Are you sure?" Malfoy purred in a tone that made Harry's cock spring back to ramrod attention. It was ten dozen kinds of unfair that Malfoy could have that effect on him using only his voice. Harry gulped half a glass of juice, which could have been embalming fluid for all he noticed of the taste. He felt a trifle steadier when he set his glass down.

Harry decided to eat instead of talk. Malfoy seemed to be in a strange mood, judging by the way

he watched Harry, who tried not to notice that Malfoy ate like a seductive concubine. He practically made love to his food, placing each morsel carefully in his mouth, biting with precision using perfect white teeth, licking his lips in a way that should have been illegal…

Harry pressed the heel of his hand against his groin in an attempt to crush his erection. He fixed his eyes on the plate, instead of on the bundle of blond sex sitting across from him.

Harry got through the meal by not looking at Malfoy at all, and controlled his lust by conjuring images of Dolores Umbridge naked and beckoning to him. He was finally able to stand without embarrassing himself.

"I'll take you to the library," Malfoy offered, and Harry grinned.

"Probably a good idea, else I'll wander around lost and you'll find me weeks from now in some obscure part of your house, dead of dehydration."

"The house-elves would never let that happen," Malfoy commented and took a slight lead. They returned to the library, which was actually somewhat close to the Red Dining Room. They stood before the fireplace and Harry picked up a handful of Floo powder. He looked at Malfoy, feeling awkward and out of sorts.

"Um… thanks for… everything…" Harry said.

Malfoy reached up and gripped Harry's chin before he leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss on Harry's lips. The slight headache Harry had not even known was looming vanished. Malfoy drew back with a half-smile.

"That one is a freebie, Potter," he said.

Harry blindly tossed the powder and stepped out of his own fireplace, confused and annoyingly happy. He spent the day trying to determine why Malfoy had been so inexplicably nice to him.

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It wasn't until hours later that he figured out the git had done it merely to drive Harry half-insane pondering it. The idea was confirmed when he received an owl from Malfoy stating that he would be away on business for the next three days. The bastard could have mentioned it at breakfast. Harry crumpled the note and went to ask Kingsley for a dangerous mission. He needed to hurt something.

Three days felt like eternity. Harry had thought the need to touch Malfoy would diminish after more frequent contact, but apparently the opposite was true. He sat at his kitchen table and pushed the food around on his plate, convincing himself that mimicking the act of eating was just as good as the real thing. He wasn't hungry, and his skin felt like someone had rubbed it with a stiff brush. His clothes hurt. He had taken off as many as possible, and sat in the chair in his

boxers while he cursed the bloody uncomfortable upholstery.

He debated owling Malfoy, because the Slytherin's note had said three days, not three days and three nights, but he felt needy enough without making an ass of himself atop it.

A pop sounded in the next room and he wondered if his wards were strong enough to repel any enemies, but decided he didn't care enough to get up and check. If someone wanted to do him in, they could come and find him.

Malfoy sauntered through the doorway, and Harry barely had time to gasp before he launched from the chair and wrapped his arms around the blond. He held Malfoy tightly as the nettlesome feeling ebbed from his skin and strength returned. He realized he was trembling, and sighed heavily.

"This is so fucked up," he said into Malfoy's hair.

Malfoy patted him lightly on the back. He had not returned Harry's desperate embrace, so Harry let go with reluctance.

"Come on, let's have a drink," Malfoy said. "I could use one."

Harry wanted to ask where he'd been—he was near-choking himself to keep from asking—but he knew the words would sound plaintive and jealous. He followed Malfoy into the living room. Malfoy went to the sidebar and stripped off his outer robes on the way. Harry suddenly felt extremely underdressed, especially considering the effect Malfoy usually had on certain parts of his anatomy. The mere thought of it made something stir. *God, not now*!

Malfoy lifted a few bottles and peered at them as Harry sidled toward the bedroom.

"You're fine, Potter. No need to dress formally on my account. I won't be here long."

Harry reluctantly took a seat on the couch, next to a pillow he could use as cover, if necessary.

"Where did you go?" he blurted, and then thought about slamming his head into the wall a few times like a house-elf.

Malfoy crossed the room and sat on the couch near Harry. He handed Harry a glass of clear liquid that could have been any number of foul-tasting alcohols. Harry sniffed it. Vodka. He looked at Malfoy dubiously, and the Slytherin's eyes watched him over the rim of the glass as he sipped. A challenge. Damn it. Harry scowled and gulped his drink, suppressing a shudder at the taste. He wasn't much of a drinker.

"I was in France," Malfoy said.

Harry waited, but Malfoy did not elaborate. They drank in silence. Harry finished his first and

poured another, thinking the taste wasn't so bad after the pleasant warmth began to seep through his system.

"France, eh?" he commented as he sat down again. "What's in France?"

"My fiancée," Malfoy said, causing the refilled glass to slip out of Harry's fingers and thump on the carpet. Harry looked at the spreading stain, but the dismay he felt had nothing to do with the spill.

Malfoy tsked and spelled the stain away before retrieving another drink for Harry, who stared at the floor without seeing it. *Fiancée.* The word hammered through his temples and he found it rather hard to breathe. *Fiancée. Fiancée. Fiancée*.

"Here, Potter. Bloody hell, you look pale as death. Are you all right?"

Harry took the glass and drank half the contents, trusting the burn to warm his chilled blood. A fiancée. Fuck. Why was that such a surprise? Had he expected Malfoy to put his life on hold simply because Harry needed him? What the fuck did Malfoy owe him? Harry glanced at the blond, who watched him carefully.

Harry forced a grin, knowing it probably looked like a rictus of death.

"Sorry," he choked. "I didn't know you were… engaged."

Malfoy's grey eyes flashed. "Understandable. My every move is not reported on the front page of the Daily Prophet." *Unlike yours*, was left unspoken. Harry was too numb to feel his usual annoyance. He felt cold even through the warmth of the vodka. He wanted to ask all the usual inane questions, but could not force them out through the lump of sawdust in his throat. He tried to wash it down with more vodka.

Malfoy's voice was surprisingly soft when he spoke. "Look, Potter, you needn't worry. I'm sure she won't object to our silly handholding and occasional snogging sessions. It's likely your prudish Gryffindor nobility will be a larger obstacle."

A pale hand reached out and touched Harry's forearm, sending a tsunami of need crashing through Harry's blood to mingle with the alcohol. Something feral seemed to uncoil, and Harry dropped his glass for the second time. A sound resembling a growl purred from his throat and he leaned over and took Malfoy's lips in a savage kiss. He pressed the Slytherin into the sofa, tasting blood. He lapped at it, drinking the taste of copper with the exquisite flavor of Malfoy. He knew the kiss was painful and bruising, but he did not care.

Pure lust had taken over Harry's motor functions. His hands roamed over Malfoy, tracing every ridge, every curve, and every valley. It wasn't enough. He fumbled with the buttons on Malfoy's shirt, and felt ecstatic bliss when his fingers splayed over the smooth, bare chest.

Malfoy made a sound that was half moan, and it nearly startled Harry back to his senses. The taste of Malfoy's mouth drew him down again, but he dimly wondered why the blond was not resisting. The fact that he wasn't was a heady rush, and Harry's hands moved lower, sliding out of the shirt to caress Malfoy's cock through his trousers. It was a pleasant jolt to find Malfoy as hard as he was, and a gasp made it past their joined lips as Malfoy inhaled sharply.

Harry opened Malfoy's trousers with determined care while teasing his lips with nibbling kisses. Harry's hand dipped inside, and his fingers glided over the heated flesh. Harry had to leave Malfoy's lips for a moment because he couldn't breathe. The sensation was too much-it felt too good. He drew back and let his gaze slide over the blond. He had never wanted anything more. Malfoy's head was tipped back, and the grey eyes were nearly shut. His reddened lips were slightly parted, revealing pearl-white teeth. Malfoy's platinum hair framed his perfect features, making Harry want to reach out and touch it.

The open shirt revealed smooth skin over a far more muscular physique than Harry would have guessed. His perusal dropped lower, to watch the magnificent cock beneath his hand as he stroked and caressed it. Malfoy's hips shifted slightly, pressing into Harry's palm.

"You're so unbelievably beautiful," Harry murmured and kissed him again.

Malfoy's hands were splayed on the couch, not touching Harry, which was just fine, anything was fine, as long as he didn't push Harry away or ask him to stop. From the sounds escaping Malfoy's lips, stopping Harry was the last thing on his mind. Harry matched his movements to the speed of Malfoy's gasps, thinking that nothing had ever felt quite so indescribably right.

Harry's mouth moved over Malfoy's jaw and down the smooth neck. He shifted until he half-knelt between Malfoy's open legs, and sucked greedily at one nipple, and then the other, teasing the hard nubs into further stiffness.

"So close," Malfoy gasped.

"Not quite yet," Harry said in a hushed tone and moved down to take the head of Malfoy's cock into his mouth. Malfoy cried out and came, flooding Harry's mouth with hot liquid. The feel of Malfoy quivering beneath his hands, along with the taste and sound and scent of him filled Harry like a crescendo of emotion. *Mine*, he thought fervently as an orgasm tore through him. It was like nothing he'd ever experienced, and he sucked and swallowed every bit of Malfoy he could taste as his own release drenched his boxers. Harry reached down and squeezed his own cock for the first time, to coax every last shudder from his over-stimulated body.

Spent at last, he licked Malfoy one last time and rested his cheek on the flat abdomen. Malfoy touched him finally—a pale hand dropped onto Harry's head and rested there without moving.

Harry waited for the shame and mental anguish to assault him, but after long moments he felt nothing but contentment. He soaked in the warmth of Malfoy's skin and listened to the slowing rhythm of the Slytherin's breathing. Harry did not want to move or think—he simply wanted the

moment to stretch into forever.

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Harry's hangover was quite spectacular. The mere act of opening his eyes was akin to placing hot coals on his retinas. He shut them tightly and fumbled on the bedside table until his fingers brushed his wand, thank Merlin.

He tried to Summon a hangover potion he kept on hand for emergencies, usually for the rare occasions Seamus and Dean visited and spent all night recalling every drinking game ever invented. Harry had to speak the spell twice—his voice reminded him of Alastor Moody's harsh rasp.

The vial felt nice and cool in his hand and he chugged the concoction without looking at it. They effects were violent and immediate, from the bone-jarring shudder to the instantaneous need to pee. He bolted for the loo to purge the effects of excessive drink and hangover remedy.

Harry felt almost human when he returned to his room. It was his day off, luckily, since the hour was long past that in which he usually rose. He padded into the living room and stopped short at the sight of the couch. The dark upholstery seemed to regard him expectantly, forcing him to deal with the memories of the night before.

He walked forward and sat heavily on the sofa while his mind slid back over every moment. His throat constricted, and he reached out a hand to touch the place where Malfoy had been.

Harry's hand froze at the realization of what he was doing. He felt no humiliation for attacking the Slytherin; all he felt was a sense of wonder. He no longer cared that his Veela need had driven him to seek out Malfoy, because the emotion had altered.

Harry missed Malfoy. He wanted to reach out and touch Malfoy's hand. He wanted to see his hair shine in the sunlight. He wanted to hear that annoying drawl, and taste the soft skin at the hollow of his pale throat.

Harry felt nothing but an unwelcome sense of finality when he realized he had fallen in love with Draco Malfoy.

Malfoy, who had a fiancée.

Harry forced away the panic induced by the thought and wondered what Hermione would do. He shut his eyes and visualized her face. He heard her practical voice say, "Well, fight for what you want, Harry. You've overcome impossible odds before."

Harry opened his eyes. Malfoy's fiancée was in France, and Harry was here, right here. Maybe he was stupid to try, but he wanted Malfoy, and he had to at least make an attempt to win him.

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It was not until Harry had dressed and eaten that he noticed the parchment on the writing desk in the corner. Harry walked over and picked it up, not surprised to see Malfoy's almost-pretty handwriting.

Potter,

My decision to drop in on you last night was quite fortuitous.

Harry grinned, hearing the Slytherin's tones perfectly as he read the words.

I did so out of a sense of compassion and duty, and was rewarded handsomely for my effort. It almost makes me feel like a Gryffindor.

Harry chuckled aloud at that, and made a scoffing noise. His amusement fled and the blood drained from his face when he read the next lines.

I am enclosing my bill for services rendered, as follows:

Kisses, with tongue 7 each at 100G 700 Galleons

Strokes, full hand (estimated) 20 each at 10G 200 Galleons

Hand job (discounted) 1 at 100G 100 Galleons

Total due: 1,000 Galleons

Harry pulled the chair out so sharply the legs screeched on the wooden floor. His knees buckled and he dropped bonelessly into the seat, feeling dark spots swimming before his vision. The determined optimism he had felt only moments earlier seemed like the mark of a bloody lovesick imbecile.

The whole time, Malfoy had been tallying his bill. Every kiss, every touch, had been nothing but another Galleon in Malfoy's coffers. Harry forced down the bile that rose in his throat and winced when his gasp of breath turned into a sob.

He put his head between his knees to stave off the vertigo, and tried to inhale and exhale in conscious rhythm. He shut his eyes. It felt like the ground had siphoned away beneath him. Harry tried to rein in the pain and crushing sense of horror.

It seemed to take forever. He felt like the world's biggest idiot, with his ability to embrace the fact that he loved Malfoy with scarcely a batted eyelash, and yet the knowledge that Malfoy would never love him hit him like a fucking *Crucio*. And really, which was more bloody logical? Obviously, Malfoy did not love him. Malfoy did not even fucking *like* him.

Harry stood up suddenly, almost glad when the panic was buried by a sudden onslaught of rage.

These fucking Veela genes! Harry had had enough. He refused to be a goddamn puppet any longer. He would rid himself of the curse of it, no matter what it took. If it killed him, then so be it. Better to die than face the cruel amusement on Malfoy's face if Harry dared to see him again. He crumpled the bill in his fist and left it on the table before snatching up a quill. He penned three messages—one to Gringott's authorizing the payment to Malfoy's account, one to Kingsley stating he was taking an indefinite leave of absence, and one to Hermione. To her, he tried to explain without actually explaining.

When Hedwig returned from her first two deliveries, Harry sent her off to Hermione with the last message. Then he sealed his flat and left.

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Egypt sucked. Harry had never imagined such wretched heat. It sapped the energy from him, even as the lack of contact with Malfoy drained the life from him.

Harry was nearly too tired to care about his mission. His research had led him to Egypt as the origin of the Veela—drawings of winged people adorned the walls of nearly every tomb. Luckily, his Auror training had provided Translation Charms, so the hieroglyphs were fairly simple to decipher, albeit frustrating. Harry knew all there was to know about the Veela, except how to break a bond with one.

It seemed most magical cultures thought bonding with a Veela to be a fabulous honor, so why would they want to dissolve the link*? Because no one else in history has ever been Veela-bonded to Draco Malfoy*, Harry thought wryly.

Harry let his tired eyes glide over the hieroglyphs opposite him. He sat on a sandy floor across from a wall detailing a Veela ritual that had no relevance to him. He tried not to think of Malfoy, but the memory of their last night together haunted him every time he shut his eyes. He sometimes felt the Veela side of him as another entity, snarling with rage as it tried to force him to flee back to the blond dementor.

Harry knew it was not another entity, though, merely some uncontrollable hormone, and his own stupidity in allowing himself to fall in love with the Prince of Self-Absorption.

Harry's hand trailed through the sand. He should probably go back to his hotel room, but he was so tired, he wasn't sure he had the energy to Disapparate. It had been two weeks since he'd seen Malfoy. His vigor was beyond depleted. All Harry wanted to do was lie on the floor and let his life drain away into the sand beneath the Sphinx. Maybe in a few thousand years, some wizard archeologist would find his desiccated corpse lying next to his wand.

"Come on, Harry, what kind of attitude is that?" he asked himself. "You killed Voldemort, saved

the world. You're an Auror. You never give up, no matter the odds."

The internal pep talk had no force. It might as well have been the wind whistling over the dunes. Harry could not muster the strength to care. He let his head fall forward onto his chest, wishing he could just *sleep*. Oblivion would be so nice, instead of this tortured, somnolent state he walked through, wracked with desire for something he could never have.

He must have dreamed then, because he felt Malfoy's arms slide around him, felt Draco's warm cheek press against his, and a soft voice whisper gently in his ear, "You are the stupidest person alive."

It was absurdly comforting to know that even in his dreams Malfoy was an ass-hat.

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The dream did not end. Harry felt Draco wrapped around him in his delusion. He pressed back into the delightful warmth, thinking if this was death, then perhaps it wasn't so bad, after all. He felt Draco's hand slide over his chest, and reached up to link their fingers.

Draco's hot mouth pressed into his neck, teasing gently.

"Rest now," Malfoy murmured. "You'll be all right."

"Don't want to be all right," Harry mumbled. "Just want to be right here."

"Idiot," Malfoy said. Harry smiled and drifted into a different dream.

This time, the dream was molten heat. He felt a hand glide over his torso, wandering down over his abdomen to the waistband of his boxers. A tongue began to lick slow, hot circles around one of Harry's nipples, lighting a fire whose flames licked their way down to join the hand that tucked itself beneath the elastic to touch Harry's cock, which became rigid in the space of a heartbeat.

Malfoy—it had to be Malfoy, because who else did Harry dream about these days?—stroked gently, tearing a loud moan from Harry's throat. He imagined Malfoy's chuckle against his chest, sending a vibration into Harry's sensitized skin. He smiled and gasped as the stokes began to build a tower of pleasure, block by exquisite block.

Malfoy's mouth suddenly muffled Harry's panting breaths, and Harry latched onto the new sensation greedily. God, there was nothing better than this… except what came next.

Harry cried out into Malfoy's gorgeous mouth as the blocks tumbled down, knocked flat by the force of his orgasm. Malfoy's grip did not lessen, and he held tightly until Harry's shudders halted. Malfoy sucked gently at Harry's lips one last time before pulling away. Harry mused dimly that it was the most realistic—and erotic—dream he'd ever had.

"I thought that might wake you up," Malfoy said with a hint of amusement when Harry's eyes opened. Harry smiled at him, absently noting how beautiful Malfoy's grey eyes were up close.

"You're awfully nice in my dreams," Harry commented, and then his brow furrowed, because his voice had never sounded so hoarse in his dreams… and why should it?

"No dream, Potter," Malfoy said and squeezed Harry's softening cock for emphasis. Then he let go.

Harry's mind rebelled, and he sharply took in his surroundings. He did not recognize the room, but the décor was familiar.

"I'm still in Egypt," Harry murmured, bewildered.

"*We* are still in Egypt, although certainly not in that wretched dustbowl near Giza. I Apparated us to this hotel in Alexandria. I refuse to stay in a place that doesn't have decent house-elves."

Harry shut his eyes to prevent himself from doing anything stupid, like punching Malfoy, or tracing the gorgeous lines of his face, or dragging him into another all-too-expensive kiss.

"Why are you here?" he whispered raggedly. He felt Malfoy cast a spell that cleaned up the mess on Harry's abdomen—Harry blushed profusely—and then pulled the blankets up to his chest. Malfoy left the bed, and Harry heard the clink of glass on glass, and then water pouring.

"Drink this," Malfoy said. "You're severely dehydrated. Rather not surprising of you to enter a sweltering tomb without proper food or drink."

Harry glared, but took the glass and drained it. He was parched. Malfoy refilled it and Harry drank that, as well.

"How long have I been out?"

"Two days," Malfoy said as he set the glass on the table with the pitcher. "You're probably starved. Can you walk?"

Harry scowled and swung his legs off the bed. He got to his feet, and then staggered as blackness licked at the edges of his vision. Malfoy caught him before he fell.

"Imbecile," Malfoy said quietly. Harry wanted to shake him off, but his touch felt so damned good… He leaned his head against the blond's neck instead, and drank in the warmth of the arms surrounding him.

"Come on," Malfoy said and eased him back onto the bed. "Get dressed, and we'll go get something to eat."

Harry sat on the bed and tugged on the clothes Malfoy threw at him. He stood up more slowly when he was dressed, and was pleased when the vertigo decided not to assault him.

They left the bedroom, and Harry noted that they were in a very expensive-looking hotel suite. A hotel suite with a single bedroom and one king-sized bed. Had Malfoy slept with him for the past two nights? The idea gave him a thrill of glee, followed quickly by panic.

"How much is this going to cost me?" Harry asked suddenly.

"Don't demean my rescue effort by putting a price on it, Potter," Malfoy said glibly.

"Seriously," Harry snapped, annoyed because Malfoy had been the one to put a price on *everything*. "How much?"

"I'm not charging you. I'm doing this out of the goodness of my heart."

"You don't have a heart."

Malfoy sneered. "Whatever. Let's go." The Slytherin Apparated them to a crowded marketplace. Harry thought it was a Muggle marketplace for a moment—the cacophony was the same. Then he caught a glimpse now and again of a peaked hat or European robes, and realized Malfoy would never rub elbows with Muggles if there was an alternative.

Malfoy purchased a variety of foodstuffs that Harry did not recognize, and then Apparated them to a remote stretch of beach. Several benches dotted a long pier that jutted out over the azure waters of the Mediterranean. They sat upon a bench while they watched the sun draw colorful shadows on the sky as it set. They ate in silence, knees and elbows touching occasionally.

Harry Vanished the paper wrappings left from his meal and got up abruptly. He wanted to know why Malfoy had followed him, but it was obvious he would not pry an answer out of the Slytherin. Harry walked a short distance down the pier and leaned against the railing. The water lapped at the wooden pilings with a muted slapping sound. Harry stole several surreptitious glances at Malfoy, admiring the way his hair turned gold in the waning sunlight. Harry swore inwardly. Part of him wanted to surrender to the simple reality of being able to reach and out touch Malfoy. He was *here*, why should it matter the reason?

Harry started, realizing Malfoy had moved to stand beside him. Harry's eyes tracked over the blond's aristocratic features as Malfoy stared out at the sunset. The Slytherin turned and held his gaze for a long minute, but said nothing. Malfoy held out his hand, and Harry took it. The blond silently Apparated them back to the hotel.

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"I think I'll read for a bit," Malfoy said quietly, as though Harry expected him to come to bed.

Harry nodded, refusing to be surprised by anything Malfoy did any more.

If Malfoy joined him in the king-sized bed, Harry never knew it. The blond was gone in the morning. Harry would have thought it a dream but for the reality of the posh hotel room. Harry showered and shaved. When he exited the bathroom, Malfoy was waiting. He shoved a paper-wrapped pastry into Harry's hands.

"Let's go, Potter. If you're determined to carry on with this silly quest of yours, at least start looking in the right places. This is Alexandria, you know. Home of the Library?"

"The Library burned down."

"The *Muggle* Library burned down. Don't you know anything?" Malfoy's smirk answered his own question. "The Wizarding Library is underground, safe and sound after all these centuries."

Harry sighed heavily and Malfoy grinned. He reached out and curled a hand around the back of Harry's neck to draw him close. Harry surrendered, and leaned into the Slytherin. His lips brushed Malfoy's neck as they Disapparated. The Slytherin released him abruptly. Harry clutched his pastry and looked around. They were in an enormous, dark, subterranean chamber. He could make out nothing but a single large desk lit by a guttering oil lamp. Malfoy already stood before the desk, chatting up a witch that looked old enough to have been around when the library was built. Regardless, she was not too old to resist the Malfoy charm.

"Come, Potter," Malfoy said imperiously. "Lovely Gertrude has given us excellent directions to the Veela section." The blond blew a kiss to the geriatric woman, and Harry felt a flash of irrational jealousy that he hammered into submission. Honestly, he was envious of a veritable fossil? What the hell was wrong with him?

He followed Malfoy into the darkness, guided by only by the Slytherin's lit wand. They seemed to walk forever, until they reached a long table adorned with several lamps that Malfoy lit with a flick of his wand. The light revealed rows of massive shelves stretching away into the blackness.

"Have a seat, Potter," he said in the same tone a man would use on his favorite dog. "And for pity's sake, eat. I won't have you fainting on me *again*."

Malfoy strode away, and Harry plopped onto a chair in front of the table. He scowled petulantly, but he ate the too-sweet pastry before Malfoy returned with a dozen Levitated tomes.

They sat together and read Veela lore until Harry wanted to scream from the useless boredom of it. The only thing that kept him in his seat was the pale hand that reached out every so often to touch the bare skin on the back of his neck, dissolving the headache that developed after each half hour without some sort of contact with Malfoy.

Harry stopped seeing words after a while, and simply waited eagerly for the next casual touch, like an affection-starved mongrel, hating himself as he did so.

"You're not even reading, are you Potter?" Malfoy asked finally. Harry flushed and stopped turning random pages. He wanted to protest that Malfoy was too distracting, but the words stuck in his throat, because he did not want Malfoy to leave under any circumstances.

"Dumbass," Malfoy said, not unkindly, and grabbed Harry's neck again, this time to pull him into a sweet kiss. Harry decided that Malfoy could insult him any time he wanted as long as it was followed by a kiss. The Slytherin pulled away before Harry reached the point of dragging Malfoy down to the floor, but it was a near thing. Harry straightened in his hard chair, panting.

Malfoy stood and strode off into the shelves again. He returned with more books, and began to read as if uninterrupted. Harry got a grip on his resolve and went back to the books with renewed determination.

After another couple of hours, Harry stood up in frustration. "It's all the same!" he snapped. "Every goddamn book and scroll and carving! 'It's an honor to bond with a Veela!' 'It's joyous to have Veela blood!' 'Veela rituals are sacred!' I can't believe no one in history ever fought this shit!"

Malfoy sighed. "Gryffindors never could handle the dark for long. Let's get you back to the pretty sunlight before you start mowing down priceless artifacts."

Harry was about to snarl at him, but the blond's grip on his hand dispelled rational thought. By the time Harry recovered, they were outside. Surprisingly, he did feel better with the sun beating on his head. The sea air felt nice, and Harry decided he would always have a soft place in his heart for Alexandria, and it had nothing to do with the blond man watching him from a few paces away. *Liar*, he told himself. He must have looked like a smitten fool, because Malfoy flushed and shifted his gaze to the Mediterranean.

"Let's go shopping," Malfoy said suddenly.

Harry stared at him in puzzlement.

Malfoy rolled his eyes. "Come on, idiot. I know you're hungry."

Malfoy took them back to the marketplace, where he bought meat skewers and bread, and thick, dark coffee. After eating, they wandered the crowded market where Malfoy bought bolts of cloth, copper framed mirrors, mother-of-pearl inlaid wooden boxes, and delicate gold jewelry set with lapis and malachite. Harry's heart constricted at each purchase, only to relax when each piece was carefully wrapped and sent to Narcissa Malfoy. Nothing was forwarded to the mysterious fiancée in France.

Malfoy shocked him by purchasing a delicate golden chain that Harry had been admiring. A tiny ankh gleamed from the chain. The blond ignored Harry's protests and fastened it around his neck.

"Shut up, Potter. It's just a stupid trinket. It doesn't mean anything."

Malfoy's derisive tone caused Harry to snap his jaws shut angrily, but the Slytherin was wrong. It might not mean anything to Malfoy, but it already meant far too much to Harry. His fingers touched the tiny piece of metal a dozen times during their weaving path through the marketplace. At last, Malfoy seemed to tire of the crowds and the quantity of halvah and bassboussa he had consumed.

"We should go to Karnak," Malfoy decided. "You enjoy stomping around in dingy tombs, right? We'll go back to the Library tomorrow."

Harry smiled in bemusement, unwilling to admit that Malfoy could suggest Apparating to the seventh level of hell, and Harry would nod like an imbecile and hold out his hands. Karnak it was.

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Karnak was impressive. Harry had found the Pyramids and the Sphinx far less than awe-inspiring. They were basically large piles of brick, after all, and the Sphinx was missing most of its face, making Harry long to cast a spell and fix it. But the statue of Rameses II at Karnak was astounding. Harry felt like a tourist as he took in the colossal pillars, statues, and carvings.

"Muggles have already raped most of this place," Malfoy said, laughing as he took in Harry's expression. "There are more artifacts in London than Egypt these days."

"Then why are we here?" Harry asked.

"Because there are a couple of places the Muggles don't know about."

Malfoy took his hand and they Disapparated again, appearing underground this time. A dusty-looking wizard glanced at them from a dirt-covered table. He was hunched over a knobbly-looking item with his wand, chipping away at the surface with meticulous precision.

"We're closing soon," the man said absently. Harry waited, thinking Malfoy's charm wouldn't work so easily on a crusty male archeologist.

"I'm prepared to make a large donation, of course," Malfoy said dryly and the wizard left his post to grovel appropriately. Harry rolled his eyes. When charm failed, use bribery: the Malfoy motto. Nevertheless, it got them deep into the passages beneath the temple. Harry marveled anew as they passed wall after wall of fading hieroglyphs.

The attendant had taken their wands, and no amount of Malfoy bribery or charm could persuade him to budge on that issue. The place was heavily warded to prevent theft. They would have to undergo a thorough magical frisking before their wands were returned.

They wandered through a dark tunnel lit only by a lantern held high by Malfoy.

"How will we read anything without a Translation Spell?" Harry asked.

"I can read it," Malfoy said lightly, and Harry yanked at his hair for a moment. Of course Malfoy could read hieroglyphs. He probably spoke six languages and could read and write twelve. Harry decided not to ask.

One tunnel was blocked off with a crisscrossing of boards, and a hand-painted sign that read: *Danger – Keep Out* in several languages. Naturally, a direct command such as that was an affront to the Malfoy sense of entitlement. The blond peered through the boards curiously.

"Danger from what?" Malfoy mused.

"What difference does it make?" Harry asked.

"Where is your sense of adventure, Potter?" Malfoy asked

"I have more than enough adventure just being magically bonded to *you*," he retorted.

"We're not bonded yet," Malfoy murmured, so low that Harry nearly missed the comment. The Slytherin yanked at the boards, thankfully not noticing the impact his words had on Harry. It was true, the Veela bond was not complete—would never be complete—without true intimacy. Harry had not even contemplated it except in his deepest erotic fantasies. Malfoy had made it perfectly clear that such a thing would not be allowed under any circumstances.

But Malfoy had said *yet*… and that was interesting.

A board gave way with a splintering of wood, yanking Harry back to reality. He dug a tomb-sized pit and shoved his latest contemplation into it before burying it under tons of sand. Malfoy was being surprisingly charitable, but Harry doubted the blond would ever be *that* charitable.

Another board let go, leaving a space large enough for the Slytherin to wriggle through.

"Malfoy, what are you doing?" Harry hissed. "Get back here!"

"Don't be a pansy, Potter. I just want to see what is so dangerous. Do you think it's a curse? It can't be a creature, or they wouldn't have used such flimsy boards. I think they are just trying to keep people away from a new find…"

Malfoy and the light were departing, forcing Harry to climb through the hole after the git.

"Damn you, Malfoy, did it ever occur to you that *danger* is synonymous with *not safe*?"

"Safety is overrated, Potter."

Harry should have expected disaster to strike at those words. The passage ceiling was low, propped with beams, and Malfoy reached up to touch one. A heartbeat later, wood and stone rained down on the Slytherin with an avalanche of dust.

"Draco!" Harry bellowed as the blond disappeared. He flung himself forward, groping blindly in the thick cloud. Harry batted at it ineffectually, wishing desperately for his wand. He spun suddenly and yelled, "*Accio wand*!"

An agonizing minute later, he heard a low whistle and his wand snapped into his hand. His thankful relief was murmured on a breath, and he spelled away the dust. He cast a floating globe of brilliant light, and recoiled in horror. The only part of Malfoy visible beneath the rubble was a single, booted foot and part of his shin.

"Fuck!" Harry cried and began to Levitate stones as quickly as possible. He had to pause and shore up the collapsing ceiling several times, but slowly the Malfoy's emerged. It looked horribly broken and twisted. Blood stained the sand beneath him.

"What are you doing?" the archeologist shouted, likely drawn by the flight of Harry's wand, or the sound of the cave-in.

"My friend is trapped," Harry yelled, and shifted a large boulder off of Malfoy's back. It looked heavy enough to have crushed the Slytherin's spine. Luckily, a beam had wedged against the wall, stopping just shy of Malfoy's head, and protecting it from the rocks.

Harry blasted the remaining rubble aside and threw himself next to Malfoy.

"Oh god, please, please be alive," he begged and pressed his hands against the pale throat. He could not find a heartbeat, and inhaled brokenly. A faint pulse seemed to jump beneath his fingers. Harry felt a strange tingling in his palms. It took him a moment to place the perception, and he finally figured it out. It evoked the memory of touching Malfoy after a long absence, but in reverse. Normally, the tingling magic soaked into his skin and built in a slow crescendo. This time, it seemed to collect in his hands and flow outward, into Malfoy. Harry gripped him more tightly and willed the magic to do what it would, hoping to give Malfoy strength, if nothing else.

"Get a Healer!" Harry said hoarsely, sensing the archeologist nearby.

Malfoy's breathing seemed to ease, but perhaps that was merely Harry's wishful thinking. He moved a hand from Malfoy's throat to the collar of his shirt. He unbuttoned it quickly and placed his palm over Malfoy's heart, as though he could keep it beating through his will alone. Harry picked up his wand with his other hand, and began to cast every healing spell he had ever learned.

The broken bones were beyond his capacity. He would only mend them wrong and end up crippling Malfoy if he tried, so he concentrated on keeping his lungs clear, and healing the visible cuts and contusions.

It seemed to take forever for the dusty man to return with the Healer. She was an Egyptian woman with pale blue robes that nearly covered her completely. She rattled out questions in Arabic to the archeologist, who replied in tones Harry could tell were confused and unhelpful. She glared at the man.

She cast several spells in succession and Harry thought they sounded much prettier in her language. Multicolored lights swirled over and around Malfoy. Harry sat back on his heels anxiously. She stood up after a short time—*too short*, Harry thought with a flash of panic—and questioned the archeologist.

"She wants to know what is wrong with your friend," the man said to Harry.

"What do you mean?" Harry snapped. "He was crushed by these boulders! Look at the blood! His legs are broken and one hand was nearly pulverized…" Harry trailed off as his gaze went unwillingly to Malfoy wand hand, only to find it whole and unblemished. He gasped, remembering the twisted fingers he had noticed while lifting the rocks.

After another short exchange, the curator said, "She says he has no broken bones. Not even a scratch that she can find. No internal damage."

The woman spoke again and reached out to pat Harry's shoulder with a smile.

"She says you should not panic next time, and that you are a fine Healer."

She stepped back and Disapparated.

"I'm no Healer," Harry said in a daze.

"He is sleeping and needs rest," the man said. "Or so she said. You will be leaving now?" He handed Draco's wand to Harry, who took the hawthorn and nodded. He knelt down and pulled Malfoy into an embrace before Apparating them back to Alexandria. After placing the Slytherin on the bed, Harry felt a moment of indecision. What if the Healer had been wrong? What if Draco was slowly bleeding to death?

Resolutely, Harry packed their belongings, signed a voucher authorizing payment for the room, gathered Malfoy, and Disapparated. He took Draco straight to St. Mungos, where they confirmed the diagnosis of the woman in Egypt. Malfoy was fine. He possibly had a concussion, which would heal after a quick spell and several days of rest. They suggested Harry take him home, which he did.

The house-elves were not inclined to allow Harry past the fireplace in the Malfoy library, but he

finally made it clear that he had no intention of releasing Malfoy into their care. He mentioned that Draco would be less than pleased to wake up on the library floor when he had a perfectly good bed upstairs. That seemed to decide them, and one of them led Harry and their Levitated master up to Draco's opulent bedroom suite.

Harry carefully undressed the Slytherin and tucked him into the expensive sheets. He brushed the silver hair away from Draco's brow and sank down in a chair to watch him sleep. After a while, Harry nodded off, with his fingers still touching the gold chain at his throat.

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"Potter." The word penetrated Harry's consciousness, and he blinked as he raised his head. It was dark but for a shaft of moonlight that crossed over the chair in which he sat. He couldn't see Draco in the dark, but he fumbled his way forward.

"Malfoy?" he murmured sleepily. His hand was caught by another, and he was drawn forward onto the bed.

"I'm home?" Malfoy asked quietly.

Harry nodded, and then realized Malfoy couldn't see him in the dark, either. "I brought you here," Harry said. "I was worried."

There was a long pause, and then Malfoy said, "I think I was dead."

Harry squeezed the hand that held his. "Not dead, but it was a near thing."

"You brought me back."

"I… they said I healed you. I don't know how. I mean, I cast every spell I know, but it couldn't have…"

Malfoy chuckled, and the sound seemed to float in the dark. "Potter, you are a dunderhead. You didn't read a word of that Veela lore, did you?"

Harry flushed, thankful that Malfoy wouldn't see that, either. "Of course I did."

"Veela can heal their mates. It's a side benefit of the shared magic. It evolved from self-preservation, no doubt, because sex can get a bit rough…"

Harry followed the sound of his voice and pressed a kiss against his lips. It communicated a tiny hint of his joy that the blond was alive, and had the added benefit of shutting the prat up.

Harry was surprised when the hand detached from his, and then Malfoy's arms went around him. Harry's kiss was returned with a passion he had not felt from Malfoy before. His heart leaped,

even though he tried not to read too much into it. He could not help feeling an overwhelming tenderness toward the Slytherin, so powerful he thought he might die of it.

Malfoy's hands slid down Harry's back, beneath his shirt, and up again. His touch set Harry to trembling, and his kisses swung between desperate, starving need, and gentle, sweet nibbles of devotion. Harry's hands roamed over Malfoy's skin without guidance—Harry could not get enough of touching him. He wasn't sure he could ever stop.

Malfoy's hand unfastened Harry's trousers, nearly stopping Harry's heart. The dim center of rationality crying out from the sea of boiling lust knew this was not a good idea. Malfoy was nude but for his boxers—Harry's shirt…bloody hell, his shirt was gone—and the sheet between them lay bunched and awry. Once Harry's trousers were gone, he would have no restraint.

The rational spark cried out for mercy.

"Malfoy, we… we can't…" Harry panted against Malfoy's perfect lips, those beautiful lips that he could not stop tasting. He forgot what he had been trying to say.

Draco's hand closed over Harry's erection and Harry forgot his own name. He whimpered and tore at the sheet, kissing and touching the hot flesh beneath his—flesh that he needed to be *inside* as soon as possible.

The kissing and touching and wanting was good, but it could be better, god yes, so much better… And then the sheet was gone, and so were the last of their clothes. Desire was like a thick web surrounding Harry, trapping and binding him in Draco's heady power. He was lost.

Harry froze suddenly, at the very brink of breaking through the last barrier between them, because he was still Harry Potter, Veela genes or no Veela genes.

"Draco," he said in a tortured voice. "Oh god, Draco, we can't. The bond… we'll never escape the bond." He felt like gnashing his teeth and sobbing. His body shook with the effort of restraint.

"It's okay," Draco said softly. Harry wished to hell he could see the Slytherin's face. The words nearly cracked him in half.

"No," Harry said.

Draco shifted and muttered a spell. The air was suddenly full of tiny purple lights, floating like fireflies. Malfoy's face was so beautiful in the dim glow it took Harry's breath away. A purple-tinted hand reached up and cupped Harry's cheek.

"I want you," Draco said earnestly and Harry was lost again. He kissed Draco with a moan of surrender.

Harry trembled so badly he thought he might shake apart. He had to remind himself to breathe. Draco pulled him into a kiss, and Harry's hands slid over him reverently. The Veela genes might have provided the spark, but Harry knew what he felt now had little to do with obscure genetics.

He was not completely sure what to do, but Malfoy's hands guided him. The Slytherin cast the necessary spells and Harry destroyed the savage flare of jealously that exploded through him at the knowledge that Draco had done this with someone other than him. That was the past, and this was now. Draco opened himself to Harry and he responded with awed gratitude.

Harry sheathed himself in Draco with agonizing slowness, guided by the soft pressure of the blond's hands on his arse. Draco arched suddenly and drove himself upward. Harry gasped, not only at the sensation of being entirely enveloped, but by the rush of magic that careened through him. It felt like a reverse orgasm, flowing inward instead of out, and setting every nerve ending on fire. He thought his hair stood on end.

"Holy shit!" Draco breathed and Harry met his eyes, wide with surprise and silver-violet in the purplish light.

"Wow," Harry managed and then Draco moved again. The center of the world lurched back to Harry's cock, and Draco made a sound that turned Harry's bones to liquid. Harry set his jaw, single-mindedly determined to make Draco forget every lover he'd ever had. Harry moved, steered by instinct and every sound and motion made by the blond beneath him. Each stroke was bliss, a feeling he made damned sure to share with Draco, using his slick hand as a counterstroke to every thrust, until Draco's whimpers grew into audible moans of delight. The sounds were as much a thrill as the sensation building in his groin.

Harry bit his lip until it hurt, lest he stupidly blurt out babbling declarations of love. The words pounded through his head anyway, and found voice in Harry's hands, lips, and body.

"Harry," Draco murmured once, and then bit into the side of Harry's neck—hard—as he came in a brilliant, welcome flood over Harry's hand. It was more than enough to rock Harry into the most explosive orgasm of his life.

He nearly bit his lip in half to keep from screaming aloud, and tasted blood before he allowed himself to whisper Draco's name. The Slytherin's arms tightened around him for a moment, and Harry let himself pretend that this was only the first of many exquisite experiences with Draco, and not the simple one-off he knew it was.

Harry pressed gentle kisses into Malfoy's temple, jaw, and throat, thinking *I love you* with every touch. Draco sighed heavily, and Harry stopped, assuming he had exceeded his welcome. He pulled out carefully and moved to slide off the bed, but Draco caught his wrist.

"Stay here," he ordered, "Gryffindor idiot."

Harry could not refuse. He could not even summon a proper response to the insult. He lay next to

Draco and met the grey eyes. The blond's expression was enigmatic in the violet glow. Harry hoped to hell he wouldn't see regret reflected there. He opened his mouth to ask, but Draco's fingers pressed over his lips.

"Don't," Draco said flatly.

Harry swallowed and then covered Draco's hand with his own before he kissed each of the pale fingertips. Draco shut his eyes. When Harry finished his worship of the Slytherin's fingers, Draco took his hand back and wrapped it into Harry's hair. He dragged Harry forward until his face was snuggled into Draco's chest. Harry sighed in contentment, threw his arm over his lover, and went to sleep.

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Draco was asleep when Harry awoke, though daylight streamed through the open curtains. The brightness was muted, however, as the sky was not the same as that over Egypt. This was an English sky—a December English sky, dark and pregnant with rain, or possibly snow.

Harry watched Draco sleep for as long as he could stand it. The chiseled features were almost too-beautiful, with golden lashes hiding the piercing grey eyes. The platinum hair was gorgeously tousled, making him look more human and less godlike. His lips were slightly parted in sleep. Harry itched to reach out and touch the smooth cheek, or taste the lips one last time.

He restrained himself, and carefully left the bed. If last night were any indication, Draco had healed quite well. He would be fine. Harry, on the other hand, was not fine. He was dangerously ensnared by Draco, to the point of losing himself if he stayed. His brow furrowed as he dressed, wondering what would happen now that the bond between them had been consummated. Harry knew it was important to Veela, but he had never expected it to happen between him and Draco, so he had not paid much attention to that portion of Veela lore.

Harry gathered his glasses and wand, shut the door quietly behind him, and Flooed home under the watchful eyes of the Malfoy house-elves.

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Harry wished Hermione would turn off the twinkle lights on her Christmas tree. The place was entirely too festive for Harry's depressed mood. It also reminded him he had been gone for three weeks, and the world had continued on without him. He wondered if he still had a job.

Hermione pressed a third cup of eggnog into his hands as he paced behind her chair. He sipped at it with a grimace of distaste, since it was not his favorite holiday drink, but the rum was a welcome addition.

"There. Finished," she said and handed him a piece of parchment. Harry took it after setting the cup down, and blew on it slightly to dry the ink. He read it twice over and nodded. It should

work. "I still think you should discuss this with Malfoy," she said disapprovingly.

Hermione's fireplace suddenly erupted in a red cloud, and Draco entered the room, looking none too pleased. Harry shot a startled glance at Hermione, who shot to her feet, looking bizarrely guilty.

"I need to… um… get something from my room." She practically ran for the hallway and Harry glared after her suspiciously. Had she called the Slytherin? Draco, who stalked forward, snared Harry's attention.

"How dare you skulk out of my house like some 50-Knut whore," Draco snarled. His silver eyes flashed with a dangerous light.

Harry gaped at him in astonishment. "I did not 'skulk'! It was nearly 11:00 in the morning." He had no idea why Draco was angry, but he held up the parchment to placate him. "I was researching the Veela bond and it led me to a tangent. I remembered a spell I used on a case last year to break a wraith possession. Hermione modified it a bit and I think it might work."

Draco snatched the parchment and read the spell over carefully. Harry had thought him angry before, but now his glare became positively glacial.

"This spell could kill you," he snapped.

Harry shrugged. He was not quite as casual about facing death as he pretended, but neither was he afraid of it. "It's a slim chance."

Draco's jaw worked silently for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was surprisingly soft. "You would rather risk death than be bonded with me?"

Harry swallowed hard at the words, knowing he only imagined the regret beneath them.

"Not for my sake," Harry said. "I don't… mind, so much… being bonded to you."*Because I love you*, he nearly blurted. He shut his eyes to prevent Draco from reading the truth there. "But you don't deserve this. You don't want it, and it nearly got you killed once. I want you to be free."

Harry opened his eyes to see Draco's narrow. "So your martyr complex compels you to sacrifice yourself?" He sneered. "How noble."

Harry scowled, and Draco walked forward until he stood near enough to touch. His voice was harsh when he spoke. "Don't presume to know what I want or do not want, Potter." He lifted his wand, and the tip of it pressed into the soft flesh beneath Harry's chin, forcing his head up slightly.

"Here is what I think of your spell," Draco said and flicked the wand tip away from Harry to touch the parchment. It erupted into flame. Harry instinctively tried to save it with a cry, but

Draco dropped the burning paper and caught Harry's hand. He gripped it almost savagely.

"No one leaves a Malfoy," he snarled and dragged Harry forward into a bruising kiss. Harry's confusion helped keep him grounded. For once, he did not lose himself to lovesick desire. When Draco pulled away, Harry met his silver eyes.

"What are you saying? You want to remain bonded?" Harry asked incredulously.

"Let's just say the idea is not as repugnant as it should be," Draco said, fixing his eyes on a point somewhere beyond Harry's shoulder, although his possessive grip on Harry did not lessen. He added, "I broke my engagement this morning."

Harry's mind reeled. "What?" he asked stupidly.

"Shut up, Potter. You can't live at the Manor, because the house-elves hate you and would accidentally murder you in your sleep. And your flat is an atrocity. I refuse to live in a place with fewer than six rooms designated for my own personal use."

Harry's sudden smile threatened to split his face in half. He listened with dawning comprehension as Draco continued. "I will absolutely not live in the country—I'm allergic to wildflowers and… country air. Do stop looking at me like that, Potter, or I'll have you sent to—"

Harry's kiss cut off Draco's rambling speech, and his heart gave an ecstatic leap when he sighed slightly and leaned into Harry.

Harry chuckled against the soft lips. "God, you're a pain in the arse. I don't know why I love you," he said ruefully.

"I will, of course, pick out our house and you will buy it," Draco went on as if Harry had not spoken. He paused and his grey eyes widened slightly. "Did you just say—?"

Harry laughed and wrapped his arms more tightly around the Slytherin. He felt giddy. "Yes, you horrifying prat. I've been in love with you for weeks."

For once, Draco seemed to be speechless. A smile transformed his face into a vision that took Harry's breath away. That always seemed to be happening.

"Shall we go back to the Manor and continue with what I had planned to do to you before you so rudely left this morning?" Malfoy asked finally.

"What would that be?" Harry asked hoarsely.

Draco's response, whispered in his ear, caused the air to lock up in Harry's throat again. He began to wonder if he would survive a relationship with a Malfoy.

"Hermione! I'll owl you later!" he yelled and pulled the blond to the fireplace eagerly.

He couldn't wait to find out.

~FIN~

Author's note: For the curious, I decided to write this fic from Draco's point of view, so if you're curious about his motivation (and why he's such a prat!) check out High Priced: Malfoy Edition. :D