Storyid: http://archive.skyehawke.com/story.php?no=7343
Skyehawke.com
Name: Poses
Author: <html><head> <META
Chapter 1 to 12

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 1

"Draco, I'm sure Ron was just asking you because he was curious. He's straight. He had some questions, he was trying to be nice to you."

"*You* weren't here. *You* didn't see it. He was *leering* at me. He wanted more than just some questions answered. Ron wanted a ride."

"Well he would've been disappointed, wouldn't he? You don't give rides," said Harry, smirking at his own cleverness.

Draco stopped his furious packing, interrupting his rather melodramatic escape scene to glare at Harry. Slowly, he raised his middle finger, "Ride this."

"I don't think you're giving yourself enough credit, Draco," sassed Harry as he gestured to Draco's middle finger, attempting to lighten the mood. "Come on, Draco. It's been a week since I've seen you. I'm here now, I'll protect you from the big, bad straight man."

Malfoy narrowed his eyes and immediately put his hand away. "One day back and you're already on *his* side and making fun of my prick. I won't be tarted off to bi-curious best friends no matter how good a shag you are, because I'm *leaving*. They didn't say hardly a word to me all week," huffed Draco, but at least he didn't resume packing.

"Ginny said that she tried talking to you several times and that you were rude to her."

"Well of course I was rude to the *Weaslette*. I don't need hand-me-down friends!"

"Draco!" exclaimed Harry. "Evidently you do or you wouldn't be here!"

That was enough. Draco was packing again.

"Please stay, Draco. Just... *try*. Try for another week before you go. Stay here. Stay with me. *I*

love you," tried Harry. In the back of his mind he knew that Draco wouldn't actually leave. As worked up as the Slytherin was, he wasn't stupid. Further, after a quiet chat with Molly, Harry knew that the other occupants of Grimmauld place weren't what was getting to Draco; instead, it was that painting of Sirius's mother. Each time she started to shriek about blood traitors, Draco would blanch and fly up to his room.

The painting made Draco remember-- remember his family and his roots. Draco wondered what his mother would say from a portrait if she could speak to him. Would she wail like that? Or would her blue eyes just look sad as she stood there and shook her head? His dreams were plagued with nightmarish replays of how she might have died. None of them had any real basis in fact; he was assured she didn't suffer. Just the killing curse and she was gone, but his subconscious couldn't help but speculate.

Draco's packing progression halted at those three hard-won little words coming from Harry. At the utterance, he dropped his clothing and folded his arms. Looking skyward he said, "I love you, too. This is just..."

"Hard. I know. I'm sorry," Harry said as he reached for Draco and wrapped his arms around him from behind to whisper intimately into his lover's ear. "I had the week from hell with terrified relatives. As horrid as they were, though, I just kept thinking of you. Worrying about you, wanting to be with you. I missed you."

Draco knew there was a reason Harry had to go to Privet Drive. They wouldn't just send him for fun, and yet he was feeling prattish and wanted attention. "You should've come to me then. You almost missed me. I might've left yesterday had cookies not been prepared to my *exact* specifications."

"Oh, the infamous oatmeal with no raisins cookies. Hermione wrote to me about those last night," said Harry. Planting a kiss behind Draco's ear, he cooed to him. "Mrs. Weasley shouldn't have chased you around the kitchen with the spatula, but perhaps you could be a bit less-"

"The cookies were dry. She obviously did something wrong," purred Draco as he leaned back against Harry, arching his back so that he could slide his ass against his lover to manipulate his point.

Harry knew from day one that Draco likely had an opinion on everything, but he had no idea just how spoilt and particular his boyfriend could be. "She worked hard on those cookies for you..." his breath caught as he felt Draco moving against him.

"And the milk was tepid. It wasn't *warm* milk it was... room temperature. Lazy," Draco continued, adding his hand between them to coax Harry's agreement.

Must-- remain-- in control--- a week! A week and now-- control, Harry, he reminded himself. If Draco entertained the notion that he could get his way through frottage, he had another thing coming. "She's not a house elf, Draco!"

Wriggling away like an offended cat, Draco continued his trite non-verbal analogy by hissing like one, "As was pointed out to me. I didn't say she was. House elves are at least *sorry* when they cock things up!"

Harry sighed and peered down at his unattended erection and then up at Draco's meaningful gesture of turning his back to him. Again, like a cat.

This was going to be a long summer.

--

These sleeping arrangements weren't going to work, Ron decided. He gave his roommates credit, Draco and Harry did wait till after Ron was asleep before Harry crept into Draco's bed. However, the shifting of the small bed on the dry hardwood floor and the gentle, rhythmic squeal of the springs was enough to wake Ron.

In the peculiar blue light from the gibbous moon, Ron could make out their position. Pale legs wrapped around Harry's darker torso and Draco's hands sliding adoringly over Harry's face. Their pace was slow, pausing now and then as they smiled and giggled and even simply chatted in the pauses during their lovemaking.

It didn't arouse Ron; but he couldn't quite tear his eyes away from it. Unlike Harry, Ron didn't notice any sort of magical transformation in Draco's appearance. He was still as pale, pointed and ferrety as he'd always been. If anything he looked a bit worse for wear, but losing your entire family and changing your destiny in the span of a couple of months did that to a person.

Ron's eyes adapted to the dark and he could see them smiling at one another, their features softened in ways that he hadn't really seen from either of them individually. After a couple of sharp movements from Harry, punctuated by the quiet protests of the springs, the boys stilled. Ron heard the quiet smacking sounds of deep kissing and then the whispers began again. Chatting, smiling, catching up. He overheard "love" and "missed" along with soft murmurs of "be nice" that followed mentions of "Weasel" and "Muggleborn."

He knew that watching this was intruding on their private time, but it was fascinating. Ron's own fumbling interactions with Hermione were usually rapid and heady. Granted, they never had their own room to luxuriate in. Everything they did was necessarily rushed. Watching this, he felt intimidated by the intimacy.

Draco's hands were cupping Harry's face again and they were just looking at each other for a moment before Harry's lower back started to move again. The rhythm started gently and Draco's arms moved down and around Harry's body as they both gasped and whimpered quietly to one another, clearly attempting to remain quiet.

As much as Ron really wanted to stop looking, it was too compelling. He closed his eyes several

times with the intention of giving them privacy only to have them fly open again at another odd sound. Their breathing turned raspy and still they were speaking to one another but with less fluidity. By now the bed was shrieking its protests but the boys seemed not to notice the noise, as they were lost in a tangle of limbs, tongues and bed sheets.

Their vocalizations became a quiet murmur of prayer and curses and Ron's heartbeat picked up in empathy. He wasn't exactly aroused, nor was he unmoved. As unattractive as he found Malfoy, he wasn't particularly enamored of Harry. Not that his best mate was unattractive, it just wasn't the way he looked at his friends or boys in general. It just made him happy to see. After putting up with Malfoy for a week it was good for him to see that Harry really did love him and that Malfoy was capable of truly loving his friend back. Or on the other hand, maybe he was just a pervert. No. That wasn't it at all. He wasn't getting off on this.

He was so lost in his analysis of why he was watching that he missed the last few articulated thrusts that ended in mutual gasps and the final boneless flop of Harry atop Draco who grasped him tightly and tucked his face into his neck. Finally registering that it was over, he let out a low sigh of relief and closed his eyes to block out the final sloppy slurping sounds of their kissing. More whispering, more conversation, but it was becoming quieter, briefer, with longer drowsy pauses in between. Ron turned over in his bed to face the wall and closed his eyes. He decided then that he definitely needed to push for his own room or make some sort of agreement.

--

Draco was chipper over breakfast the next morning. *Embarrassingly chipper*, in fact. So chipper that Harry had a hard time making eye contact with anyone else in the room. This worked out well since no one else in the room seemed able to make eye contact with him or Draco.

Draco was undeterred by the room's silence and simply to be more of a prat, he took to humming as he set his plate. His plate. With the Malfoy crest in the middle and a full set of shining silverware that likely cost what Arthur made in a year.

Harry was used to Draco and his place setting fetish and was unsurprised by the appearance of the Malfoy family china. At this point the rest of the Order was used to it as well, although they had been a bit surprised the first day when Malfoy refused to eat off of anything else.

"I think I liked it better when you were quiet, Malfoy," Ron interjected to interrupt the annoying humming.

Draco halted in the midst serving himself poached eggs and smirked, "Funny that, I was just enjoying the sound of your being too afraid to make your clumsy bi-curious advances on me in front of Harry." He sneered pointedly at Ron whose hand curled into a fist as he started to stand.

Hermione and Ginny who were sitting on either side of Ron, pulled him back down to sitting, "That's not true!"

"Draco," warned Harry as he pinched Draco's thigh.

"Ow!" snapped Draco, who leaned in and rested his chin on Harry's shoulder and leered at Ron, Ginny and Hermione. He'd just opened his mouth to say something else to them when he heard Molly clear her throat from the stove situated behind him.

Hermione wished that she were surprised by this behavior. She'd expected that once Harry showed up to protect him from the occupants of the house the Malfoy bravado would make its reappearance. It made her a bit uneasy. If Draco was willing to use Harry as protection in the kitchen, she wondered just how often Malfoy was going to play this sort of game and to what end. She opened her mouth to comment when McGonagall and Snape swept down the stairs silently into the basement kitchen.

While Harry was normally all for as much snuggling as he could get, he was a bit put out by Draco's behavior. He was about to push him away and to tell him behave when Snape came into the room. At seeing the Potion's master, he dashed his hands around Draco and pulled him closer.

Draco made no protests about this and likewise settled closer to Harry. On his first day at Grimmauld Place, Snape had showed up at breakfast just like this. Upon seeing him, Draco grabbed up his plate and tea and charged up to the room. The manner wards Draco put on the door were a tad childish and while Snape could have easily gotten through them, the message was clear. Severus was not forgiven yet. So the teacher kept to his regular rounds of Order business and had, other than furtive attempts to make eye contact, left Draco alone.

Minerva was delighted to be here, although her stern face didn't reflect that. She wanted to personally deliver this news to Harry, particularly since she felt responsible for some of the tribulations the boys endured. It was hardly her fault that Voldemort had shown up when he did, but she still felt guilty for encouraging the boys to continue in spite of what the dangers were. That said, she was pleased that Draco and Harry were still together and that Draco seemed to have been redeemed, or at least not actively fighting along side the Death Eaters.

She didn't believe that Snape's presence was necessary for the news that they were going to give, but her colleague insisted. She understood that Snape wanted to make things up to Draco. It would hurt to have Harry reject her the way that Draco had pushed Snape away, however she understood why Draco did it. Part of her wondered if there weren't something more going on there. Minerva never asked. How did you broach that subject with a coworker?

"Mr. Potter," she acknowledged brusquely through a spare smile as she stood behind Ron. "I have some news that I believe you will be rather glad to hear." Of course, she knew this was a message she had to impart personally. She was making good on one of her vows from fifth year, one that she had feared she wouldn't be able to fulfill now that Snape had permanently banned Harry from further Potions classes.

"Yes?" asked Harry as he sat up a little straighter. Good news? That was a switch. In general his life seemed to go from bad to worse, particularly when Snape was around. He took pleasure in

shooting Snape a quick grin before he focused his attention back on McGonagall.

McGonagall was smiling; she hadn't looked this pleased since she told Harry he could be a Seeker. "The Ministry of Magic is starting Auror training Monday morning and there is a spot reserved for you," she stated.

"What? Me? An Auror?" Harry questioned with his eyes bright and wide.

"Well, you will not, of course, actually be an Auror after this. The training takes three years and you will have to go back to school in September. Besides, you are still too young for that. However, the Headmaster has arranged with Amelia Bones for you to spend the summer training up so that you will be better prepared to face... whatever comes," McGonagall said. What was to come was going to be difficult and tragic. It would require many sacrifices on both sides. At least, she reasoned, Harry would be as able to protect himself as possible. Perhaps he would even be able to teach the others. What pleased her most about this arrangement was that she knew how much it would mean to Harry.

"Monday morning? That's... that's tomorrow!" said Harry as he disentangled himself from an increasingly clingy Draco. "I start tomorrow. *Tomorrow*!" he said again, trying to contain his excitement. He looked across the table at Ron and Hermione who seemed pleased for him, even if Ron did look slightly put out, as he always did whenever Harry got something that he did not. Finally he turned his head towards Draco who was clearly sulking. "Auror training!" he enthused as he prodded his boyfriend.

"Shouldn't we all be receiving Auror training?" Draco asked. "The golden boy's escaped the Dark Lord loads of times. It's the rest of us who could use training up," Draco pointed out. Ron's ginger brows rose at what he thought was an excellent point and he twisted around to look hopefully at McGonagall.

Looking down at the children in puzzlement, she couldn't fathom why the others were anything less than thrilled for Harry. Then it hit her. Jealousy. It had been too long since she'd been that age. "I'm afraid it took quite a bit of effort for Dumbledore to get Harry enrolled, but I am certain that Harry will be happy to teach you all what he learns. He'll be back here in the evenings, although he may be tired. Perhaps when the school year starts, he'll have time."

"*Auror training*!" enthused Harry to no one in particular, pointedly ignoring those who were brooding at his good fortune.

"I'm so proud of you, Harry!" said Molly who gave him a quick hug from behind.

"Congratulations, Harry," added a beaming Hermione.

"Good show!" continued Ginny.

"Yes, that's... really great, Harry," grumbled Ron.

"So I'm going to be left here all alone with these... people all day?" asked Draco, mostly to Harry.

"I am afraid so, Mr. Malfoy. Although I could come by if you wish," offered Snape.

"He'll be fine!" snapped Harry before Draco could give his answer.

"I believe that's *his* choice to make, Potter," sneered Snape.

Draco folded his arms angrily and just glared around the table, clearly displeased with every facet of this situation. Everyone looked right back at him, waiting for him to give an answer. "Pfft."

"Pardon?" asked Snape as he stepped forward.

Draco glared at the corner of the wooden table and flexed his jaw. Finally he looked over at Harry as if he'd just betrayed him in some horrible way. "That won't be necessary, Professor Snape," he growled through his teeth.

Harry gave Draco a guilty smile and reached out to take his hand. He wanted to be sympathetic to his boyfriend, but he was wounded that Draco wasn't happy for him. Then again, being left behind with people you hated couldn't be particularly fun either. "I'll be home every night."

"Very well, then. Although I would like to talk to you about your dropping Potions class at some point before the school year starts, Mr. Malfoy. I realize that our relations are a bit strained at the moment, but you have a brilliant..." started Snape.

"I don't want to talk about it," Draco broke in.

"You will have to deal with me next year either way, Mr. Malfoy. I am your Head of House," drawled Snape as he moved to sit next to Draco. At Harry's narrowed eyes, Snape perked a brow and looked smug. It amused him to know how irritated his position next to Draco would make Harry.

"Not that it matters since I have *my own room*," retorted Draco as he scooted closer to Harry again. Harry pulled Draco to him protectively, returning Snape's smugness with a triumphant grin.

"No, you will not have your own room," intoned Snape, whose face went blank in order to keep his annoyance with Draco's recoiling in check.

"But I'm not safe in Slytherin, all of those Death Eaters children...." Draco squalled.

"Have been withdrawn from attending Hogwarts, Dra-Mr. Malfoy," stated Snape.

"*What*?" Draco asked for the entire room. Curious eyes were upon the two Slytherin. All of the Death Eater children withdrawn? Was the war *that* near?

"Those who would harm you will not be returning to Hogwarts. Some have enrolled at Durmstrang and I believe some are... training," Snape said with as much care as he could muster, knowing this would likely bother Draco.

"Oh," was all Draco could say. "So Crabbe and Goyle?"

"Withdrawn."

"Parkinson? Nott?"

"Are not returning," explained Snape.

"Oh." Draco closed his eyes and nodded with solemnity. Of course. Were his father still alive, he would have been withdrawn for seventh year as well. He'd probably be in the Dark Lord's presence right now, being marked, preparing for battle. He shivered and looked up at Harry and then up to his lover's scar. In spite of the fact that all of those people aside from Goyle had attacked him, he worried for them. Although mostly for Crabbe and Goyle. Poor simpletons. They really had no clue.

"So you should be quite safe back in my care," pointed out Snape.

The words sent a shiver through Harry's spine. "Oh certainly. Great care that is. Maybe Voldemort himself will show up and you can walk him to Draco's room personally this time!" exclaimed Harry.

The occupants of the room flinched at Harry's blunt recitation of Voldemort's name. All except Snape, who glared at Harry. "That was an unfortunate error in judgment that no one regrets more than I."

"Oh, I bet *Draco* regrets it much more than *you* do," hissed Harry.

Snape's eyes narrowed and his mouth opened to speak when McGonagall cut him off. "I think that it is time for us to take our leave, Severus," she spoke.

Draco found a spot on the wall to glare at while Harry and Snape's eyes bore into each other venomously. "Yes, I think it's time for you to leave, Snape," growled Harry.

"I was just getting comfortable, Potter," Snape growled back.

Minerva moved around the table to Snape and put her hand on his shoulder. She'd drag him out bodily if she had to. The rest of the room was agog at the spectacle. "Severus, we're leaving.

Now." Her tone brooked no debate. "Now."

After a beat, Snape pushed himself out of the chair that skidded back loudly over the stone floor. "Mr. Malfoy, I will be back to talk to you about *our issues*."

"There's nothing to talk about," answered Draco, whose nostrils flared and eyes rolled. No Harry during the day and now Snape promised to badger him.

"Very well," answered Snape. Feeling McGonagall's hand tightening on his shoulder, he knew it was time to retreat. For now.

"Tomorrow morning, Mr. Potter," chirped McGonagall. "Be ready by eight. Arthur will be bringing you to the Ministry with him. I expect you to be well rested, so do not stay up too late tonight."

In spite of everything going on, Harry beamed. "Eight. I'll be ready. Thank you, Professor."

Giving a nod, she turned on her heel to exit, followed closely by Snape, who exited the room in a theatrical flare of robes.

--

Draco excused himself early from dinner. After spending the day listening to Harry recount the horrors of a week with the Muggles, he'd had quite enough of the stories that left him feeling angry and helpless and the company he was forced to keep. As it was, his contempt for Muggles and Muggleborns was only glossed over by necessity. He realized that Harry wasn't a pureblood, but it was an indulgence he allowed himself rationalizing that he was at least famous. And adorable. And he made the loveliest noises when--

And at that point his train of thought derailed and somehow his hypocrisy seemed logical. Harry was Harry, not a half blood. Granger was a Mudblood, end of story.

He wandered around the drawing room silently, looking over the items leftover from the previous summer's cleaning. His fingers grazed over the once bedeviled writing desk as he swept to the Black family tapestry. "Lumos," he whispered, which unintentionally lit up the room. Draco's eyes quickly darted around the room that was part of his past, his family. The house in itself was a dim shadow of memory. Now and then a disembodied elf head or some trinket would trigger a jolt of familiarity. Better days. Family. His father. His mother. The guilt of their passing would twist his stomach and he'd retreat to his room to read until it passed.

In an odd turn of events, Sirius Black's lack of a formal will resulted in the house defaulting to the closest in the bloodline who had not been disinherited, which meant that Draco Malfoy was the proud new owner of not only the Manor but also Grimmauld Place. *My summer home,* Draco mused in one of his morbid moments.

He glanced over the mostly empty glass shelving and his memory flashed on his father swatting his hand away from the glass. His wailing, his father's stern voice and the hard slap of his father's hand on his and the tacit agreement of the room that Draco was out of line. Draco closed his eyes and shook his head. There had been terrors on the shelves. He knew that now. But his toddler self didn't understand and no one explained. Reaching out, he slid his fingers over the glass. Innocuous seals and daggers were all that was left, remnants of the Noble House of Black.

Finally turning away from the shelves to what he'd come in to see, he looked over the enormous tapestry. His eyes followed the lines up the family tree, or at least his mother's side, till he caught the line stemming from Phineas Nigellus. His brows furrowed. Phineas Nigellus. The portrait that had snickered at him in his room from day one of his being here and had in as much as called him a blood traitor. It had been easy enough to avoid the entryway and Mrs. Black's wrath. Nigellus, however, was always in his room and had a subtle way of degrading him.

Ignoring his distaste for Nigellus, he traced the family line down through the generations with his outstretched hand. He smirked at the line out to the Weasleys. Certainly this had to irk Ron. Go back far enough and Draco had to be related to nearly everyone. His musings had taken him so far from his goal, perhaps protectively so, that he'd almost forgotten it until suddenly his finger was trailing over his parents' names.

He glanced to Sirius's name and then over to his aunt Andromeda's name. Blacked out. According to the tapestry, they ceased to exist. Gone. His father would have erased his name without a moment's hesitation. This wasn't the Malfoy family tree, however. It was the Black family, his mother's family. She never knew what hit her or why. What would his mother say about his relationship? Would she have burned him off the tapestry for his betrayal? His finger slid over his own name and frowned that it would all end with him. Would his sexuality have been enough to make his mother burn him away?

Draco thought he'd made his peace with his mother's memory. He liked to believe that she would have approved and encouraged him. Now he was faced with the family she came from. This hadn't been her house, of course. She'd never lived here. These *were* her roots, though. Her name wasn't burned off of this tapestry, so either she was good at faking her beliefs or she had bought into it. No. He was playing with himself. He knew what she bought it all and as much as she'd want to see him happy, she would not have been pleased with his relationship with Harry. Nigellus knew. That was why he snickered. Draco's hand dropped from the tapestry and he pressed his lips together and closed his eyes.

Harry had seen enough of Draco's masochism. He'd followed his lover up the stairs from the kitchen after he'd left and spied on him in the drawing room. In truth, he thought Draco had signaled him to go up to their room. Finding out quickly that was not the case, he was intrigued with exactly what Draco was going to do in this room. Now it appeared that what Malfoy was going to do was break down. Harry moved across the room and tenderly wrapped his arms around Draco's waist from behind and whispered reassurances.

Draco leaned back against Harry. He was surprised that Harry was there, but grateful all the

same. Placing his hands over Harry's on his abdomen he turned his head to the side and kissed the side of his face. "Thank you."

"Come on. Let's get out of here. Come to bed." Harry interlaced his fingers with Draco's and pulled him towards the door.

"Yes. I'm tired," said Draco. "You have a big day tomorrow."

"Draco-- I know you don't..."

"Like your friends? Want to be left here?"

"Yes, that." Harry looked into Draco's eyes, trying to read his emotions.

"Pfft. Well." Draco dropped his gaze to stare down at his feet and then gave a shrug. Finally, he looked up past Harry and sighed. "Nothing for it. You're the golden boy. The hero. I'm the... homeowner," he snarked at his position of owning two homes, neither of which he could actually live in without being attacked.

"What?"

"Oh, this place, the Manor, I'm a boy of leisure, didn't you know? So many houses, so little time. It's silly this place went to me. You should have it."

"What?" asked Harry again. It was English, clear enough, but somehow the words weren't making sense.

"This house. You should have it. I should give it to you. I don't need it. I'm sure Sirius would've intended for you to have it."

"You want to give me a... house? This house?" asked Harry.

"Well, sure. It's not like I'm giving you anything of value. I don't know this house and it's barely even a shack. But then you won't have to go to those Muggles every summer. You'd have your own place," said Draco. He took up Harry's hands and looked back into his eyes. "Yes. I want to give you this house."

Harry bit his lip, feeling overwhelmed. He looked around the drawing room. It wasn't exactly the cheeriest of places. But it would be his. Then Draco went on about how he wouldn't have to stay with the Muggles. No. He *had* to go there. He couldn't have another home. It would break the blood of protection. "I... I can't accept it."

"I don't need it, Harry."

"I know you don't. I just can't... take it."

Draco sighed. "I want to do this for you. You... those stories...those people. I don't want you to ever have to deal with that again. I know what all those people have done to you..."

"Draco, stop." Harry pressed his fingers to Draco's lips to hush him." It's not that. I appreciate it, Draco. It's just that-- I *have* to stay with the Dursleys-- you didn't want to know any of this."

Knocking Harry's hand from his lips, he said, "I didn't want to know then because I had to go home at some point. The path I was on-- and I didn't know Occlumency-- at this point, who would I tell?"

Harry gave this some thought. "That's true. I haven't... exactly explained it to anyone before. It's simple, really. When my mother died, she died protecting me. The grand mystery of my survival has to do with my mother's love. That love is bound to blood and home. Petunia Dursley is my mother's sister and is therefore of my blood, so calling the Dursley's my home enables me to keep that protection. If I accept this as my home, then it voids that. So I can't."

"Oh," was all Draco could come up with to say after a moment's thought. He'd paled considerably and then nodded his understanding. "So if they died, it would void that protection?"

Harry ruffled his hair nervously and pushed his glasses up his nose. "Well, I hadn't thought of it that way, but yes."

"I see. I... shouldn't know this."

"What? Why not? Are you going to kill the Dursleys?"

Draco shook his head and then turned to look back at the tapestry.

"Are you having doubts?"

"I-- no. I don't-- no? Yes. No? I... " Draco gestured to the tapestry. "It's who I am."

"That isn't all you are. It wasn't all Sirius was."

Draco squinted at the tapestry and then turned back to look at Harry. "I don't want to be a scorch mark."

That took Harry's breath away. "What? What do you mean by that?"

"Toujours Pur. Forever pure. That's the family creed. But... " Draco's fingers tightened around Harry's hands and he looked desperately lost for a moment. "But that doesn't leave room for love, does it?"

"It doesn't exclude it. I'm sure your father loved your mother."

Draco looked dour and shook his head. He doubted his father loved anything overmuch. Or maybe it was just easier for him to believe that. It certainly made his betrayal *neater*. "I love you. I love being a Malfoy. Or I did. I just..."

"You don't know what it means?"

"Not anymore."

"You'll figure it out."

"You're so certain of that. I wish I had... someone to talk to about it. Like your godfather," confessed Draco in hushed tones.

Harry smiled tightly. "I wish he were here too."

"I don't feel right knowing how you could be killed. What if..."

"What if what?"

"Something happened? I'm not a Gryffindor."

Harry rolled his eyes. What could possibly happen while Draco was here? "Well, that would explain why I haven't seen you around the dorms."

Draco squeezed Harry's hand too tightly in warning. "Don't be *me* about this. You know what I mean. I'm strong, but not like Dumbledore. If I were captured...."

"You won't be."

"I don't recall you being particularly good in Divination, Harry."

Harry sighed. "Well, then perhaps I don't know that for certain. But now that I've entrusted you with this secret, you can't be putting yourself in harm's way. Which means that no you must stay here. No running away while I'm gone."

"Oh, now I get it. You only told me to keep me here," sauced Draco who released Harry's hands to wrap his arms around him. "Sneaky. Rather Slytherin, really."

"The hat wanted me in Slytherin. I argued with it."

"That explains so much," teased Draco who had to duck Harry's playful swat.

"Seriously. Promise me no big theatrics while I'm gone, Draco. Please. I won't learn anything worrying about you all day."

Draco sighed and started them towards the door again. "Fine, fine. I'll let your toadies *abuse* me all day so long as you make it up to me at night."

Harry rolled his eyes as he followed Draco. Abuse him. Honestly. "That's all I ask."

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 2

The next morning, Draco and Harry headed down to the basement kitchen together, leaving Ron to sleep in. Draco reasoned that he might as well eat with Harry and then he'd kick Ron out of the room to go eat while he took a nap.

They walked down the stairs hand-in-hand, teasing one another about what they were going to do all day without each other. After the boys entered the kitchen, Molly and Arthur immediately snapped closed their copies of *The Daily Prophet* and set them down. Harry and Draco stared at them curiously and both tilted their heads to read the headlines. Molly was alarmed to see that Arthur had nervously set his copy down face up and snatched the paper up to turn it over, but her actions were in vain.

Draco read the headline aloud, "The Boy Who Was Gay?' What? Like there's only one gay boy?"

Harry was aghast. "Is that about *me*?"

"Well, technically it's about *us* but yes, the headline is about you."

"You knew about this?" Harry asked Draco as the Weasleys got up and shuffled around the kitchen to set out dishes for the boys.

"Oh sure, it's a series. They've been on about it for *days*," noted Draco as he took a seat and poured himself a cup of tea.

Harry was flustered, but he followed Draco and took the seat next to him and picked up the paper. He gazed at it in wide-eyed shock. "*Days*?"

"I know. You'd think there wasn't a war on. Then again, we're much sexier than a war. I'm not even sure what they could possibly be saying about us now. Yesterday they had it that we were unreachable because we'd run away to have some romantic tryst in the mountains of Spain." Draco paused for a moment before adding cream and sighed wistfully. "If only."

"*Days*?" squeaked Harry again as he shook his head, unable to concentrate well enough to read for himself. He was comfortable with being gay. Well, comfortable with Malfoy. He hadn't thought much about it; he hadn't really had the time to. However, he *wasn't* comfortable with everyone reading about it.

Draco grabbed the paper away from Harry and with a snap of his wrist, flicked it away from the table. "It's rubbish. Nearly all of their facts are incorrect and the picture they keep running of me is *appalling*. Pay attention to me instead."

"Eat something, Harry dear," Molly intoned in her singsong voice as she set out eggs and bangers for the boys.

"Yes, eat something Harry. You need your strength for Auror training and then after that I'm going to make you do to me what they wrote you do to me in the paper yesterday," flirted Draco as he speared one of the sausages and sucked on the end of it scandalously.

"WHAT?!" squealed Harry. Draco snickered.

"Draco!" snapped Molly. "Harry... they don't report things like *that* dear. They're just surprised. As we all are. That's all."

"Surprised?" asked Harry as Draco nudged him and rolled his eyes. "Oh, right. They thought I'd be with a girl."

"Probably Granger, loads of people are under that delusion. Lack wits," said Draco as dismissed the banger and took a bite of his eggs.

"I always thought you and Ginny would end up together," piped up Arthur.

Harry looked shocked that people had been giving his love life any thought at all. He'd certainly never given it that much thought. "Oh. Well. Surprise."

"Indeed," said Draco as he nudged him again. This time Harry nudged him back and grinned. Harry retaliated by scooping a bit of egg yolk on his finger and smearing it over Draco's lips and then they started to kiss.

Molly grinned at the two boys. It was disarming to see them like this. They just appeared to be two kids in love. Not the Boy Who Lived and Draco Malfoy at all, just two lovers not staring into the face of oblivion at all. Even Arthur was impressed that the stoic blond was so lit up and that Harry was giggling. The older couple looked at one another and then Arthur took Molly's hand.

Between the snickering and occasional breaks to kiss and tease one another, breakfast ran a little long. Finally, Arthur cleared his throat and announced that it was time for them to go. The boys

embraced as if they wouldn't see each other for a week, but finally broke apart and Harry filed out after Mr. Weasley.

Draco headed up to his room after giving Molly a curt nod for breakfast. He shook the end of Ron's bed to rouse him and then flopped into his own. Picking up his book, he reclined against the pillows and began to read his Wizard's edition of "The Taming of the Shrew." He enjoyed the moving pictures of Katherine and Petruccio banter and read along. It was a children's edition with loads of moving pictures, but it was attended with the proper text for him to read if he wished. In particular he took pleasure in Petruccio's starving of Kate with his rudeness to the servants. Finally he slid his finger over the base of the picture to stop the picture from playing and settled in to read.

No sooner had Ron finally ambled out of the shower, then Draco heard quiet snickering from the portrait of his ancestor Phineas Nigellus. "Look, you can either say something or you can knock it off, but I'm not having another week of your heavy breathing."

"Of course," purred the painting as the goateed man come into view and lean casually against the frame. "I should leave all of that heavy breathing to *you*."

Draco rolled his eyes and looked back at his book.

"You asked me to talk, Mr. Malfoy. Now you're going to ignore me? Tut, tut, so rude. Or are you *afraid* to have a conversation with an ancestor?" questioned Nigellus.

"I'm not afraid. They're just boring."

"Boring? I suppose that's why you sent that werewolf into your home to retrieve the contents of your room at the Manor? Afraid to have *boring* conversations with your forbearers?"

"No, it was too dangerous and too menial for someone important like me. So they sent an expendable person," lied Draco. Aside from the fact that he was dead scared of Remus biting him, he didn't accompany him because he was afraid of what the portraits would say.

"Oh, *of course*, but you know and I know that your only worth in this house is as the 'Chosen Boy's' boyfriend. These people would let you die were it not for *him*. Is that why you let him copulate with you in that manner? Is that what makes you the woman, Draco? Oh how ashamed your mother would be to know that her little boy grew up to be someone's sweet little wife," taunted Nigellus.

Trembling, Draco felt wisps of a blush coloring his cheeks as each one of his fears was systematically pulled out and put on parade. He slammed the book shut and glared at Nigellus.

"You know it's true. You know your mother would not be happy with this. That's what you hope, don't you? That she would love her homosexual son? She may have. But you know she wouldn't be pleased with you bending for a half blood. Particularly *that* half blood. It must be a weakness

in the *Malfoy* blood. A bloodline whose motto is 'Toujours Pur' certainly wouldn't produce a fully fledged bottoming blood traitor."

Draco's chin tilted up as he tried to face these charges with dignity, but he was visibly shaken. He clutched the book to his chest and sneered at the painting. Rationally, he knew that Nigellus didn't know his mother personally, but his sentiments stung his already ravening insecurities. His mother wouldn't be proud, would she? Draco stood to leave.

Nigellus caught sight of the title of the book Draco was clutching. His eyes sparked with fresh malice, "My, my, my, reading a Muggle-loving Wizard's work, are we? And *that* story in particular, hmm? Why would you read *that* story, I wonder? Are you hoping that after all of the banter and forceful treatment that Petruccio and Katherine live happily ever after, Draco?"

Draco stretched taller and took a deep breath. "It's merely entertainment, a way to pass the time. I had a collection of these, the full set, in fact. My father burned many of them, as you likely know. That left me with little to read other than the dry books on Dark Magic. I feel like reading these now because there's no one to tell me not to."

The story of the shrew Katherine, who was too bitter and sharp-witted to be beholden to any man, being forcefully romanced by a likewise sharp-witted man earned her respect enough to marry wasn't as widely renowned as Shakespeare's other works. It was more of a comedy than a true romance. Up until this point, Draco hadn't considered the similarities of his situation. It wasn't a direct allegory, but he had to ask himself whether that was why he was reading it? "You'd think with generations to consider, you might have gotten better with analogy and the use of literary allusions."

Phineas chuckled. "Oh, certainly, *Master Malfoy*. The problem is with my... analogy. Look at you, so dignified as you stand there with an illustrated *children's book*," Nigellus mocked. "You do realize, of course, given what you're to face for your treacherous ways, your magic books would be much more practical to read. But we all know why you're reading Muggle literature, don't we? You want to know how it all ends. Well, let me set your mind at ease about how dear Petruccio and Dra-Katherine... end up."

Draco's eyes narrowed at Nigellus and he turned on his heel to head out of the room, but he couldn't escape Nigellus's last words.

"It wasn't happily ever after, *Dratherine*," he cackled to the back of Draco's head. "Poor Kate was subjected to Petruccio's will for the rest of her life. What could she do? She entered into the marriage against her will, subjected to a headstrong and capricious man. Though she convinced herself that was love and that love in itself was enough, she was neither in love nor would that fleeting emotion ever going to be enough even if she were. She died lonely and without the decorum that sticking with her principles would have given her."

Draco glared at the portrait from the doorway for a moment after the end of its rant and then muttered, "The End," and slammed the door.

--

Draco sat alone in the drawing room for a good half hour. There were other rooms, of course, but he kept coming back here, didn't he? He'd intended to get back to reading his book, but instead he'd taken to staring up at the family motto, "Toujours Pur." He wondered if this was what Sirius did when he was trapped here the summer before. Probably not. He probably had more sense. Draco rolled his eyes and sighed.

He was remotely aware of Ron taking a seat on the other end of the couch. Draco tried to ignore his presence until Ron cleared his throat in exasperation. "Why don't you go to your room?" asked Draco, not looking towards him.

"I was in there, but that painting was... giggling. Bloody unsettling, that is," observed Ron.

Draco huffed and looked back down at his book. "Indeed."

"Besides, I thought we might... you know... plan a little."

"Plan? A little?"

"Well, I realize that you and Harry probably want some alone time, being that you're a couple and all," said Ron. He certainly didn't want to admit that he'd been privy to the past two nights' *alone time*. That was just embarrassing.

"*Alone time*," Draco drawled. "That's a very genteel way of saying you don't want to listen to us... *shagging*?" Draco leered at Ron blatantly, knowing that made him uncomfortable.

"You know what I mean, Malfoy," Ron huffed as he wrapped his arms around himself.

"Look, why don't we do it this way; Harry and I will shag after dinner and you stay out of the room till 9 or 10 and by then we should be asleep," offered Draco.

"Then we don't get to see Harry!" complained Ron

"You'll see him at dinner."

"Everyone will see him at dinner."

"Well there you go. Everyone will have seen him. I'm not sure what the flap is about."

Ron glared.

"Fine then," he said as he gave a dismissive gesture. "We'll just promise to be dressed and done by then. Up to him if he is too tired."

"But right after dinner? Why not... later?"

"Do you want to be locked out of the room all night? I'm just trying to keep it fair and with a reasonable schedule. You can just take that time to shag Granger and you lot can chat about your afterglow while I sleep."

Ron flushed at this suggestion, ignoring that Malfoy didn't include himself in the afterglow chat, not that anyone would miss him. "Well, if we *had* afterglow..." he mumbled.

"Pardon?"

"Nothing," blurted out Ron, angry with himself for his admission.

Draco was so amused he could barely contain it. "You mean you haven't shagged the Mu--ggleborn?" he said after a warning look from Weasley.

"No."

Trying to contain his want to cackle at this revelation, he said, "In that case, I commend you on your taste."

"It wasn't MY decision, Malfoy," growled Ron, now visibly scarlet and shifting in his seat.

"Then I commend HER on HER taste," sassed Draco before he cackled.

Hopping up from his seat, Ron shouted, "I'm not discussing this with YOU!"

"Good!" retorted Draco. "It was making me nauseated to contemplate!"

"You shagging Harry makes ME nauseous!"

"Not so nauseous that you didn't have yourself a peek, hmm?" gloated Draco.

Ron paled and worked his mouth, too shocked to reply. Draco knew? He SAW? He knew and didn't stop? "Fine! After dinner you and Harry... do whatever. This conversation is over!" shouted Ron as he stomped out of the room. What the bloody hell? Malfoy knew he was watching and didn't stop? Pervert probably got off on it. Ron clenched his jaw in fury as he fled towards the kitchen, brushing past Hermione.

"Ron? Is everything all right? I heard shouting..." she called after him.

"It's fine, Hermione. Everything's bloody FINE!" he shouted, awakening the portrait in the entryway.

"BLOOD TRAITORS BE GONE FROM MY HOUSE-" Mrs. Black started.

Ron yanked back the curtain to give the woman a glare so lethal that she quieted and recoiled. At that, Ron decided to turn and run up the stairs to his room. Enough was enough.

Watching the redhead disappear, she headed into the room he'd burst out of to see Draco chuckling and looking smug down at his book.

"What did you say to him?" questioned Hermione.

Draco's head snapped up and he leered. "To whom?"

"Ron. He just bolted out of here!"

"Oh, that. Well, I didn't say anything in particular to him. He seems tightly wound. He needs a good shag, *clearly*." Draco's lips twisted in a sneer that dared her to respond.

Hermione was speechless. Her mouth dropped open and her face burned red.

"Oh right. I forgot, you two don't *do* that."

Gasping, Hermione brought her hand up over her face. "He-- he *told* you that? Why?"

"Oh, we were *bonding*."

"Bonding?"

"Mm yes. Maybe he wants to check out the other side. See to someone willing to give it up?" Draco shut the book to concentrate on Hermione's reaction.

"I sincerely doubt that."

Draco raised his hand in deference. "You'd be surprised what a boy would do to get his nob attended."

Hermione crossed her arms and leaned against the doorframe. "Yourself included?"

"My nob is fine. Thanks for asking." Draco smirked and sat back, spreading his legs to be lewd.

"Nice. Thank you." Hermione averted her eyes.

"Seriously, what are you holding onto it for?"

"Holding onto *it*? You're so romantic, Malfoy."

Draco shrugged. "You fancy him, he fancies you. Life is short and uncertain. Particularly for Mud-Muggleborns."

Hermione's brows rose. "Are you threatening me?"

"No, I'm telling you to go boff your boyfriend before he develops a crush on me, you stupid minge!"

Shocked by Draco's outburst, Hermione's eyes widened and she followed his gaze to the tapestry. Her head tilted to the side as she thought about what he must have grown up with. She'd seen the same brooding from Sirius, although he was never this uncouth. She continued to stare at Draco who finally looked from the wall hanging and re-opened his book.

"Sod off. I'm reading."

"If you ever need to talk, Malfoy--"

"It won't be with you. Now fuck off already."

Hermione stood there for a few minutes, watching Draco pretend to read. After a few moments, she pushed off of the doorframe to talk to Ron.

--

The hours passed slowly with Draco watching the way that the color of light changed over the never turned page of his book. A few times Draco fancied he'd dozed off stretched out in the couch, dreaming of the shadows moving along the wall. He smelled and heard the sounds of lunch downstairs but couldn't be arsed to pay attention to the nagging pull of his stomach.

He was full on asleep and dreaming of falling by the time he felt a hand on his arm. Draco jolted and his eyes met with the familiar green. Harry looked rather amused, albeit tired. "They say you've been in here all day glaring at that book. I never really understood Shakespeare either."

Draco rolled his eyes and clapped the book shut. "That's because you're a heathen brought up by Muggles. And *they* are lack wits that I was too irritated with to speak to. Ron was sniffing at my crotch again and I thought it best for me to stay in a public area lest he choose to act out his wet dreams upon me."

"Oh, all prepared to defend yourself by napping, were you?" teased Harry who had gotten quite the earful from Ron on the matter already.

"Well, Weasley's so inept that I could defeat him in my sleep."

"I'm sure," Harry placated. "They said you missed lunch."

"I wasn't hungry," started Draco who was interrupted by a rather loud eruption from his stomach.

Harry brushed Draco's hair back from his face and shook his head. "What am I going to do with you?"

"Take me with you?"

"You know I want to and you know I can't, Draco."

"You're the golden boy. You can do anything you *want* and you know it. You just don't *want* to." Draco sat up and folded his arms around the book.

"Draco... I'm too tired to fight about this-"

"Great. I'll see about scheduling an appointment then."

"What?"

"Well, you had time to listen to everyone else's reports on me and their grievances, but when it comes to mine..."

Harry stared at Draco. "They didn't ask to *come with me*. They know better than that. They certainly didn't act like spoiled children when I told them they couldn't have their way. I can't change whom the Ministry allows there and I'm not fighting over it because it's stupid. I missed you all day and now you have nothing better for me than to act like a brat."

"Pfft." Draco knew he was being a brat. Both boys knew that it wasn't so much that Draco had a burning desire to be an Auror as he just didn't want to be stuck in an unfamiliar house with people he despised. "You didn't miss me at all. You were too busy learning new magic."

"I missed you a lot, actually. They were teaching some of the things you were talking about your father teaching you and how to defend against it."

"Oh. So you were thinking of me as a cautionary tale?" Draco asked in an obvious ploy for more attention.

Harry recognized it, but wasn't going to refuse. He scooted closer and wrapped his arms around Draco and kissed his temple. "Always," he teased.

Draco made a weak movement to pull away, but smiled as Harry held fast. "I suppose I should be flattered that The Boy Who Lived was thinking of me *at all*."

"You should be. He has *so many fans*," Harry taunted, recalling the strange looks he got from the other Aurors. The day had been difficult and strange. Some of the other trainees were friendly to

Harry, but most of them didn't like being trained alongside a mere "child," no matter how auspicious his birth. He was further vilified by being used as an example of someone who had survived dark attacks. The times between classes had been strained. Draco had no idea how much Harry wanted a friendly face there with him. As it was, there was only one man there that said much of anything to him. A Richard something or other, Harry couldn't quite remember his full name after the strenuous day.

"Well, so long as he doesn't forget..." started Draco as he bunched Harry's robe up so he could reach into his pants to stroke him, "his number one fan."

Harry's eyes fluttered closed behind the glasses-reflected waning light in the room. "Oh... I bet he's been thinking about his number one fan doing something like *that* all day."

"Has he been? That boy is naughty. I hope his dirty thoughts didn't distract him too much. Might have made for a rather conspicuous problem in class," purred Draco as Harry's arms released him so that he could slide down to his knees in front of the couch.

In fact, Harry had lamented that Auror training had to take place in Wizarding robes and not in street clothes. But these were real Wizards, he reasoned, and they were expected to perform their duties dressed as such. It made sense that they were training in them. Still... it did make for a few prickly moments for Harry, although no one seemed to notice. Harry was about to thank Draco for loaning him a few robes to wear since all he had were school robes when he felt the balmy heat of Draco's mouth around him. Harry moaned as he slid his fingers through the blond tresses.

Draco's tongue whirled around Harry's length and his fingers gripped the base to steady him. He looked up at Harry's blushing face mouthing wordlessly through his ragged gasps. Grinning inwardly, he moved his other hand under Harry and tentatively touched his rigid band of muscles that went tighter at his touch. The tension foreshadowed Harry's whole body tightening at Draco's probing until he felt a determined tug at his pale locks. Releasing the length from his mouth, Draco looked up at Harry's shaking head. "Haaaarrry...." he whined.

"I know, and I'll let you, but not today, please?" asked Harry as he slid his fingers over the tender scalp. "It was my first day in Auror training... I'm really... tense. I've been thinking about how good you feel all day long." Harry hadn't let Draco top since the Astronomy Tower. Draco rarely brought it up, but when he did, he was easily put off. Much to Harry's relief, it appeared to be all that it was going to take tonight too.

It burned Draco a bit that Harry wouldn't let him top again, but at this point his bottoming was automatic. If it really bothered him to do, he wouldn't have, but on occasion he would've enjoyed a bit more consideration. "Fine," inflected Draco.

"Great," enthused Harry. Either he willfully ignored Draco's vocal and facial expression or he was just in too much of a hurry to get up and run to the room, but the result was the same. Harry was up and skipping away in a flash.

Draco couldn't help but be amused with how eager Harry was, although he wondered if it was enthusiasm over sex with him or just relief from not having to bottom. He was just about to get up to follow when Harry was back in the room holding the vial of lubricant and spelling the door locked. "I thought you were tired," Draco observed as he pulled his robe up over his head and tossed it aside on the couch. He rested his knees on the couch and leaned his forearms on the back, looking over his shoulder at Harry.

"Well... I *was*." Harry likewise dispensed with his robe and pulled his pants off. "But then someone was sucking my prick and it woke me up a bit. Not to mention that I'm shocked to know that my boyfriend has been lounging around the house with no pants on!" he teased.

"Loads of Wizards and witches don't," said Draco as he wiggled his pale bum at Harry who caught it between his hands and gave it a squeeze. "I only wear them when I'm wearing trousers."

"Mmm, I see." Harry squeezed lubricant onto his hand. Sliding his hand down the cleft of Draco's ass, he continued. "And you were calling *me* a dirty boy."

Draco rolled his eyes and pressed his forehead against his forearm as he felt the tepid fingers entering him.

"Did you go pants-less in the robe I was wearing before?" asked Harry as he leaned over Draco's body to whisper into his ear.

Feeling the warmth of Harry's body against him and the waxy feel of his prick sliding against his thigh, Draco shivered and nodded.

"And the one I'll wear tomorrow?"

"Mmhm." Draco winced until he felt Harry's fingers curl to find his prostate. He groaned into the couch back.

"That thought will prove distracting to my training," Harry whispered back as he continued to tease Draco until he was induced to reach for his own length. Harry kissed along Draco's shoulders and then nuzzled the back of his neck. Reaching around Draco's waist, he swatted Draco's hand away. "Stop that."

Twisting his head around to complain to Harry about shooing his hand away from his prick if he wasn't going to do something about it, he hissed through his teeth when Harry slowly moved himself inside of him. "Oh!"

Biting his lip, Harry whispered an apology and kissed Draco's shoulder and the side of his face in apology. His slick hand wrapped around Draco's length and he started to move in tandem to the slow pumping of his fist. "Don't come like this."

"Is there... anything else... I can do for you?" Draco panted out to Harry, looking back incredulously.

Harry was flushed with his effort as he worked himself smoothly in and out of Draco. His glasses were fogging, as he beamed at his lover. "I... want to... suck you... off..." he panted back as he released Draco's prick to grip his hips tightly to give more articulated thrusts.

Grinning, Draco let his head flop forward and he pressed back against Harry. He clenched harder around him, wanting to get Harry off sooner rather than later.

Feeling the warmth of his lover closing in on him did Harry in swiftly. Before he could object to Draco that he wanted it to last, his fingers were already stabbing into Draco's hips and his body was quaking with his orgasm. After the last punctuated pushes, he flopped against Draco's glistening back.

Draco gave Harry a moment to bask against him, but his prick was throbbing an insistent reminder that he needed tending to. He grunted at Harry to get his attention, to which Harry whimpered a begging for another moment of stillness in afterglow. Granting it for another couple of minutes, then Draco whined and Harry moved out of him.

Harry grabbed his pants up off the floor and blotted the leavings that dribbled from Draco before the blond turned over and sprawled on the couch, pink prick at full and lascivious attention against his abdomen. Sinking to his knees in front of the couch, Harry wrapped both hands around it and stuffed it into his mouth.

"Ack!" Draco cried before Harry remembered to cover his teeth. Harry's noise of apology reverberated through Draco's length. Draco relaxed into the feeling, splaying his arms out over the couch. His hands grabbed the cushions as Harry's mouth suctioned tighter and his tongue started to found a steadier rhythm. His back arched as Harry sunk his fingers inside of him and prodded till they roughly massaged at his prostate.

Giving a groaning warning of his release, Draco felt Harry steeling himself to handle it. Harry pushed his lips to the base of Draco's cock and swallowed several times. He surprised himself by not missing any of the come except a small dribble that he then lapped out of the corner of his mouth. He was about to make a comment when Draco's stomach again came to life with a rather angry growl.

Draco blushed. Harry suppressed a giggle as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, "Come on, let's get you fed up. You eat and I'll tell you about my day."

"Right," said Draco as he got up stiffly and pulled his robe back on.

Harry had gotten his robe back on as well and leaned in to kiss Draco who made a face at tasting himself, but otherwise didn't protest. "I love you."

"I love you, too," said Draco who tried to speak louder than his stomach's newest grumble.

Harry slipped his hand into Draco's and pretended not to hear it. Pulling his wand, he ended the locking spell and tugged Draco downstairs to the kitchen.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 3

That morning Draco got up with Harry again, but this time brought his book with him so he wouldn't have to come back into the room. He observed that Nigellus seemed much less chatty with others in the room, so he took the opportunity to make a clean escape with no further blasts from the past.

They left Ron to sleep in and again Harry and Draco flirted over breakfast until it was time to leave. Once Harry was out the door, Draco picked up his book and retired to the drawing room. The tapestry was no less vexing than the portrait, but at least it kept its mouth shut.

He wasn't sitting there long when Ron stepped through the open doorway and sat awkwardly on one of the tatty wingback chairs across from the couch Draco was stretched out on. Draco looked up from his book. His brows rose in question. "We didn't even shag in the room, or did you find something else to whinge at me about?"

Ron was befuddled. He blushed and shook his head. "No. I just... was... nothing. Never mind."

After an outburst like that, Draco would have left in a dramatic swirl of robes. But Ron hadn't. Draco eyed him inquisitively. "Have a row with Granger?"

"No." Ron sighed and pressed his hands to his knees and focused intently on them.

"If you're here to offer me the precious flower of your virginity, let me just say 'Ha! You wish!'"

"I'm not gay!" spat Ron who finally looked up into Draco's eyes. "Even if I *were*, it wouldn't be *you* I... ugh! Just... no. I don't want sex with a boy! I wanted to... Ugh! Why are you such a git?"

"Oh sure, I'm the git when you're the one in here nancying about in my room!"

"This isn't your room! It's a... a..."

"This is, in fact, my *house*. I just let you all stay here," insisted Draco.

"You wouldn't last a day in this house without the Order here to protect your barmy arse and you know it!"

"Pfft," garbled Draco. "Look, you came in here for a reason, obviously. Now spit it out so I can see to getting you out of my presence." His eyes cast over the tapestry again. Forever pure. Right. Ron was a pureblood, from his own family line even, and Draco couldn't stand him either. Purity did NOT equal good company, as far as he was concerned.

"Well..." said Ron. Again he lost his composure, much to Draco's visible displeasure. "It's about Hermione...."

Draco sighed and looked at the ceiling, appealing to the gods for Ron to get on with it.

"Because, you know... I told you yesterday that we... you know... haven't..."

"Nor should you," Draco advised.

"What?" asked Ron as he sat up in a panic. "Why? Do you know something? Is she... with someone else?"

"Hah! Who else would have her?" Draco gave Ron an expression of sardonic disbelief.

Ron's hands balled up into fists. He looked murderously at Draco, and then counted to ten. "Why do you think we shouldn't?"

"Well, for one thing, if you bred..." Draco shivered. "*Won't you please think of the children*? I mean, the *future hair disasters* alone..."

Ron leapt to his feet and glared down at Draco. His balled fists were pulled up, ready to strike. Draco cowered, holding his book up protectively over his face. "I don't know why I bothered. What would you know about charming anyone?"

"At least I don't have to beat people to get them to talk to me!" The book muffled Draco's voice and he pulled his legs up defensively, knowing that remark was going to buy him no friends. "You know, if Harry comes home to find me black and blue, he's going to want to know who did it."

"I'll explain to him that clumsy berk that you are, you fell down the stairs," explained Ron, but his hands were already lowered as he realized that though it would be satisfying, beating Draco wouldn't get him any closer to his goal.

"Oh right. Because I'm *always* tripping over things." Draco peeked out over the book to see Ron's offensive position lessening. He sighed in relief and then decided to relent. It would be a long summer if he had to fend off daily physical attacks. Not to mention it would be quite lonesome to sit in a room reading books day after day. "So you want to know how to bed a girl,

hmm?"

"Not just any girl."

"Right. Well, I'm no expert on *that* girl. As dubious as some of my conquests have been, I've never sunk *that* low--" Draco broke off as he heard Ron's knuckles cracking again. He cleared his throat. "I suppose it would help to know what the reason is that you two haven't shagged yet. Then we can work on how to overcome that." Draco glared at a snag in the fabric of the gold velvet couch and tried to smooth over the threads with his finger to avoid looking at Ron.

Ron looked surprised, but decided not to question Draco's change of tone, reasoning it likely had more to do with fear of further violence than a true wish to help. "I guess because neither of us have. She doesn't really give a reason so much as she just... stops everything and makes an excuse and leaves."

Draco nodded and sat up, abandoning the couch flaw for a loss. He set his book into his lap and looked thoughtful. "Is it possible that you're just not very good at snogging?"

"I... well..." Ron flushed and stuttered, not sure what to say in the face of such bluntness. "I... err... I don't know. How would I find out?" He flashed Draco a misgiving stare.

Giving Ron a withering look, he shook his head. "Don't look at *me* that way. *I'm* not willing to go *that* far to figure out your problem, no matter how early or often you offer to beat me. That is simply *beyond the beyond*."

"I don't-Would you get it through your thick head that I don't *want* you?"

Draco held his hand up to cut Ron off. "We're agreed. Just drop it." Shaking his head to rid himself of that train of thought he then went on, "Does she seem into it while you're snogging or does she act distracted?"

"She seems into it. She makes these little noises like...ooo ooo ooo."

Draco shuddered at the imitation of Hermione's sex noises and held his hand up again. "Weasley, if you make me ill I won't be able to help."

"Sorry."

"Right, then. Is there a consistent point in which she cuts off... relations?"

Ron closed his eyes to ponder this. "Are you asking how far I've gotten?"

"Well... yes. But don't be graphic about it. I just ate."

Ron rolled his eyes. He wondered if girls now repulsed Draco, or if he just didn't like Hermione.

"You used to be such a lady killer."

Draco was a bit thrown by the sudden topic change, but it was better than thinking about Granger moaning. "Well, admittedly my reputation was subsidized by Nott often posing as me in darkened nooks around Hogwarts."

"Really?"

"Well, yes. I found out about this all too late. But I'm afraid there are some young ladies parading around under the delusion that I shagged them. Probably more than I care to even know. It was too amusing to put a stop to, though. Well, until everyone found out I was with Harry. Then Nott had to get tail on his own merits again. I'm sure he was destroyed."

"That's foul. I can't believe Nott would-no, I can believe that. I can't believe you let it go on!"

"Well," Draco said with a dismissive sigh. "I liked my reputation as it was. That's all shot to hell, though. The birds will have to find another dirty boy to complain about."

"I keep forgetting you're gay now," said Ron, smirking.

Draco paled and looked around the room distractedly. "Gay," he repeated for a moment, as if he'd never given thought to it. He had, though. Quite a bit. "I don't know. I suppose I am. But for the moment I prefer to think of it as Pottersexual."

Ron snickered at the name but shushed as Draco shot him a glare. "Seriously? You don't like guys? Just Harry? You're still attracted to girls?"

"I..." Draco made a face. He didn't know how to explain himself, really. "I'm only attracted to Harry. I suppose that in the past I did find other males attractive now and then, but I never took those attractions seriously because I am a Malfoy and Malfoys do not bugger boys. Maybe it was extreme denial. I don't really know. Between attempts on my life, mourning my mother, and killing my father, I haven't had loads of time to sort it all out."

Ron looked away, feeling a stab of guilt, which was exactly what Draco intended. "Right. Well, you two seem good together. From what I've seen anyway."

Draco smirked and perked a brow. "And as we both know, you've seen quite a bit."

Blushing, Ron rolled his eyes and cleared his throat. "So, back to Hermione..."

"Right. I asked if there was consistent point in which she cuts off the snogging."

"She says I'm a really good kisser. She lets me touch her under her shirt, and I've touched her-"

"Yes, ok, so you're... *touching*... things. Great."

"Yes, but I can't... see what I'm touching. She won't let me take things off of her."

Draco nodded perceptively. "She's self-conscious then. Do you tell her she's attractive?"

"I... well... no. But she knows I think she is."

"How does she know that if you don't tell her?"

"Because I'm snogging her!" explained Ron.

Draco blew out a long breath to keep from cackling at Ron's ignorance. "Girls like to be told that they're beautiful, Weasley. Even when they... clearly are not."

"But she *is* beautiful."

"Don't tell *me* that. I don't believe you, nor do I care whether you think she's beautiful or not. It's Granger that needs to hear it, lack wit."

Ron narrowed his eyes at the insult, but dismissed it in favor of moving on. "So if I tell her she's beautiful she'll shag me?"

"Probably not. But it will be a start. You'll have to tell her that pretty often to make her believe that you think that. Particularly since you've been neglecting that aspect of your relationship up to this point. In fact, I'm surprised she's still with you at all."

"She has been owling Krum."

"No, she hasn't," insisted Draco.

"What? What do you know about it? She told me she was!"

"She said that because you're neglecting her. But she wouldn't risk revealing the Order location by owling for pleasure. You really are simple, aren't you?" asked Draco.

"Then... why would she tell me that?"

Draco sighed. He knew that the trio was dense, but this was ridiculous. "To get a reaction. I bet you get all protective and jealous acting when she says that. That's probably the only time aside from snogging that you show your passion for her."

"I think about her all the time!"

"She's not a mind reader, Weasley. Honestly. This isn't Arithmancy. This is basic human behavior."

"When did *you* get so sensitive, Malfoy? How do you know all of this? You trample over everyone's feelings all the time!"

Draco grinned. "Yes, but I do it *on purpose*. You have to understand why people behave the way they do to know what will truly cripple them."

"That's evil."

"*Slytherin*," preened Draco.

"So you do these things on purpose? Even though they get you beaten?"

"There's worse things than being beaten," said Draco as he toyed with the weft on the couch.

"Did your father beat you?" asked Ron, leaning in.

"He *disciplined* me. There is a difference."

"A beating is a beating."

"It was never *beating*. It was a few slaps and a couple of spankings. I know you all want to think he was this horrible beast. To be honest, at this point I wish I could believe that too. It would make everything *neater* for me. But he wasn't. He wasn't a perfect father, but he was a good father. He tried to teach me as best he could the things that he was brought up to believe." Draco bit his lip and stared hard at the grotty material, willing himself not to think too hard on his father. It wouldn't do to fall to pieces in front of Weasley.

"Do you believe those things? What your father believed?" asked Ron as he pointedly looked at the tapestry.

"I don't know," Draco answered. "I thought I did. Then again, I thought I had to. Now I don't have to and... " he sighed and waved his hand in the air as if to clear it.

"So you'd still see Hermione dead?" hissed Ron.

Draco held his breath and squeezed his eyes shut as if really contemplating it. He disliked her, certainly. But dead? Finally, he opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling and said, "No. Not dead."

"Really?" inquired Ron. He really had no reason to doubt Malfoy's answer since the boy had obviously given thought to it before he finally answered.

"Really."

"Why not?"

"It would bother Harry," Draco dodged. He wasn't willing to see the smug look on Ron's face at his admission that perhaps he'd been misguided in the past. The evasiveness did not curtail Ron's smirk at him.

"I'm sure *Harry* appreciates that."

Draco shrugged and opened his book. "He'd better." Glaring at the page, his eyes darted up to catch Ron still staring at him with a bemused expression. "Don't you have a girl to woo, Weasley? I know I'm pretty, but if you keep gazing at me like that, people will think you've gone queer."

Ron continued to smirk at Draco, enjoying the Slytherin's mounting anxiety.

"Argh, get OUT!" spat Draco as he picked up one of the cushions from the couch and tossed it at Ron's face.

Blocking the projectile pillow, Ron snickered at Draco's distress, but nevertheless stood. "Well, I'll see you at lunch then. I'll keep you updated on my situation with Hermione."

"Please don't. I'll lose my appetite."

Ron rolled his eyes. "Come to lunch anyway. Or I'll send Hermione up here with a sandwich," he teased.

"Do that and I'll tell her you were tossing off while watching me with Harry," he taunted, smirking into his book.

"You wouldn't!"

Draco peered up from behind his book, looking impish. "*Slytherin*!" he chimed playfully.

"All right, Slytherin. But, can I ask one more favor of you?"

"Dear Merlin, man. I realize you're used to receiving charity, but I'm new to giving it."

Ron glared at Draco but noted the continued grin on the pale face and decided that he must just be teasing. "Well, can we... would you just... not tell Harry about this?"

"Why not?" Draco's brows furrowed. Keep something from Harry? Well, everyone had his or her secrets. Still, Draco didn't relish the thought of lying to Harry to keep this promise for Ron.

"It's just... weird. We've all been friends for so long and it's strange enough without having, you know, Harry disapproving of it."

Draco's face steeled as he considered that. "What makes you think he'd disapprove? Honestly, I bet he thinks you've already shagged."

"Maybe," pondered Ron. "I just-- that almost makes it worse, actually. If he found out we didn't... besides, he gets kind of jealous sometimes. I guess we all get jealous when it seems like the other two are getting closer."

"He knows you've gotten closer... we all know that," Draco pointed out. Looking at Ron's anxious expression, he finally relented. "Fine. I won't tell him about this. Your secret is safe with me."

"Thanks, really. It's a big relief. And do come to lunch. I won't have Harry thinking we're trying to starve you to death."

"All for Harry, hmm?"

"Well, let's just say I wouldn't see you dead," answered Ron, grinning.

"That's the sweetest thing you've ever said to me, Weasley. I might just *cry*," said Draco in a melodramatic voice.

"Just be there."

Draco's eyes lowered and he grinned and nodded. "Fine."

--

Auror training was set up much like Hogwarts classes. Of course, Harry was only getting the summer version of what was a three-year training program, but he was lucky to be starting it along with the others so at least there wasn't a huge age gap. Unlike Hogwarts, of course, there were only a handful of people in his classes, which made the focus much more intense on each student.

The morning had been a thrill for Harry. Defensive flying was something he excelled at and the other trainees, for the first time since training started, were giving him compliments. Some even dared to fly at him to try and challenge him, but Harry's artful and natural technique overwhelmed the others and no one got past him. The congratulatory slaps on the back halted just before lunch and though he sat with the other 12 students in his classes, none of them said much to the privileged younger boy who would be leaving at the end of summer.

That afternoon was a Potions class focused on Quick-Remedy Anti-Venom Potions that Harry was dreading. Not just because of his weakness in potions, but because they were warned that they would need to pair off. He hadn't felt this way since he was a student in Muggle School.

Once again he was the dowdy geeky kid that no one wanted on their team. His stared at the floor as he tried not to notice the other students happily pairing off. He found it odd that no one from Hogwarts was starting this term, but he remembered McGonagall talking about how selective the Ministry was and that they took only the finest students from schools around the world.

This was all well and good, but it didn't help him with awkward moments like these, standing alone near a cauldron, knowing that there were an odd number of people in the class and believing that this would be just another time and place where he was pointed out as someone who didn't belong. He tried to brush it off and looked over the ingredients when the only person who had bothered to introduce himself, Richard, wandered up and asked to join him.

Harry beamed at him and looked around and noted that one pairing had branched into being a threesome. He sighed. Well, perhaps he should just be glad not to be working alone in a subject he was likely to be weakest in.

Richard smiled at Harry and looked in the direction the boy was looking. "Don't feel bad about it. I was going to hit you up to work with anyway. We're both the odd men out here. I'm a couple of years older than everyone else, so..."

"Oh, really?" asked Harry. He grimaced at how lame a response that was. Why would Richard admit that if it weren't true?

"Yes, I was on queue the past couple of years, but now that this big war is supposedly starting, the Ministry is taking more people, so my persistence paid off."

Harry smiled at Richard. It didn't bother him that he was a couple of years older. Many of the people he considered friends were much older than Richard. "Wow, so being an Auror is something you really wanted."

Richard nodded; he flipped back his blond hair and stretched. His accent was different than Harry's, but that wasn't unusual for this class. He guessed the man was Australian. The new hair growth revealed Richard wasn't a natural blond.

"Been my dream, really. Since before I was your age," Richard said.

If he squinted, Harry mused, this man could be a taller, more bulked up, tanned version of Draco. Only less pointed. As Harry piled on the corollary conditions in which the 20-year-old looked like Draco, he realized slowly that the man looked nothing at all like his boyfriend. Clearly, Harry just missed Draco. "It's my dream, too. Although I'm just here for..."

"To save the world. I read the papers. In fact, I was going to ask if it was true that you're with Draco Malfoy, but it's evident that you are, so I left it."

"Evident? How?" asked Harry, wondering if Draco had put some manner of magical brand on him, which would be so much like the Slytherin it wasn't even funny.

Richard reached forward and slid his hand over the right breast of the robe Harry was wearing. He traced it as he spoke, "DM. I assume that means 'Draco Malfoy.' Interesting that you'd come to class bearing his emblem. I don't know if that's love or a neurosis that needs treating," he teased.

Harry wasn't sure he liked a stranger touching his chest, but he let it go, mostly out of shock. He hadn't seen the embroidery of his lover's initials on his garment. It wasn't exactly a *magical* marking, but Draco had certainly made his presence and claim known. He shook his head and rolled his eyes. "Doing this was a surprise. I'm borrowing his robes for the week until I can get to Diagon Alley this weekend."

"Oh, so... you're not really with him? He just lets you wear his clothes?" quizzed Richard who smiled and moved closer to Harry.

"I'm... no. I mean, yes. I'm seeing him and yes I'm wearing his clothes. It's just not a neurosis or obsession. I bet all of his robes have his initials on them, he likely didn't think about it," Harry lied. He was pretty sure the little prat did it on purpose, but he didn't want strangers to know his boyfriend was a bit of a possessive nutter.

"Malfoys are very possessive, even over their clothing," he said pointedly.

"Right, well, it won't be an issue after this weekend either way. Unless I just want to wear his robes," answered Harry. He didn't want to start a discussion on the nature of Malfoy or their relationship.

"Well, good on you. If it were me, I wouldn't like someone marking me publicly."

Harry bristled. "It's presumptuous of you to think that's what he's doing. I'm sure it was an accident. Even if it weren't, *The Daily Prophet* has marked me in a far more public way than some stitching would."

"Touche. In any case, I didn't mean to anger you. I was just making conversation. Your passionate defense of your *lover* wasn't necessary." Something about the way Richard spoke to Harry about Draco irked him, but he couldn't put his finger on why.

"My *boyfriend* is very important to me. We're very close. I don't like hearing strangers speaking ill of him," stated Harry.

Richard smirked and nodded. "Well, that's good of you, Mr. Potter. Sounds like Mr. Malfoy is a lucky man, indeed," he said and winked at Harry. After a beat, Richard threw in, "I hope he's just as loyal to you as he is to you."

Harry opened his mouth to respond, but at that point the proctor entered the room and gave them their assignment and time limit and instead Harry and Richard set to work in silence.

--

Arthur had some late coming paperwork to deal with which delayed his and Harry's return. They didn't arrive back to Grimmauld Place until just as Molly was finishing supper. It didn't leave him much time to catch up with Ron and Hermione before he needed to run up and wake Draco, but he did find out from Ron that Draco had actually come to lunch that day. Harry was proud that his boyfriend was making an effort.

After Molly announced that supper was just about ready, Harry ran up the stairs and found Draco napping on the couch with his copy of "Taming of the Shrew" across his chest.

Sitting down on the edge of the couch, he pulled the book away and softly rubbed at Draco's chest to rouse him. "Is this your misanthropic plan to get through the summer? Going to sleep it away?" asked Harry.

Draco murmured a bit before he was awake enough to process that Harry was there and he was teasing him. "I went to lunch."

"So Ron informed me," said Harry. "I guess you were finally hungry enough? They said you didn't say a word."

Thinking about the lunch and the way he'd simply traded expressions with Ron to find out that his advice had seemed to be working at least somewhat on Hermione, Draco sniffed and rolled his eyes. "Yes, well, nothing to say, I suppose."

"They're good people, Draco. You should try talking to them."

Draco opened his mouth, ready to tell Harry that he had, in fact, chatted with Ron; he quickly anticipated the next question that would be "what about?" Since that question was unanswerable due to his promise to Ron, he shrugged. "Pfft."

"Pfft, sure. It'll be a long summer if you keep on like this."

"Maybe," he said as he reached out and grabbed Harry on top of him. "But I always have my boyfriend back by nighttime. How was training?"

"Oh, brilliant," Harry fibbed. The morning had been good, so he focused on that and explained his many victories on his Firebolt and how the other students couldn't catch him, nor get past him.

Draco sat up while Harry explained. His gestures became so excitedly extravagant as his hands zoomed around to illustrate the students coming at him and how he dodged them, that he had to move back from Draco. Harry was just wrapping up his soliloquy when what Richard pointed out to him about the robes popped into his head. Squinting, he eyed Draco's lapel suspiciously.

Catching on a second too late as to what Harry was looking for, Draco pulled his hand up to block the unmonogrammed lapel, but Harry was already shaking his head. "Marking me, hmm?"

Draco cleared his throat and affected the appearance of innocence. "Pardon?"

Harry pointed at Draco's initials on his own robe. "Your initials?"

"Oh. Right. Well, my better robes are monogrammed. I didn't think anyone would notice."

"No?" Harry tilted his head to express his disbelief.

Draco shrugged. "Well with all of the," he gestured an exaggerated imitation of Harry's flailing broom demonstration, "it must've taken a keen eye to see it."

Harry suppressed a giggle at Draco's mimicry. "There was a potions segment later and we had to pair off."

"Pair off? Someone had to make a potion with you? Poor sod."

"Hey!" said Harry as he swatted at Draco who smirked and dodged. "Actually, he ended up making the potion. I pretty much just watched."

Perking a brow, Draco asked, "He? Is he *cute*?"

"I... ummm... I don't know."

"Did the potion steam your glasses so you couldn't see him?" teased Draco as he jabbed his lover with his foot.

"No, he's just... older."

"Older than what? Dumbledore?" chuckled Draco. He dodged another one of Harry's jovial swats.

Harry explained how Richard had been on queue and further explained how the two of them were outcasts by age. Harry because he was a year too young, and Richard because he was a couple of years too old.

"On queue? I didn't think they did that. I thought you were either in or you weren't," observed Draco.

"I guess it's the war. Normally they wouldn't let a student learn for the summer either."

"Oh but you're *special*, Golden Boy," taunted Draco. "Still, rather curious. War or no war..."

"I don't make Ministry policy, and I'm certainly not an expert in it," said Harry as he stood. "We need to get to dinner."

Draco nodded and followed Harry. Something about this Richard person didn't feel right, but Malfoy couldn't put his finger on it. Perhaps it was nothing, but still... it rankled him. "What's his name again?"

"Richard... something. I umm... don't remember."

"You don't remember?"

"I... err... Oh, I know. Spien. Richard Spien."

Draco's brows furrowed as he again tried to place the weird feeling. The name didn't ring any bells. Shaking the ominous feeling off, Draco and Harry headed down the stairs for dinner.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 4

"You and Ron seem pretty chummy," observed Harry as he pulled one of his freshly acquired robes from his weekend trip to Diagon Alley over his head. The past few nights at dinner he'd noticed Draco and Ron having some manner of wordless conversation that he couldn't quite suss out. It caused Harry to relive Richard's admonition that perhaps Malfoy wasn't as loyal as he hoped.

Draco shrugged in deference to the observance. "You said you wanted me to try and be *nice* to your friends." He slipped out of his robe and tossed it carelessly to the end of the bed and pulled Harry closer to him, sliding his hands down his back to grab at his ass.

Harry knew what Draco was after; he'd kept putting it off, but he knew he was running low on excuses to not let Draco top. "Sure, I want you to be *nice*, but Hermione said you two lock yourselves away midmorning for an hour or so," he said, lowering to his knees in front of his lover.

Telling Harry the nature of their discussions wasn't an option per his promise to Ron. Although, of late they'd diverged from their original topic and fallen into patter that only on occasion threatened to end in a dramatic fight. "We do."

"Why so mysterious?" he asked as he glided his hands over Draco's abdomen. He still wasn't very confident in giving blowjobs and he wished Draco would drop this push to being on top. Harry liked their sex life as it was. It wasn't that Draco had hurt him when they'd done it before; he just wasn't of a mood to give up control perhaps. Or maybe his cousin's goading about buggery was still nagging at him. He didn't know. He wanted to enjoy his boyfriend and then get some rest. Was that really too much to ask?

"It's not mysterious, we just don't necessarily want everyone just wandering in to hear everything we're talking about," Draco started. His voice ended in a gurgle as Harry's breath and then warm face nudged against him. He closed his eyes and rested his hands on Harry's shoulders. A blowjob wasn't what he wanted, but he was loath to turn it down. Even if he realized that Harry was just placating him. Again. He sighed and let his head fall back and muttered, "It wouldn't be necessary if she'd just put out."

Draco didn't realize what he'd just implied, nor that he'd said anything at all, as his blood wasn't all in his brain. He also didn't see the look of alarm on Harry's face just before he mouthed Draco's cock. The Gryffindor decided to close his eyes and try not to think too hard on what that was supposed to mean. Instead, he focused on how to deal with this large object in his mouth. He tightened his lips around it and started to wildly bob his head.

It was a bit too rushed for Draco, so he slowed Harry down gently by cupping his face with his hands. Draco tried to push forward to get deeper inside of Harry's mouth, but it triggered his lover's gag reflex. Draco sat up on his elbows and watched Harry with concern as he drew back and sputtered. "Sorry," Draco mouthed.

Harry gave him a nod and a wry grin to let Draco know it was all right before he lowered his face to the purpled prick and he sucked it in as far as he could fit. Draco closed his eyes and fell back. He just let Harry do what he wanted and tried to keep his hips still. He slid his own hand down to the base of his prick and massaged what didn't fit into Harry's mouth.

Hearing Draco's moaning, Harry figured this was as good a time as any to get Draco prepared. He opened his eyes and reached out for the lubricant. Squeezing out a thick dollop, he greased his fingers and began to probe into his lover. He was so intent on opening Draco that he missed the wailing and the warning squeeze on his shoulder and was surprised when he found his mouth filling with ejaculate.

Draco gazed tenderly at Harry, only to see the shocked look on Harry's face as he struggled to swallow. He found a sudden need to mutter a confused apology. As far as Draco was concerned, he'd given Harry plenty of warning, but evidently not. After licking away the leavings and wiping at his mouth, Harry shrugged to let Draco know the apology wasn't necessary. He pushed his concerned lover back down onto the bed.

Spreading his legs to make room for Harry, Draco reached behind him to cushion his neck with a pillow. Harry quickly jabbed his fingers inside of him and gave a few cursory strokes before he plunged himself in. Feeling his face flush with the coarse invasion, Draco tilted his head up to

watch his hands wind into the headboard. Forcing himself to relax after a few of the hard thrusts, he pushed back and whispered, "I love you."

"What? Oh... I love you too," Harry answered as he leaned down to sloppily kiss Draco. "You feel so good," he added as Draco shut his eyes and bore how rough Harry was taking him. Wrapping his arms around Draco, he whispered to into his neck and chest how beautiful he was and how much he missed him, although his mind was elsewhere. Why was Draco locking himself up with Ron? Why was he being so evasive about it? And what in the world did it mean that Hermione should be putting out?

Harry wasn't sure he even wanted the answers to these questions. The thought of his best friend and his lover... together... was really more than he could deal with, so he set it out of his mind and concentrated on the hard press of their bodies together. He ground into Draco, feeling the uncomfortable way their hip bones mashed together and the thrusts that caused meaty slapping sounds that echoed in the uncarpeted room. Just over that noise were Draco's gasps that were bordering on pleas for Harry to stop. Harry didn't quite come to until he felt the hard seizure of his orgasm flowing out of him, which made his thrusts squishy and slick.

Finally he collapsed onto his lover and Draco's arms wrapped around him. "I love you, Draco. I really do. I don't... ever want you to leave me," Harry blurted out. He didn't realize how rough he was being, and it wasn't meant to be punishing; at least not on a conscious level.

Draco had no idea where that came from and his brows furrowed as he scanned the ceiling, trying to make sense of what had just happened and to reconcile it with what Harry was saying. Deciding it was an apology of sorts, he responded, "I'm not going anywhere, Harry." He kissed the top of Harry's head as he slid his legs down, hissing at how tender he was. "I love you, too."

--

Snape was fighting a losing battle with trying to distract himself from his feelings for Draco. He dove into his potions work and attended the few meetings with the other Death Eaters he was summoned to. Now that things were intensifying, only the truly loyal were kept close to Voldemort and Snape's proximity to Dumbledore made him suspect. Still, the man's skills in Legilimency provided him with some nice tidbits.

Many of his recollections of Draco, and the emotions attached to them were being set into the Pensieve, at least as much as he could. When he was away from Draco, he was fine. He could go hours without really thinking about him, but then something would pop up; a color Draco favored, a comment he made on a potion ingredient, the sense memory of his lemon and rosemary smell. These things triggered his longing and he'd remember, yet again, that Harry Potter, son of James Potter, stole Draco away.

It hurt. Thinking about it made him ache in an inexplicable way. He didn't want these feelings and yet, there they were. What he truly wanted was to go back to being Draco's father figure, to mentor the boy and to be the one that Draco looked up to and ultimately clung to when danger

was near. But Draco was clinging to Potter of all people. To make matters worse, the arrogant Gryffindor grinned at him. The boy grinned in that same way James would grin at Snape when he knew he had something over on him. It was maddening. Worse yet, Potter was exactly who Draco should be running *away* from.

Voldemort wanted Harry dead and he didn't much care who he had to shoot through to get to him. Draco would just be another casualty to the Potter egotism and would lay forgotten as soon as he hit the ground dead. Snape wanted to spare Draco that. Spare him and treat him the way that he deserved, not like a second-class citizen. Or Potter's pet project, which was how Snape believed the other members of the Order saw him.

After passing Ron in the hallway and giving him no acknowledgement, Snape entered the drawing room. He held a sack of books, and observed Draco curled casually on the couch. The blond boy smirked up at him and appeared ready to say something smart, but on realizing it was Snape and not Ron who had entered, his face fell and he slammed the book shut.

Draco thought Ron had forgotten something or had another quick question for him before he faced Hermione. The last person he expected to see in the doorway was Snape. In fact, seeing Snape there was even more vexing as it pointed out to Draco that he rather *enjoyed* talking to Ron Weasley, a concept he wasn't terribly fond of recognizing. "What do *you* want?" he drawled.

"I brought you some books from your father's study. I thought you might like to see what material the Dark Lord requested. I made copies of them for you and for Dumbledore. I also added some from your room that appeared to be... lighter reading." Snape gestured towards the tome in Draco's lap, now a copy of "As You Like it."

Draco considered Snape for a moment and then pointed towards the writing desk. He didn't want to deal with Snape. Not now, not ever again. The man had betrayed him, tried to touch him, and put him in a position to have to kill his own father. "Leave them there. Good day."

Snape made his way across the room and set the books down on the table. He took a moment to balance the bag's contents as he contemplated his next words. "Draco, I'd also like to speak to you about your future... you have a real gift for potions..."

"What I have is an inheritance. A rather large one. One that is so expansive that if I don't wish to share my *gifts* with greasy Potions teachers, I don't have to."

Snape turned around and folded his arms as he glared down at Draco. "So that is what you're going to do? Retire? You'll get bored."

"I'm sure my boyfriend will keep me entertained," the boy answered, flourishing his hand.

"I see. So you're banking on your estate not being seized and that Potter will survive this. I never knew you to be such a gambler, Malfoy. Did you know that there's a prophecy?" he asked. Taking Draco's silence as an answer, he carried on. "His prophecy states that either he or the

Dark Lord will die. That's how this will end. The prophecy gives even odds, and yet when you really look at it, there's a learned wise wizard versus a student. Are you certain your *boyfriend* will even be around to keep you *entertained*?"

Draco paled and gripped his book tightly against his chest. "Aren't you banking on Harry winning this?"

"Perhaps. But if he does not, I am covered, aren't I?" Snape asked as he crossed his arms.

Draco's eyes narrowed and then dropped. Those odds really didn't sound much in Harry's favor. He slumped and then muttered, "Well, it's not as if Vol-- Vold-- the Dark Lord was able to kill him as a baby. Nor has he been able to since. Perhaps he's not all he's rumored to be. Harry's that much bigger now and he can hold a wand."

In spite of Draco's words, Snape was triumphant in striking a blow to Draco's belief in Harry's likelihood to survive. He took the moment of doubt to slide in next to Draco. "That may well be, but you must look at this from all sides, Draco. A great many things could happen that could change your future. Not only would continuing your potions studies benefit you, but also any association with me could cover you both at school and after."

"*Association*?" questioned Draco, appearing repulsed.

"Not like that, Mr. Malfoy. I realize that what happened reflected poorly upon me and gave credence to Potter's conspiracy theories regarding my intentions towards you, but I am only looking out for your *future*. Not trying to seduce you. I have *always* looked out for you, Draco. You know that. I was the only one at school who looked upon you as better than Potter. You've said yourself that you once thought of me like a father, I certainly felt that. We can get back to that if you'd just..."

Draco narrowed his eyes and started to scoot away. "You tried to *touch* me. I didn't *imagine* that."

"I was not trying to *touch* you," Snape insisted. "Not like that."

"I know what I saw and I know what I felt you moving towards. You were going to *touch* me."

Snape shook his head at Draco and closed the distance again. "It is unfortunate that you believe that, but ultimately *irrelevant*."

Draco bristled. "It's *very* relevant. You almost got me killed. You put me in a position where I had to kill my own father and now you're worried about my taking a *Potions class*?"

"Potter put you in those... positions." Snape tried to disguise his distaste for Draco's perked brow and smirk at his choice of words. "I was trying to make the best of a situation that had gone awry to protect you both as well as myself. As you may or may not know, your father could not have

killed Harry."

"What?" asked Draco.

Snape tilted his head as a sly smile crept onto his lips. "You didn't know, did you? According to the prophecy, one will die by the other's hand. One will kill the other, which means your father couldn't have killed Potter no matter what he did."

"So... I did *that*... for nothing?" Draco could feel the blood draining from his face and he clutched the book tighter for security. Out of the corner of his eye, he thought he caught a shadow moving and found himself staring at the tapestry. He winced as if it were his father's ghost pointing an accusing finger at him and then snapped his head back to Snape.

Catching the look to the tapestry, Snape leaned in even closer and whispered, "Your father still would have killed you. You still did what you had to."

"I *thought* I was protecting Harry."

"I suppose he has his reasons for letting you *believe* that," said Snape as he watched Draco's distress with a calculating stare.

Draco's eyes lowered. "I told him not to tell me too much. I didn't think I could be trusted."

"Certainly after... all of what happened... he could have trusted you."

Bringing one hand up to place over his eyes, Draco shook his head. "I didn't want to know. He didn't tell me because I didn't want to know this. I did what I did because I thought I was protecting him. It was the one noble thing I've ever done. The one *fucking* selfless thing I've ever done in my life and it... was for no reason at all. There was no point to it. It ended up being a selfish act in spite of... my intentions."

"Intent and outcome are rarely coincident, Draco. People like us... we do what we have to, but people like Potter and his little friends, they do not understand," cooed Snape as he shifted closer to Draco and slid his arm around the upset boy. "Everything is so black and white to them. They don't understand reality as we do. They leave us to do their dirty work, the messy spying, making the difficult decisions; this is all up to us, Draco. He'll never appreciate who you are; he'll never see your strengths as I do."

Draco stiffened as Snape touched him and he started to recoil from the embrace, feeling ill with each damning word Snape spoke. "That's not it at all. He's never..."

"Made you feel evil? Oh, it's not so easy as that is it? It's the hints and suggestions from him and his ilk, chipping away at you, making you feel unworthy." Snape slid another arm around Draco and pulled the confused boy closer to him, bypassing the weak objections.

Unworthy? Was he unworthy? Is that why Harry wouldn't let him top? Draco felt a sickening wave of insecurity washing over him. "I'm not unworthy," he weakly protested.

"No, Draco. You're not. You're better than he is. Stronger. You have to be, don't you? You don't have the cadre of sycophants to support you, do you?" asked Snape as he leaned in to press his face into the silky platinum hair and kissed his temple.

The rake of dry lips against his temple was enough to shock Draco into reality and again his body tensed and he looked frantically around the room trying to spot where he'd left his wand. "Let go of me. Now." The nightstand. He left his wand on the nightstand again. In his own defense he rationalized that he didn't think he'd need to be running about the house with his wand on him.

"I'm just comforting you," defended Snape.

"It's not comforting. Let go of me," he growled as he began pushing the man away.

"Professor, I do believe that Malfoy asked you to let go of him," sounded a familiar feminine voice behind them. Both Slytherins looked up in the direction of the voice to see Hermione standing with her arms crossed, glaring at Snape. Draco couldn't remember ever being pleased to see Granger, but at the moment he couldn't deny his extreme relief.

"Miss Granger, this is none of your affair," stated Snape.

"*Affair*. That's a rich choice of words, Professor." Hermione moved around to the side of the couch and stared expectantly at Snape.

"I see that Potter has been filling your head with his *obnoxious paranoia* as well," hissed Snape who had little choice but to loosen his grip against Draco's squirming.

"Given what I just walked in on, it would seem that maybe Harry isn't paranoid *enough*," stated Hermione who finally looked at Draco, who had extracted himself from Snape and was brushing off his robes as if he were worried that Snape might have rubbed off on him. She'd heard the last of the poison that Snape was tipping into Draco's ear and wondered how much of it Draco believed to be true. It would seem that on some level Draco felt it or Snape couldn't have gotten that close.

Snape stood and glared indignantly at the teens. "I will not be accused by *you*!"

"Then go," snapped Draco. His eyes narrowed at Snape and then averted in favor of the writing desk with the books on it.

Following Draco's line of sight Snape said, "I'll leave these books for you. Perhaps you can study them while you're here. Do give consideration to what I said about Potions class. It would be a shame for... circumstances... to keep you from where your talent lies." With that, Snape

turned and left the room in his usual theatrical manner.

Hermione eyed Draco, the boy's mouth was open and he was panting as he stared at the door through which Snape had left. His face pinched tight and his eyes closed as he mastered himself back into his usual sneer which he directed nowhere in particular. "Malfoy... what he-- what Snape said-- that's not how we all feel. He was just goading you."

Draco's expression turned to annoyed skepticism, and he rolled his eyes and snorted.

"What I mean is, we do see you're strong. I think all of us recognize the choice you had to make to get here. We respect and understand the sacrifices you've made. Just... day-to-day you're rather a..."

"Malfoy."

"Yes, rather a Malfoy," she said as she smiled at Draco, who scowled back at her. "The point is, no matter how we may feel about each other personally, like today, we'll be there to back you up when you need it. That's what we do."

"I didn't need you to back me up," huffed Draco. "I can handle Snape."

"Seems he was *handling* you."

Draco shivered, but he tried to cover his discomfort with a mild shrug and he turned his attention to the books again. It was one thing to be "comforted" by a once-trusted teacher, quite another knowing what he knew about Snape and his intentions. The idea that the man might toss off thinking about their interaction made Draco grimace.

"I'm sorry, that was insensitive," Hermione recanted.

Draco pulled his book back up to his chest and clung to it.

Reading the gilded letters of the book, Hermione spoke, "*As You Like It*? Shakespeare? I love Shakespeare!"

Sometimes Draco forgot that not only was Shakespeare was well known to Muggles, but that Hermione was an avid reader. "Yes. It's not really my favorite, though," he mumbled.

"No, you seem more of a *Hamlet* sort."

"I'm not so keen on avenging my father's killer," was his caustic reply. Most wouldn't have made such a flippant joke so soon after reopening the wound over murdering their own father, but it was Draco's way of coping. "Besides, it's too dramatic for my tastes. I leave the vengeful bloodlust to Harry," said Draco with the barest of smirks.

Hermione grinned. "You prefer *Romeo and Juliet,* then?"

"Pfft. Overrated by Muggles. Too much like life for my tastes," was his ironic reply.

"Oh, I see," said Hermione. Her grin increased as she saw Draco's mood and face lightening a bit at their conversation. "Don't tell me you're a comedy lover."

"I enjoy good banter."

"That makes sense, actually. Well, my favorite is a comedy as well. *The Taming of the Shrew*," said Hermione.

Draco's eyes widened for a moment and then he glared down at his book. It was immature, but he hated that he shared the love of that play with the Mudblood. "Figures. That's the worst of the lot. Wholly unbelievable. I'm surprised at you, Granger. It shows women as quite repressed even for the times. A strong intellectual woman repressed by a noisome man? Honestly."

Hermione's face fell and she sighed quietly. "Oh. Well. I just thought it was charming it its own way, and he did respect Katherine. I see what you're saying, I suppose we just see it differently," she said evenly. Deciding to change the subject, she asked, "Do you want me to send Ron in for a bit? You two seem to be getting on all right."

"No," he answered. What would he say to Ron about this? He didn't want to say anything to anyone about what happened with Snape. What he really wanted was to flay every part of skin that had touched the older man. He felt befouled.

"I assume it's you who has been advising him on our relationship."

"Why would I do something that would benefit *you*?" questioned Draco.

"I..." Hermione didn't have an answer for that. "Maybe you just wanted to see Ron happy?"

"Why would I care about *Weasley*? Or *any of you* for that matter?"

"You care about Harry. A great deal, maybe you just want his friends to like you?"

Draco shrugged; he didn't really know what to reply. Sure, he found they weren't evil horrid people, and maybe that was it. Maybe he was just bored. But right now he didn't want to discuss it. He felt ill and tired, and if she didn't leave soon he was going to end up telling her off just to vent his frustration. "I don't give a toss if you like me or not."

Hermione stood there feeling hurt and insulted that Draco had shot her down at every attempt of kindness she threw to him. She was running out of things to say. "Well, I'm pretty sure that it is your influence that has Ron telling me that I'm pretty, and opening doors for me, and even the flowers he bought for me at Diagon Alley last weekend. I've known him for years and I know he

wouldn't think to do these things on his own."

Draco sat still, eyes averted from the girl.

"Well, for whatever reason you're doing it, thank you."

"He wants to do it. I don't tell him much. He knows what he should be doing deep down, I just let him know his instincts were correct. We don't talk much about you anymore. I didn't know about the flowers."

Hermione spotted the flicker of a smirk on Draco's face and the way he looked to the left, crafting his lie. Draco knew about the flowers, of that she was certain. He likely paid for them, too. "Well, no matter how little it was, I do appreciate it. I was starting to think he was hopeless."

The cocksure grin spread over Draco's face and he answered, "He *is* hopeless. You're both rather pathetic, really. A matched set."

"Yes, well, I suppose it's good to have someone to be hopeless with, isn't it, Malfoy?" she asked.

"I wouldn't know a thing about being hopeless. I'm strong and mighty and evidently you all see that and know it to the roots of your noble Gryffindor beings," teased Draco.

"Oh, we do, Malfoy. We really do," said Hermione with a light mocking tone.

Draco snorted and flashed her a quick grin.

"Harry's right. You are rather handsome when you smile."

"Harry told you that?" asked Draco in surprise. His grin widened at the prospect of Harry finding him attractive and confiding it in his friends. Perhaps Harry didn't find him quite as unworthy as Snape would have him believe.

"Yes. Back at Hogwarts. We were interrogating him as to why he would be with...someone like you," admitted Hermione

"Someone like me... you mean wealthy and stupendously attractive?"

It was Hermione's turn to snort. "Yes, we were all very worried that Harry was falling for wealthy and attractive boys."

"Sarcasm doesn't work for you. Nor does that shade of purple," Draco pointed out, noting her Muggle t-shirt.

"Right. Well, it was good talking to you, Malfoy."

Draco smirked and perked a brow at her. She shook her head as she started towards the door. Calling after her, he said, "Granger... I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention this to Harry. The Snape thing. He has so much else going on and he gets 12 shades of arsed off about the man and really, nothing happened."

Stopping in her tracks, she turned to look at Draco. "Are you sure? You didn't do anything you should be ashamed of, and I'm sure he'd want to make you feel better." Nothing had happened? Draco looked awfully shaken for someone who didn't think anything happened. But she'd respect his wishes if that's what he wanted.

"No, he's just so tired when he gets home and there's nothing he can do about it anyway. Just... leave it. It wouldn't do to have him mucking up his training worried about my being left here alone for Snape to prey on."

"You're not alone, Malfoy," Hermione reminded him.

Draco's hand gestured dismissively. "I suppose not."

"Not that you *need* help."

"Of course I don't."

"But if you did..." said Hermione.

Draco rolled his eyes and threw his book open and pretended to read.

After a few moments of watching Draco's rather lame attempt at looking busy, Hermione said, "You're welcome, Malfoy."

"What? I thought you left," said Draco a little too quickly.

Shaking her head, Hermione left the room.

--

Harry arrived home late again and quickly tripped up the stairs to fetch Draco for dinner. It was clear that everyone in the kitchen expected them to take longer by the conversation that the boys walked in on.

Ginny, ladling food onto her plate, said, "Well at least now we know why Harry was so bad with girls, he was gay!"

Harry glared at Ginny for a moment, his mouth dropped in shock. His head tilted down and he glowered at the chair before sitting in it. He was so hurt by the notion that his lack of talent for wooing girls meant automatically that he was gay; he couldn't form the words to protest.

Draco noticed Harry's reaction and leapt to his defense, "Maybe he wanted to be with someone who hadn't already shagged half the school."

"As if you were a virgin," snapped Ginny.

"And yet I still got the boy. That must *hurt*." Draco took his place next to Harry and started to pile food on his plate.

"It hurts no more than your tiny inbred prick hurt me!" Ginny spat back.

Harry's eyes widened and he looked between Ginny and Draco several times, his mouth agape.

"I have no idea what you're on about, Weaslette," replied Draco flatly before sipping his pumpkin juice.

"It doesn't surprise me you've lost track, there were *so many*," Ginny grumbled.

"I was a shark, no one's denying that," responded Malfoy.

Harry looked between them and then narrowed his at his empty plate as if he were angry that it didn't fill itself. All he could think was that Draco Malfoy had shagged someone else in this house. Someone he was left alone with all day. His stomach twisted. Hermione and Ron watched in astonishment. Ron's fists tightened into balls as he restrained himself.

Ginny sighed impatiently. All eyes were fixed on her; most uncomfortable amongst them was her mother. "In the broom closet?"

Draco stared blankly back at her.

"On the third floor?" she tried.

Draco appeared to be giving this some thought and shrugged to indicate he had no recollection of that event.

"Last year! After the Halloween feast!" she finally revealed, causing many gasps in the room.

Only one person didn't gasp, and that was Draco, who was snickering. "Nott."

"You did too!" exclaimed Ginny.

"*Theodore* Nott, you lack-wit. You shagged *Theodore Nott*, not me."

Recognizing the scam from Draco's story telling in the drawing room, Ron was flabbergasted that his sister had fallen prey. He met Draco's eyes and shook his head. Draco threw his hands

up. There wasn't much he could do about that now. He'd had no idea.

"But... he... you weren't... it was YOU!" shrieked Ginny.

"It was *not* me. I was shagging *Chang* that night in the Astronomy Tower," Draco tossed out.

At this proclamation Harry reddened and stood up. His chair made a loud screech on the stone floor and drew everyone's attention back to him. "I don't want to hear any more of this!" Harry announced, settling his incensed stare on Draco. "I'm going to bed." There were countless things Harry didn't want to know about Draco's past. Past conquests were chief amongst them. Principally because of this now awkward situation of finding out that Malfoy had shagged a girl he'd once fancied. A girl that he had been incapable of wooing, which it would appear made him gay by default. Unlike Draco who evidently could have anyone of *either* gender he wanted. Weasleys included.

"Good, let's leave these heathen to their Shepherd's Pie," said Draco in disgust as he rose.

"No, *you* stay here. Have your little tart-off with Ginny. I'm sure it's *fascinating* that there's any virgins left in school at all," spat Harry.

"I can think of at least *two*," Draco pointed out.

Hermione and Ron, who had stayed out of it up until this point, turned crimson.

Harry looked at the rest of the trio and then faced Draco again. For a moment he thought to have a go at Draco for outting his friends' virginity. Then it occurred to him that they'd never bothered to share that information with *him* either, and that he was likewise angry with them. Finally he settled on, "I DON'T WANT TO KNOW ANY OF THIS!" and stormed out.

Draco dropped into his seat and shoved his pie away and slumped in his chair with his arms crossed. He couldn't even spare a trademark sneer of amusement when Mrs. Weasley dragged Ginny out to have "a talk" with her about the evening's revelations.

Ron eyed Draco and almost felt sorry enough for him to offer a "he'll come around" to help him feel better. He opened his mouth to say it, but stopped as he recalled that he was rather put out with Malfoy for revealing that he and his girlfriend were virgins.

Hermione seethed. "Malfoy..."

"Shut up and bang your boyfriend, Granger. I'm in no mood for your lectures."

"At times like this, I have no idea what Harry sees in you. That was *horrid*," she growled as she grabbed her plate and nudged Ron. "Come on, Ron. Let's eat in my room."

"You may as well, nothing *else* is going to happen in there!" Malfoy after them as he flopped

back in his chair, finding himself alone at an empty dinner table. He thought about what Hermione said. *I have no idea what Harry sees in you.* "Sometimes, neither do I..."

After eating his Shepherd's pie in silence, Draco crept up to the bedroom where Harry was pretending to sleep. He slid into his own bed, noting that Ron was still with Hermione. "Harry?"

There was no sound from the other side of the room. No movement, just the back of Harry's body facing him.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I love you. I..."

"I know, Draco. Just... get some rest," Harry grumbled to him. He knew it wasn't Draco's fault that things with Cho hadn't worked out, but at the moment he was just irritated and didn't want to talk about it.

"*I love you, Harry.*" Draco tightened the blankets securely around him. After the day he'd had and this stupid fight, he just wanted to be held.

"I'll talk to you in the morning, Draco. Good night."

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 5

After a good night's rest, the fight seemed asinine. Harry realized that perhaps he was over-tired from training. Cho was in his past, and while he'd had a crush on her for a good while, his actual relationship with her hadn't lasted long. And really, she was a bit of a nutter. Or perhaps waking up with Draco in his bed clutching him swayed his mood. Evidently at some point in the night, Draco had crept in. Sneaky Slytherin. Harry kissed Draco to rouse him.

"Ugh... morning breath, Harry," Draco protested, pulling an arm up over his face to shield himself from the smell.

"Hey, I'm forgiving you here." Harry sniggered at Draco's reaction and pulled at the defending arm.

"Shouldn't I be forgiving *you* for... whatever *that* was about?" Draco perked a brow at Harry as his arm was pulled away.

"It's... well, maybe you should be. I don't know. Just... after what Ginny said about me with girls and...." He frowned, it was still a little bothersome, but it really wasn't Draco's fault that Ginny

brought it up. Harry thought for a moment about asking about Cho, but he decided that the subject was better left dropped.

"That irritated me, too. You have just as big a lack of talent with boys as you did with girls." Draco smirked, relieved that he seemed to be forgiven. He was glad Harry didn't ask about Cho. He would've lied about it, of course, but the truth of the matter was that he'd only bothered with her because she'd been with Harry. He'd planned to use it against the Golden Boy later, but before he had the chance to drop that little bomb at what he'd hoped would have been the most devastating moment, he was involved with Harry. Bitten on the ass by his own machinations. He supposed on some level he deserved last night's tantrum, so he wasn't particularly interested in prolonging the making up process.

Harry pinched Draco's arm. "That's it. I'm not making love to you this morning."

"Mmm... sex," said Draco as he picked up the bottle of lubricant and started to get up. He was stopped by Harry's grip on him. "Where are you going?"

"Drawing room."

"Why?" Harry pulled Draco back down onto the bed.

"Sex? Or was that just a really good dream I was having of my boyfriend inviting me for a morning shag?" Draco settled in against Harry.

"Why not here?" asked Harry.

"Well, Ron..."

"He's asleep." Harry pointed over at his friend to demonstrate.

Taking a quick look back over his shoulder, he turned back to Harry and responded, "Well spotted. However, he might wake up."

Harry smirked. "Then you'll have to refrain from screaming my name."

Draco rolled his eyes. "I want to scream it, Harry. Come on." Draco pulled at Harry's arm as he started to roll back.

Harry pulled his arm away from Draco and raised his brows. "Seriously?"

"About screaming your name? Well, you'll have to *inspire me*." Draco gave Harry a sultry look.

"No, seriously do you want to go into the drawing room?" asked Harry, suspicious about why Draco was suddenly so concerned about Ron's feelings. Just what was going on between his best mate and his boyfriend?

"Yes."

"Why?"

"What if he wakes up and watches us?" Draco asked as he looked back over his shoulder at Ron to see if Ron was already doing that.

Nonplussed, Harry asked, "You didn't care a couple of weeks ago."

"That was at night. It was dark."

"Come to think of it, Draco we haven't done that with him in here since." Harry eyed Draco and sat up, detangling his limbs from the sheets and his lover.

"Well, um... no." Draco reached for Harry.

"Why is that, Draco?" Harry deftly avoided him by springing out of the bed.

Heaving a sigh, Draco followed. "He's straight and-- he wouldn't want to see that."

Again, Harry dodged Draco, this time moving to the wardrobe to grab a fresh robe and his pants. "You? Considerate?"

Draco folded his arms over his chest. "It's been known to happen."

"Not towards *Ron*."

"You *said* you wanted me to be nicer to your friends. Aside from which, I don't want him seeing me naked, or you naked for that matter. Come on. It's just easier this way. We won't have to worry."

Harry wasn't sure he liked Draco being considerate of *Ron*. Of course, it was what he'd asked for, but now that it was happening, Harry was distrustful. Particularly since he knew that Draco and Ron spent time in the drawing room together in the mornings and Draco was cagey about what they were doing in there. "You know, I'm suddenly not in the mood. I'm going to have a shower." Harry started towards the bathroom.

"I-- fine. Whatever, Harry." Draco gave a dismissive wave.

Harry shrugged and slammed the bathroom door. The noise woke Ron who looked up in bleary-eyed confusion as the portrait snickered. "Fuck OFF!" spat Draco, who threw on a robe and stormed into the drawing room.

--

"Trouble in paradise, Harry?" Richard leered so hard that it unsettled Harry.

Harry took his usual spot, pointedly one chair away from the creepy man. It bothered him that he couldn't get along with the only other outcast of the group, but the insinuation of Draco's lack of loyalty cut him deeply. So much so that he couldn't stop thinking about whether Ron and Draco were having an affair. "How do you figure that?"

"Auror training, Harry. We've all learned about body language already. Besides, I can spot boy trouble a mile away." Richard patted the seat next to him and then stretched his arm out around it.

Harry looked at the chair, then at the arm draped across it and then rolled his eyes. "What would you know about boy trouble, anyway?"

"Well, if you'd come closer I could explain to you just how much I would know about boy trouble. Come on, I thought The Boy Who Lived was brave. Afraid I'll make you soak your daks?"

"No, I just don't have boy trouble, nor do I see the point in getting any closer to you." Harry ruffled his hair, trying to appear as secure as he sounded. "Unless, of course, *you're* having boy trouble, and then perhaps I might help."

Richard leaned on his elbow on the chair in an attempt to close the distance between them. "Well, there is this looker in my class who is clearly seeing a complete arse who treats him like dirt. I'd like to ask him out for a pint but he won't even sit next to me."

Harry glanced at the man leaning towards him in his nondescript navy blue robes that made his eyes stand out. "Maybe the 'looker' is the arse."

"Oh, I doubt it. His boyfriend is from a long line of arses from what I've heard. It was just a matter of time before the prat stepped out on him." Richard tried not to look triumphant at the way his statement made Harry pale.

"What makes you think that's what happened?" Harry couldn't maintain eye contact with Richard and looked down at the scratched desktop.

"Malfoys aren't known for their fidelity. Everyone knows that, and you look like a dog's breakfast," said Richard, who slid into the empty seat to get that much closer to the nervous boy.

Dropping the pretense irked Harry almost as much as the man's closeness. Harry's snapped his head towards the front of the class, but he glared at him from the corner of his eye. "I'm too young for a pint."

"I could get you in. But if you'd rather, we could go for ice cream." Richard slid his arm along

the back of Harry's chair.

Harry huffed at the derisive tone and spoke through his teeth, "I *don't* want ice cream. Draco didn't cheat. Leave me *alone*." He turned his head back and scowled at Richard's arm until he withdrew it.

Rankled, Richard questioned, "You know that for certain?"

Did Harry know that for certain? Well, no. But now that someone was pushing him on it, he realized how very foolish that thought had been. Ron, gay? Draco slumming with a Weasley? Still, the evasiveness was infuriating which brought him back to start. "He wouldn't," Harry meekly replied.

"That didn't sound certain at all. Come with me for a pint. We can discuss how your boyfriend *wouldn't* cheat on you while making him wonder just where you are." This time Richard put his hand on Harry's shoulder, and the boy didn't immediately recoil.

Harry arched his brows. That idea was... appealing. Let Draco wonder what the ambiguousness was about for once. He reasoned that he didn't really need Arthur to guide him back from the Ministry. He'd gone home alone the night before when the man had to stay for Order business. He could do it again. "Fine."

"Excellent," purred Richard. He fell silent, not wanting to press his luck any further. After a few moments, the instructor came in and class began.

--

Harry wasn't sure how it had happened. He excused himself to have a leak one minute and the next, he was pressed against the lavatory wall with Richard's tongue down his throat. It was a kiss that had something to prove. Claiming, angry, mashing of teeth and lips and Harry found it altogether as objectionable as Richard himself.

Shoving him away with more force than was necessary, thanks to the two pints he'd drunk on his virgin system, Harry whirled around to leave. At least he'd had time to urinate, he thought. Harry felt a hand land firm on his shoulder. The fingers dug in and he was whipped around and glaring into Richard's livid face. Harry felt that he was giving Richard a sufficiently malevolent look, but he found himself once again flat against a stall door, dealing with Richard's pungent beer breath and lashing tongue.

Again Harry shoved at Richard, but found stronger resistance this time. The older man had at least two stone more on him than Harry, which made escaping him thorny. Before Harry consciously decided to do it, his knee met with Richard's groin and the man was doubled over in pain and then on the floor. Harry staggered out of the bathroom, feigning obliviousness to people staring at him because of the wailing emanating from the toilets. "No means no," muttered Harry as he made his way into the balmy evening and started his trek toward Grimmauld Place.

--

Draco was tense from waiting and worrying. He felt so much relief that Harry hadn't been attacked on the way home from the Ministry, it was hard for him to stay annoyed when he saw Harry, even though he was bleary eyed and off-kilter. His lover smelled of smoke and tasted like cheap beer, but he ignored it in favor of Harry's passionate kiss. Pressed against his family's tapestry, Draco melted and abandoned all rational thought.

Even though he hadn't welcomed Richard's kiss, the memory of it made his insides twist as if he'd truly betrayed his lover. He heatedly balled up the sides of Draco's robes with his hands, and then he pulled it up over his lover's head and tossed it aside.

Taking another quick glance to the door to ensure that it was shut in their manic rush to get to this point, Draco shivered in the chill of the low-lit room and the feeling of being utterly naked up against his family symbol. His slender fingers scrammed for Harry's robe. He succeeded in pulling it off as Harry kissed down his body, pausing only to raise his hands over his head to allow the fabric to clear his arms.

Draco had little time to angst over the fact that clearly Harry wasn't going to let him top again before his prick was engulfed in the heat of his lover's mouth. His platinum hair caught at the dark tapestry as his head fell back and he exhaled through his pinked, violated lips. His hands twisted through the wiry strands of Harry's black hair as his head bobbed on his prick. This was, by far, the hardest Harry had ever worked at a blowjob and while Draco should have been asking himself why, he was entirely too shocked and aroused to do so. "Harry!" he gasped as he felt his toes curl.

Harry's green eyes scaled up Draco's body, observing the flexing of the boy's glistening abdomen and the erratic heaving of his chest. Harry crept one hand up Draco's torso towards his face, wanting to stroke it as Draco lurched forward to look down at Harry's frantic suckling. He tried to smile around the prick at Draco's vulnerable expression and forehead shimmering with perspiration. Sliding a finger up into the drool collecting on his bottom lip and the base of Draco's length, he then worked the finger to the cleft of the Slytherin's ass and then gently inside of him.

Draco's head snapped back against the wall. It made a resounding thud as Harry's finger sought out and found the hard but tender spot inside of him that made him cry out. Feeling the increased internal pressure along with the hard sucking from his boyfriend's hollowed out cheeks, Draco finally caved and shuddered, releasing into Harry's mouth.

The Gryffindor swallowed some, but kept his cheeks puffed with the majority of Draco's leavings still in his mouth. He stood up and for a horrifying moment, Draco thought he was going to force him to eat it. But then Harry turned his head and spat the sperm over The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black family tree. Draco watched with bemused revulsion as his ejaculate slid over Araminta Meliflua's family line, staining trails of white bubbles down the

fibers of the tapestry.

Draco parted his lips to say something, only to find his mouth filled with his lover's tongue and the hard, slick press of his erection jabbing his hip. This speed at which this was taking place was starting to make it feel more like assault than sex, but Draco didn't want to stop. He wasn't sure he *could* stop it. Hoisted up by Harry's hands on the backs of his thighs, Draco wrapped his legs around his lover's waist.

"I need this, Draco. I need you," Harry gasped against Draco's neck. He wasn't sure exactly why he needed it and if Draco was trying to stop him to discuss it; he wasn't sure what he'd say. He couldn't bring himself to tell Draco the truth about Richard kissing him, which made him feel as if he was cheating. He didn't want to explain that he had a feeling that the older man was attracted to him and that he'd gone anyway. That he thought that maybe he *could* cheat on Draco because he *believed* that Draco was cheating on him. "Mine... you're mine..."

Need. Draco was needed? Doing it this way was wrong, not just because Harry was in such a rush, but because what they needed to do was stop and talk, not fuck. Yet, being told that he was needed and feeling the hard press of Harry's body against his, he was too aroused to tell him no. "Yes, yours, Harry... yours," he whispered as he brushed his lips over Harry's scar.

It hadn't occurred to Draco that Harry was going in dry until he felt the rough entry. His nails bit into Harry's shoulders as he wailed out in protest. "Haaarrrry... waaaait! Slow dooooown! We need..." He felt raw and chafed for an instant. His hands retained their tense grip as he bore out the sharp stab of pain that made his teeth clench and his face flush.

It hurt, and Draco was going to tell Harry to stop, but after a second and then a third hard thrust, the point was moot as Harry was flooding Draco with his release. "I'm sorry... I'm so sorry, Draco. Merlin, I'm so sorry," Harry sobbed into his lover's shoulder, after he realized too late what Draco had been wailing and why.

Of course Draco took it that he meant he was sorry for the rough sex. It hurt, but it wasn't the end of the world. He wasn't exactly a virgin when it came to anal sex. He had been bottoming a while. But it had taken him by surprise and his ass stung.

While the rushed sex was part of what Harry was apologizing for, in his alcohol-addled mind he was apologizing for everything that had happened that night.

"It's all right, Harry. I-I'm fine. I'll be fine," he assured him as he reached back to grasp the tapestry behind him so that he could detangle his legs from around Harry's waist and stand on his own. Once Harry's prick was out of his ass, the ache started anew, but it was dulling again. He knew he'd live through this and he would be fine. He rationalized that Harry was just rough because he was drunk, another thing he decided he'd take up with Harry later. "I'll be fine. Let's-let's go to bed," mumbled Draco. He was tired now and he just wanted to lay down.

"I'm so, so sorry," whimpered Harry.

He searched Harry's troubled green eyes for a moment before he reached up to stroke his cheek and he kissed him gently. "I know you are, Harry. I love you. I'm fine. Really." At that, he started to slowly bend down to get his robe.

Seeing Draco's pained expression, Harry pressed a hand to his shoulder to stop him and knelt down himself to scoop up their robes. He threw his over his shoulder and turned Draco's right-side out. "Draco, I love you, too. So much. I really am..."

"Please stop apologizing, Harry. Just-- don't do it like that again," said Draco as he pushed his arms through the sleeves of his robe that Harry was pulling down over his head like dressing a small child. "I'm really tired now, Harry."

Satisfied that Draco was dressed, he pulled his own robe on. "Bed. Yes," said Harry. "I *need* you, Draco. I don't want you to...."

At this, Draco smiled and ruffled Harry's hair. A look of concern flickered over his face. Harry was being strange. Then again, he was drunk, which was a matter he decided to drop unless it happened again. They'd been fighting that morning, probably the other students took him to a pub and he sobbed in a pint. There were worse things, he reasoned. "I'm not leaving you, Harry. I need you, too. Come on," he said as he took Harry's hand.

"Wait, one second," Harry said as he pulled his wand from his pocket and cast a cleaning spell on the tapestry to remove Draco's semen.

Draco yawned and nodded his approval of the action, although he had found it to be a poetic statement about family trees in general. But since he thought Harry just did it because he was drunk, he didn't ask. Instead, he turned and headed for their room. His ass still smarted, but the pain was ebbing away. By morning it would be gone completely. Harry followed and after they both cleaned up, they sank into Harry's bed clinging tightly to one another as they slept fitfully.

--

"Hermione thinks you need to tell him," intoned Ron in a voice that made it unclear where he stood on this issue.

"I can't. She-doesn't have all of the facts," said Draco as he glared at the parchment, one of many that he'd received from Snape over the past couple of weeks. *You're brilliant with potions.* Check. *This is for your future*. Check. *This art will serve you well in the future*. Check. *Few have this gift*. Check. Then, of course, the diatribe would go into more nebulous rants that might be, depending on Snape's mood, that he saw Draco as the son he never had. Or that Potter was going to ruin his life. Or that people took a chance on Draco's redemption and that perhaps he should be kinder towards people who made mistakes. The last one struck a chord, but seeing as Snape had no way to gauge Draco's response, he didn't realize it and therefore used it the least.

Nearly all correspondences came with a plea for Draco to speak with him. Draco never answered any of them. When the Order had their meetings, Draco would retire to the drawing room with the door closed and Harry would fill him in on what he needed to know.

"She says he'll explode if he finds out we've been hiding this from him," stated Ron.

Draco's jaw flexed. Harry seemed on the cusp of exploding nightly, and for this reason, Draco didn't want to mention Snape's visit or correspondence to him. "He has enough on his mind. He's in all of those Auror training classes; people are plotting to kill him. I think I can spare him the distress of the greasy pederast." Draco's tone was dismissive in spite of how unsettling the idea of Harry finding out about this was. To punctuate his stance on the matter, he crumpled the parchment, tossed it into the air and with a well-aimed "Evanesco," the parchment was permanently banished. "He doesn't ask about Snape. What he *does* ask me about are our little morning chats. I think I'm going to have to tell him."

At this, Ron panicked. He'd also been avoiding Harry's ever more suspicious questions about his "talks" with Draco, but he found it increasingly awkward to talk about, as he still hadn't met his original goal. "You *can't* tell him about that! You swore to me you wouldn't tell!"

"I know what I said, and I've kept to it. But the time has come and he needs to know." Draco folded his hands in his lap calmly. It wasn't nice to betray Ron's trust; he'd prefer permission to tell Harry what was going on. But if Ron wasn't forthcoming, Draco was willing to break his agreement in order to soothe Harry's doubts.

"He'll be angry! She's like a sister to him! He'll get mad you were bargaining her virtue-"

"Oh for the love of *Merlin*, Weasley. I'm the dramatic one! Bargaining her virtue? He knows you haven't shagged her yet. *As we all do*," Draco hissed.

"It's not my fault. We haven't discussed that in a long time now! *You* got us off topic with all of the *practicing*!" shouted Ron as he leapt to his feet in defense.

Draco rubbed his fingers to his temples. "I couldn't take any more of your whining. And it isn't as if you didn't enjoy it!"

"I didn't deny that I enjoyed it! It was great practice! But the rate things are going I may not get to use it with anyone *but you*!"

"Then practice with someone else! I don't care!" shouted Draco.

"BUT THERE'S NO ONE ELSE TO PRACTICE WITH!"

Draco glowered at Ron, "WHY DON'T YOU PRACTICE WITH *HERMIONE*?"

Ron returned the intense stare and then appeared stricken. "You know why."

"I do. Because you're afraid of her."

"I'm not afraid of her, I just don't want her to think I'm a-"

"Fool? Pillock? Buffoon? If she really is the brightest witch of her age, I'm pretty sure she's sussed that you are all of those by now," Draco pointed out as he flopped onto the couch.

Ron gave Draco an irritated look but then sighed and dropped onto a chair. "I don't want her or Harry to know about any of this. Not what we started out discussing or what we've been doing since then," Ron muttered. "What if they find out and I'm asked to perform and I... freeze up?"

"Well, depends on who you're in front of. If it's Hermione she'll probably just say something incredibly condescending and if it's a Death Eater then you'll die," said Draco.

"I almost wish it were the other way around," sighed Ron, reasoning that death dealt from Hermione would be better than suffering the humiliation of her placating him.

Draco shrugged and sat up. "Well, we're almost to the end of the books that Snape brought from my father's study anyway. There are only so many more spells to practice from there."

"I know. I just... I'd rather..."

"I know. But Ron, he'll be so much less stressed out to know we've been practicing spells and gossiping about your shagging Granger than to know that Snape... "

Ron nodded and his look of concern over Harry reflected Draco's. "Is he really that bad off?"

Biting his lip, Draco looked away, not sure he could even communicate properly how he felt, or if he really even wanted to. Ever since the first week of Auror training, Harry had just been... off. Questions about his day would send him off into tirades about fairness and being paired off with a freak. Other times when Draco would try to ask why this Richard person vexed Harry so much, the other boy would turn needy and strange. Draco would find himself pushed against whatever was near, load bearing or not, and taken passionately. In spite of the fact that he'd asked Harry not to do that, he fancied that Harry was simply overwhelmed with his need for him and couldn't help himself. This theory was far more appealing than more realistic scenarios involving infidelity, or that Harry was cracking up; although both theories had played across his mind a few times. "He's just stressed, I think. We just need to... let him in on this one thing."

"But not about Snape."

"He'd..."

"Explode, right," said Ron as he pushed out of the chair.

"Right." Draco was silent for a moment until he remembered something he'd given brief thought to. "Oh. Right, about Granger..."

"Yes?"

Draco got up and moved over to the stack of books that the boys had been exploring together for the past couple of weeks and dug through to the bottom for his copy of *The Taming of the Shrew*. "You've kept up the compliments, right?"

"Well... mostly?"

Giving an annoyed look, Draco shook his head. "Plan a nice dinner for her. Maybe a midnight meal by moonlight or something equally as trite."

"You make it sound so *romantic*, Malfoy."

"Considering the parties involved, I should be praised for my ability to keep down breakfast."

"Ass."

Draco smirked. "Wrap this up and give it to her. It's her favorite." He tossed the tome to Ron.

Ron caught it and looked at it and then at Draco. "But it's yours..."

"Which is why I'm free to give it away."

"No, git. I mean... you don't give things away a lot. I thought you liked it, and it looks expensive."

Draco shrugged. "I don't need it, really. I have others," he said, deciding not to whine that it was his favorite, as well. If he really wanted it again, he could buy another, he reasoned. Although deep down he knew he wouldn't. He could've given Ron this book at any time since Hermione had mentioned liking it. Now that he felt like he and Ron were friends and looking out for one another, he really wanted to.

"Are you sure?" asked Ron as he looked over the gilded letters and felt the fine leather. He knew she'd love it and there was no way he could repay Malfoy. Not in this lifetime.

A million snarky things went through Draco's mind in response, but instead he just nodded.

"Thank you," said Ron as he gave a sincere smile.

Draco grinned back and then shooed him away. "Go on. I'm just going to stay in here and read."

Ron gave one last look at Malfoy and then headed off to his room to plot.

--

"The lack of progress vexes me, Severus," spoke the high, cold voice.

"I apologize, my Lord." Snape was prostrate on the floor before the pale, reptilian man. "But the boy's willfulness was part of his appeal, was it not?"

While it was true that patricide was near and dear to Voldemort's heart, that was not the only reason in his interest in Draco Malfoy. He'd always believed the boy to be little other than a whinging brat who couldn't follow orders. It was a shock that he'd killed his father and made Voldemort reconsider his assessment. It took a good deal of will to take a life, particularly one so close. In fact, it was likely that Draco was stronger and held faster to his convictions than Lucius did. Undoubtedly he made his own path. Although he did fear that Lucius was right. That Draco had been afflicted with that petty emotion of love and the fact that Draco had yet to take the bait was bearing that out. "This little plan puts Richard at risk. He was placed to observe and infiltrate, not to seduce."

"I appreciate the position he is in, playing against his... orientation. There are advantages to his getting closer to Potter."

Voldemort's red eyes blazed for a moment at the contradiction, but he let it go. "It lays more eyes on Richard. It was fortunate that we got him into Auror training at all; setting him so close to Potter is attracting attention to him. It has been made abundantly clear that this road will lead us nowhere. To push Potter further would expose Richard."

Snape nodded and continued to stare at the ground. It meant that he could not count on Potter to cheat on Malfoy to separate them. This was bad news for Snape as well as Malfoy. Voldemort only had so much patience with the boy's reticence to come back to the fold. "I understand, Lord."

"If Malfoy does not come with you willingly then you shall have to bring him by force. Either way, I will have my riches back. I have wasted enough time and energy doing this subtly. I must move forward before the Order does, your prurient interests notwithstanding. Get him out of that house and get the information out of him. If he refuses to turn, end him."

This was sticky. Then again, Snape's circumstances were always sticky. Both sides believed him to be a double agent for the other when, really he only ever looked after himself. Although he strongly suspected that both sides figured that as well. Each side only ever told him as much as they were comfortable with the other knowing, with the exception of a few matters that it would be in Snape's best interest to keep under wraps. It was a complicated cat and mouse game, if there were two cats and one elusive mouse in the middle.

What made it even more complicated was that Snape wasn't even sure Draco had the

information Voldemort wanted. He'd gambled that Draco knew something of how to get to the assets that Lucius was hiding on behalf of Voldemort, but he didn't know that for certain. "What would you have me do, my Lord?"

"I have a plan," answered the Dark Lord, as he held out a book in his long, spidery hands.

--

So that was that as far as Snape was concerned. He sat in his dark cottage on the outskirts of London proper. His dining room table was necessarily small. Aside from the minuteness of his stone house, no one really came over anyway. It was an above ground house, but the lack of windows and torches made the setting dismally the same as the dungeons of Hogwarts.

He glared at the book that Voldemort handed him. His fingers slid over the cover, but he dared not open it. There were worse things that he could be called to do. There were measurable sacrifices in this war, and this was a tolerable one. Perhaps. Snape stood and paced the small confines of his kitchen/dining room. He circled around the small dark table, watching the way that the light played over the ominous silver lettering and the snakes that weaved its way around the spine and cover. It did scream Malfoy, didn't it? Still... Snape wasn't sure he could live with the sacrifice.

Snape pulled his wand and directed it at the book. Muttering an incantation, the book lit up the room in green and then yellow. Snape wailed in pain but maintained, keeping his wand pointed at the tome. His other hand steadied his wrist as his dark eyes narrowed in determination. Again he shouted in pain until he could no longer sustain eye contact and he slammed against the wall, clutching his wand hand against his chest. He had done all that he physically could. Snape hoped it was enough.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 6

It was Ron's turn to be entirely too chipper that morning, and Hermione's to blush and avoid eye contact. None of this escaped Draco's notice, although he wasn't sure whether he should have been proud or ill. On one hand, he'd helped successfully manipulate Granger into putting out. On the other, well, *Granger naked*. Draco pushed his breakfast plate away.

It was juvenile to take satisfaction in squicking Malfoy, but Hermione reasoned it was better than getting offended, so she gave him a deliberate smirk when she saw him pushing his plate away. The night before, she had immediately recognized the book Ron handed her as being of similar design to the one Malfoy had held when she rescued him from Snape. When she read the

title, *The Taming of the Shrew*, she knew. Malfoy must have given Ron the book to give to her, knowing this was her favorite. Of course, she'd already decided to give herself to Ron that night. Bribery didn't work on Gryffindors, but the gesture from the both of them was touching.

Ron caught Draco's eye and he waggled his ginger brows. Trying to suppress a grin, Draco pressed his lips together and nodded solemnly. Ron lit up in a beaming smile. Draco opened his mouth and jabbed his index finger in to imitate gagging. This set Ron to giggling and Harry snapped his head up like an angry librarian.

"What's going on?" The edge of Harry's tone sucked the mirth out of the room.

Draco opened his mouth only to catch Ron's warning look. Ron's eyes darted meaningfully to his parents. "Nothing."

"That was an awful lot of giggling for *nothing* to be going on." Harry glared at Draco. Draco furrowed his brows.

Again Draco started to speak. Ron promptly stomped on his foot to prevent it. "Ow!"

Harry's resentful gaze turned on Ron just as Ginny breezed in. She took a seat on the other side of Harry. "Oh, Ron and Draco playing footsie again?" she teased before catching the dour looks on everyone's faces.

"*Again*?" questioned Harry.

"She's *teasing*, Harry. They don't play footsie. *Or anything else*." Hermione was trying to be reassuring. She'd gotten a fair idea of what was going on in that scarred head of his, but under the watchful eyes of the Weasleys, it wasn't a good time to blurt out what Ron and Draco were giggling about. Watching Harry's ever-reddening face, she determined what his problem must be. Projection. Though she tried to talk Harry through his episode with his classmate a few nights ago, he was determined to hang onto his guilt. She didn't see that he'd done anything wrong, but it was clear that it was eating him alive. Hermione was starting to wonder if her advising him not to confess it to Draco had been the right thing to do. Especially with as moody and tense as Harry was.

In spite of Harry's prickliness and Ron's wrathful look, Draco leaned in to whisper the "big secret." Before he could make a sound, Harry had sprung up from the table, skittering the chair behind him a few feet before it dumped over. "I need to go, I don't want to be late," Harry announced.

Arthur was surprised by Harry's response to what he thought was a rather obvious situation. The Weasleys were no fools. After all, they had a litter of children and this whole scene was an open book. Clearly his son and Hermione had... well, he didn't want to think about it in those specific terms, but he was happy for his son. There was a good twenty minutes before they needed to be at the Ministry. "Harry, there's still plenty of time before we need to...."

"I'm going NOW," seethed Harry as he tromped to the stairs.

Watching Harry up the stairs, Arthur decided he might as well follow and try to talk to the boy along the way. He kissed Molly and said his goodbyes before giving Ron a knowing wink. He then gave Draco a quick nod to indicate he'd try to sort it out. Draco frowned at his plate.

--

"We have to stop. I'm exhausted." Draco's pallid brow glistened in the midmorning light. He blotted it off with his handkerchief.

Ron nodded and wiped his sweaty face with his sleeve. "I was exhausted an hour ago."

Draco flopped on the couch and slid his wand away. "Yet another way in which I'm superior to you."

By now, Ron was used to Draco's attitude. He shrugged it off. "Are you going to be all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Might have a nap, though."

"You and your naps," said Ron as he shakily put his wand away and brushed his sweaty palms on his robe. Draco had been very driven to practice magic today; Ron surmised it was to do with his spat with Harry. He tried to keep up with Draco, particularly since he felt responsible for their friction.

"You tire me." Draco stretched out on the couch and rested the side of his face on one of the cushions.

Ron started towards the door, taking Draco's not-so-subtle hint, but paused after a thought, "Thanks for letting us have the bedroom and all."

Draco decided not to tell anyone about the portrait's habit of mocking him when no one else was around. He wasn't about to talk about it now. "It's not the same without Harry in there with me."

Ron rolled his eyes. "I never took you for such a sap."

Draco snorted as he rubbed his palms into his tired eyes. "I didn't either."

"I'm glad that you two-- I mean, I'm glad you have-- You two are good-- You know, he's only upset because he loves you so much." Ron frowned at his incoherency, but Draco seemed to understand what he was getting at.

"Yes. I know. Love is grand, isn't it?" Draco attempted a wry smile, but it came out rather pitiful.

Sympathetic to Draco's stress, Ron assured, "I'll talk to him when he gets back, get it all straightened around. You just have a nap. You'll wake up and everything will be right as rain."

"Mm. Good." Draco pulled the throw blanket up over his shoulder and snuggled in. "See to the door on your way out?" He didn't think everything could be fixed quite so easily, but he wasn't going to turn down some help.

"Have a good nap." Ron left the room and shut the door. As an afterthought, he cast a Silencing Charm on the room guessing that Draco could use some quiet time after the morning he'd had.

--

On top of his relationship stresses, Harry was not having the time of his life in Auror training. He filled his supper talk at Grimmauld by expanding his sparse training victories into longer stories to give the impression he was well liked. He only ever talked about training when asked since none of his classmates talked to him much.

Not even Richard. Not that he wanted to talk to the man after "the kiss."

There were few things more vexing, Harry decided, than ignoring someone who obviously didn't care. He'd expected for Richard to either throw a big fit at him after their pub brawl or to apologize. Richard did neither. In fact, he distanced himself from Harry and, shortly thereafter began to make rather *intimate* friends with two female trainees.

Harry wasn't sure why he felt so insulted; he should've been relieved. Instead he felt like a hit-and-run victim. Richard showed up, implied Draco's infidelity, took him to a pub to sexually assault him, and then left Harry to deal with the remaining remorse and without concern for the wreckage he'd left behind. Harry dearly wished he'd stuck with his first impression of the man and stayed away.

But he hadn't stayed away and as a result, he'd kissed another man. No, it hadn't been his intention, but he went to that pub of his own free will, sure enough. He had an inkling of what might happen there when he accepted, given the winks and flirty manner in which he'd received the invitation. At the time, part of him even thought that he wanted something to happen. Just to show Draco.

Draco. Evasive Draco. Manipulative Draco. Draco-who-had-probably-dropped-the-issue-of-topping-because-he-was-screwing-Ron. Yet, Draco who constantly told him and showed him how much he loved him. Draco-who-was-putting-up-with-the-snapping-and-possessive-and-rough-lovemaking. Why? Why would Draco put up with it? Especially if he had someone else? Deep down Harry knew. He knew there was nothing but fidelity and sincere love. Maybe now he just wanted Draco and Ron to be involved so that he could feel less guilty about what had happened with Richard. So that Harry could point his finger and say "Hah! You're not perfect either!"

What the shit was that with Draco and Ron? Giggling? Footsie? Harry could feel his anger stirring again. It wasn't just that he worried that Draco was cheating on him. What also rankled him was that life was going on without him. Draco and Ron were... friends? That shouldn't bother him. That's what he wanted, wasn't it? For his lover and his friends to get along? Yet that happening without him there he felt lost and talked about and jealous of not being there to see the friendship develop. *If that's all it really was.*

Harry reflected on the conversation he had with Hermione about the kiss with Richard. He'd conveniently left out the circumstances that had led him to going with his classmate to the pub. He didn't think she needed to hear that her boyfriend might be unfaithful any more than he wanted to think it. It probably should have occurred to him that she didn't suspect that for a reason, but it didn't. Hermione didn't ask why Harry had gone to the pub with Richard in the first place, likely assuming that he was popular and got invitations out frequently. He didn't care to ruin that impression either.

Her advice was on the money, and he knew it. Even so, it hurt not to tell Draco what happened. He wanted to confess, to beg forgiveness. Or maybe he wanted to confront Draco with it. Wait for the other boy to scream at him so he could make his accusations about why he locked himself away with Ron in the mornings. Mornings that Harry was not a part of. Mornings that led to giggling at breakfast over things that Harry didn't know about. He was stuck in Auror training every day. It should have been fun here. He should be having the time of his life. Instead he was ignored, if not reviled, while at Grimmauld they were all having wild fun. *Maybe even orgies*, he thought in hysterical bitterness.

He couldn't concentrate. This was unfortunate for Harry because he was brewing a blood-staunching potion and Harry wasn't good at concentrating for long periods of time on his best day. He was staring blankly at the manual when his potion caught fire and noxious fumes filled the room. Richard led the charge of cackling at Harry as their classes were dismissed for the day. He started to respond but found himself too wound up to even form coherent response. So, with the afternoon sun shining down on his daunted face, Harry trudged towards Grimmauld Place.

--

To anyone who wasn't Draco, the Eagle owl who arrived with a flat, bulky package would've appeared to be the Malfoy family owl. Though it was an intentionally excellent likeness, it was not the same owl.

Hermione was thrilled to have received what appeared to be another book. She smiled and fed the owl a treat and unwrapped the package.

"I don't know if I'm comfortable with Malfoy giving you gifts, Hermione," said Ron with his brows raised. To Ron, it made no sense that Draco would send Hermione a present, especially another book.

"Maybe he wants to thank me for rescuing him from Snape?"

"A month later?"

Hermione shrugged. "Well, it arrived by *his owl*."

"Which is also odd because I haven't seen his owl since Hogwarts," Ron pointed out. Not even Malfoy knew where his owl was at present, not that he'd fretted over it. It was a family owl, not a pet. He'd never been allowed pets.

Already, Hermione's fingers were sliding over the snakes woven into the cover and she was mouthing the words on the tome. "*A Serpent's Revenge: Sneaky Spells To Wreak Havoc*. It sounds like him, doesn't it? Anyway Ron, only someone who knows where we are could get an owl to us."

Ron was dubious. Even if Draco had suddenly become altruistic and decided to buy Hermione a gift, Draco would've mentioned it to him. No, he definitely couldn't see Draco buying Hermione something to give her from himself. Not wanting to see her dead and showering her with gifts were two very different things. He was just about to express his doubt about it actually being from Malfoy when Hermione threw open the book.

There was a flash of golden light. Hermione's eyes widened in shock as the strong magic hit her, jolting her body rigid before releasing her. Letting out little other than a whimpered sigh, she crashed face first into the open book. Ron shrieked and grabbed Hermione up into his arms, not sure what else to do. He was relieved to feel her breath on his cheek; at least she was still alive. A second later, two things happened; Molly was up the stairs and in Ron's room, and the portrait of Mrs. Black woke and began screaming her wrath.

"OH THE UNWORTHINESS WHO HAVE BEFOULED THE HOME OF MY FOREBEARERS, THUS SHALL YOU SUFFER THE VENGEANCE OF MY ELDERS! YOU SHALL SUFFER AND DIE!"

--

"How dare you! How *could* you?" screeched Harry as he stormed through the silenced drawing room door.

Draco jolted awake and stared up in groggy shock at his enraged lover. "What?"

"Hermione!"

"Huh? Oh.-- *that*... well..." stuttered Draco. Clueless as to what had happened to Hermione, Draco assumed that Harry found out about his helping Ron get into her knickers and reacted as poorly as Ron had feared. "I--" he stumbled again, not sure what to say. "She needed it?"

"SHE NEEDED IT?" Harry shrieked. How Hermione needed to have a book blow up in her face was beyond him and, had he been in a more stable frame of mind he might have wondered if Draco wasn't on about something else entirely. "ARE YOU SAYING SHE DESERVED IT?"

Draco furrowed his brows. Sure, why not? Who wasn't deserving of a good seeing to? "Yes, she deserved it. Honestly, I think she *earned it*. I don't see what the big deal is, I realize she's your friend and all, Harry, but in the end she's just a girl," he pled, reasoning that Harry must have her on a pedestal that made him think she was above sex.

"SHE'S NOT JUST A GIRL, SHE'S MY BEST FRIEND AND SHE-- SHE'S HURT!" screamed Harry as he rushed to the couch and yanked Draco to his feet. They were lucky that the silencing charm was still intact or the noise would have likely roused Mrs. Black again.

Draco yelped in surprise as he was spun around and then thrown against the tapestry on the wall. "HARRY! STOP IT! IT DIDN'T HURT HER--. IT'S NOT THAT BIG OF A DEAL!" Well, as far as he knew it didn't hurt her, but then, who knew just how big Ron was? In a less desperate moment, he might've made that joke to Harry; instead he scrammed to pull out his wand for defense.

"Pulling your wand on me, *Malfoy*?" hissed Harry as he plucked it out of Draco's grasp before he could get a hex out.

"You're mad! Give me back my wand! Get *off* of me!" Draco screeched in utter panic. Harry pocketed Draco's wand and grabbed him by the front of his robes.

Ron had been thrown out of Hermione's room while Molly tended to her injuries. In spite of the fact that the package was made to appear that Malfoy had sent the book, Ron wasn't buying it. He was shocked that Harry was. Wasn't Harry his lover? Shouldn't he give him more of the benefit of the doubt than this? Ron dashed to the room just in time to catch Draco whom Harry had thrown at the door. "Harry! Wait! Stop!" Ron protested.

"And YOU! What happened, Ron? Did you dump him for Hermione? Is that what happened? He couldn't stand that you shagged her and attacked her?" shrieked Harry.

"What?" Ron and Draco looked each other over as if this were the most repellant thought ever presented. "Harry... we're not..." Ron began.

"Boys, boys," drawled Snape as he appeared in the doorway behind Ron and Draco. "Is there a problem?"

"YOU! It figures you'd show up now. Well you can *have him*. I'm *done*," growled Harry.

"WHAT?" cried Draco in panic. He eyed Ron who was shaking his head in incredulity.

Snape was pleased that things had worked out according to plan. Hermione, insofar as he could

tell, was unconscious but not dead thanks to his weakening of the book's potency. He was astounded that Ron wasn't attacking Draco as well, however; that wasn't a deal breaker. He had a mission and he was following through with it. He grabbed Draco by the arm. "I don't know about *having him*, Potter, but I will not leave him here for more of your *abuse*."

Draco glanced at Snape in trepidation and then looked to Harry in appeal. Harry glowered at his lover and then gave a dismissive wave for Snape to take him away. Draco grabbed for Ron's sleeve, but missed. Snape yanked Draco into the hall with him and slammed the door before Ron had a chance to react.

"Harry, you can't let Snape take him!" Ron turned to open the door, prepared to stop this himself if Harry wasn't going to.

It was too late; Snape had hexed the door locked and shoved the dazed Slytherin ahead of him.

"Merlin, Harry!" Ron cried as he tried wiggling the door knob as if that would dislodge something.

"Oh sure, you'd defend him, wouldn't you, Ron? I thought you were my *friend*, but you always were very jealous of me. *You always wanted the things I had*. I should've seen this coming," snapped Harry. Part of him wanted to beat Ron till he bled, but he was too exhausted and miserable to put up such a fight.

"Seen *what* coming, Harry?" Ron asked distractedly before he started trying a litany of counter hexes to open the door. In an attempt to be productive, he chose to ignore the hurtfulness of Harry's insinuation. They needed to focus on rescuing Draco from Snape.

"You and Draco."

Ron stopped and stared at Harry. Disregarding it wasn't going to work. "I thought you wanted us to be *friends*. You just haven't been around. *You're* still my *best friend*. He's just...he was here. There is *nothing else going on*."

Harry put his hands over his face and shook his head. "I love him, Ron. I love him so much and he just-- and you-- the two of you..."

"Harry, I have room for more than one friend. He helped me a lot with Hermione. That's the thing, Harry. He really wouldn't have done this to Hermione. He hasn't said so, but... well I think he likes her all right, too. Or at least he wouldn't see her hurt. He did say he wouldn't see her dead," he said as he remembered their earlier conversation to that effect. "But we can straighten that out later. We *really* need to get Snape away from him, Harry."

"You mean-- he-- *Hermione too*?" Harry peered over his fingers in horror at Ron, now believing that Draco also shagged Hermione.

Ron shook his head at Harry and spoke as one would to an excitable child. "Yes, he gets along with all of us. Sort of. In his own-- well, none of us wants to kill each other so much anymore."

"No, of course, why would you kill the slutty mad shagger?" Harry scrambled to his feet. "How *could* you? How could you all be shagging one another like that? Oh I bet it was a BRILLIANT ORGY that you all had at my expense!"

Ron raised his wand, ready for Harry to attack, which as unhinged as he was acting, seemed likely. Honestly, how he'd gotten from what he'd said about Draco not wanting to kill Hermione to thinking he'd shagged her was insane. Frankly, he was sick of the sexual implications as well, which Harry had latched onto like a dog with a bone. "BLOODY HELL, WOULD YOU LET IT GO ALREADY, HARRY? I KEEP TELLING YOU WE'RE FRIENDS. THAT IS ALL, *JUST FRIENDS*." It would've been funny if it hadn't been so sick and if Ron weren't becoming increasingly fearful of Harry's madness. Not to mention what Snape might be doing to Draco. "I HAVEN'T BEEN SHAGGING DRACO! I DON'T WANT TO! I'M STRAIGHT! I SHAGGED HERMIONE!"

"WHAT?" shrieked Harry.

"I-- err-- Hermione-- " stuttered Ron, flushing scarlet.

"I thought... you hadn't? I thought you err-- were-- and-- uhhh-- "

"We-- no. We hadn't. Draco was helping me with that...she and I did... last night. *For the first time, for either of us*. Draco just had his father's books and we were practicing spells in here."

"That's what you two were err... in here-- why-- why didn't he tell me that?" asked Harry, simultaneously relieved and upset.

"I-- he-- he wanted to tell you but I was embarrassed and I made him promise not to. We started out talking about Hermione and how I could umm... you know... because we hadn't. I thought it would be... weird for you to know I was trying to. Or that you'd think I was umm... lame... for not um... doing it before now." Ron lowered his wand and looked at the floor. He felt guilty for the stress he'd put on Harry and his relationship.

"He promised you," whispered Harry in realization that Draco had just been acting out of... *friendship*. It stung worse to know that Draco had been only doing what Harry had asked him to. Harry had kissed another man and threatened Draco and-- now he allowed Snape to run off with him? "Then why did he send that book?"

"I really don't think he did, Harry. I know it looks bad, but-- she-- he-- well... He just wouldn't do it. It's not important right now. We need to get him away from Snape. I wasn't supposed to tell you but..."

"What? Why are you *all* keeping things from me?"

Ron frowned, that answer seemed obvious, but Harry evidently needed it spelled out for him. "Well, he said you've seemed so stressed and Draco was just... worried about you. But... Hermione caught Snape all over Draco and helped him get away a few weeks ago. That's what she said, anyway."

"Snape was here? Touching him again?" Harry wondered if Snape didn't have something to do with that book, given how quickly he managed to turn up, but he was too outraged with this revelation to voice it.

"Before, yes. But now he just ran out of here with Draco and you--"

"Merlin!"

"Exactly!" said Ron, who turned around and tried more counter curses.

--

Draco meekly protested being carted away by Snape, but his movements were leaden with grief.

Harry wanted him to leave.

Harry didn't want him anymore.

Evidently, Harry found out he was helping Ron get into Hermione's knickers and that was that.

Draco was stunned, but mostly he just felt sick. He let out a choked sob as Snape shoved him against the wall. Snape stuck a gloved hand into his pocket and held out a vial of a luminescent potion to Draco. After registering it for what it was, he looked up at Snape in question.

"Take it," Snape ordered.

Draco didn't move. "I'm not drinking that."

"Just hold it!" he insisted. Pulling off the glove on his other hand with his teeth, he grabbed Draco's hand and held it palm up in front of him.

"What? Why?" squalled Draco.

"It's a Portkey."

"Wait! I don't want to--" but in an instant, Snape had placed the vial in Draco's hand and covered it with his own. Feeling the familiar, uneasy swirling tug at his stomach, Draco was transported from Grimmauld Place. He found himself in a very dark room that had the same strange anise smell as the Potions master himself. Looking around wildly at the dim room, he tried to spy an

exit or suss out where he was standing.

"Welcome to my home, Draco," purred Snape as he slid his fingers up Draco's arm and caressed his face.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 7

Draco squirmed away from Snape's grasp and assessed the room he was in. The light waned in the already dreary stone cottage, but he could still make out trite details of a room decorated with an obsessive loyalty to Slytherin. Forest green velvet couch, inky black leather chair by the fire, teak Chippendale-knockoff coffee table; it was like a claustrophobic representation of the common room.

"I realize it's not the spacious grandeur that you are used to..." drawled Snape.

Trying to calm himself so that he could gather his wits about him, Draco gave a noncommittal gesture. If he didn't calm down and focus, he'd be easy prey, he reasoned. "I suppose it works."

"Have a seat." Seeing Draco's eyes flitting to the lonely chair, he grabbed the boy's bony shoulder and shoved him onto the couch. Snape took the spot next to him.

The eerie light of the room concentrated on Draco's pale blue robes, lighting him up with an ethereal glow. He appeared angelic until he spoke. "What the *shit* am I doing here?" His expression was somewhere between anger and grief as he gave up on observing his surroundings and concentrated his gaze on Snape.

"I was protecting you, Draco. I told you that Potter would turn on you and look at what he did," he said as he pointed out the strained buttons on his robe.

Covering them with his elegant hand, Draco looked away. "It was a misunderstanding, obviously. I need to get back and sort it out."

"I am not taking you back. What did I tell you about them, Draco? They will never trust you, not really. They will never believe in you. At the first opportunity, Potter turned on you, didn't he?" asked Snape as he slipped an arm along the back of the couch.

That stung, but Draco held fast to his stoic sneer. He still had no idea what happened to Hermione that made Harry turn on him, he hoped that if he kept Snape talking that it would come out. "There must have been a reason. Something happened. I don't know what's going on, I

need to get back and find out so that I can explain. He seems to think something was going on with Ron and me, and Hermione was hurt?"

Snape balked. "Ron? Hermione? I do believe that is the first time I have heard those names pass over your lips in such a *familiar* fashion." Had Draco made friends with those *Gryffindors*? That would put a kink in things. Then again, Snape had faith that if *Harry* didn't trust Draco, that the others would soon follow and that he'd be covered.

Draco gave a deferential shrug. "The point is, there's a mess there and I'm... here. I need to be *there* to find out what happened and to explain."

"I brought you here to protect you, Draco. Potter has gone quite mad, and I can only assume that Weasley hadn't found out what happened to Miss Granger or he would have been attacking you as well," he purred as he slid his hand down to Draco's shoulder.

Immediately, Draco's body twitched and he turned his head to eye the pallid hand until it was back on the couch. He cast his defiant grey eyes on the Potions master and growled through his teeth, "But I *didn't do anything*. I'll go there and we'll sort it out. Take me back. *Now*." One thing he was certain of; whatever happened didn't have to do with Hermione losing her virginity. This had to be much more serious than that. Feeling Snape's lecherous hand back on his shoulder, Draco gave him a scathing look.

The older man ignored it. "Draco, it is no coincidence that I showed up when I did. The reasons that I did come will be dubious, but I should have to ask you to hear me out on them."

Draco closed his eyes and flexed his jaw. "Professor Snape, let's *pretend* for a moment that I am an upset and traumatized student who has experienced one of those shatteringly horrid days. A day where everything I thought I could depend on has gone pear shaped and that I'm being attacked on all sides. In fact, let's go on to *make believe* that I've been attacked by the only person left in this world that I truly care about, but before I got the chance to find out why, some lecherous old man who's been trying to feel me up for months dragged me away. Not to another room for a quiet chat. Not to someone who could help sort things out easily like Dumbledore. No, instead he dragged me away to. His. *Home*."

Draco reached up and shoved at Snape's hand. In response, his hand squeezed tighter. Draco's eyes flared with fury and his hand automatically moved to where he kept his wand. *Fuck. Fucking Potter still had his wand, didn't he? Fuck.* "Do you think you'd really want to sit here and hear them out?"

Draco's speech making left Snape unimpressed. His face moved right into the insolent boy's personal space and he peered deep into Draco's eyes. "I would guess that if a boy, we'll call him you, found himself disarmed and in this '*lecherous old man's*' home with no visible means of escape... I'd suggest he learn some manners. Otherwise the '*lecherous old man*' might well *take* what he wanted from the '*upset and traumatized student*' and there would be little said student could do."

It took a moment for the threat to register completely. When it did, his jaw dropped and his accelerated breath fanned Snape's face until the man withdrew. Draco blinked a few times and scanned the cottage like a frightened rabbit. He licked his lips and smoothed out his robes in an attempt to look composed. "I-I-I-see," he stammered as he stared down at his lap, too terrified to make eye contact.

"No, you do not see, Draco. But I will tell you now," he cooed. Would he have hurt Draco? No, he would not. But the threat had its desired effect of subduing Draco enough so that he would pay attention. "I knew what was going to happen, as it was done on order of the Dark Lord. He desires you to come back to the fold. He sees that your killing of your own father in defense of what you want means that you are strong, bold and ruthless. You are everything that your father was, and more." Snape released his grip on Draco's shoulder and slid his hand up and down the boy's arm.

Draco recoiled. Not just from the touches, but to the very notion that he was like his father. He was not *that* ruthless, was he? Killing his father wasn't something he did for his principles; his father was a threat to his life and probably Harry's. Well, no, not Harry's. He knew that now. But at the time he had no idea. Still, to get what the wanted, he'd murdered his father, and that was rather cold-blooded. "I'm not becoming a Death Eater. Bind me up and do whatever your perverted heart desires. I'm *not* betraying Harry. I don't care what the Dark Lord thinks I did or why I did it. I refuse."

Snape cackled at him. "Dear boy, perhaps you were miss-sorted after all. What a *brave and noble* sentiment. Or perhaps Potter is rubbing off on you."

"We do a lot of *rubbing*," he snapped, hoping it would bother the older man. "Or perhaps it's my new Gryffindor sperm diet."

"There is no need to be crude, Draco." Snape's nostrils flared at the visual Draco's words evoked.

Draco took a small measure of pleasure that the barb struck home. He sneered in satisfaction.

"Why you must still stick up for that selfish, spoiled boy..." started Snape.

Whipping his head up, he eyed Snape in disbelief. "Spoiled? Harry? Oh, well I suppose he did grow up with that *whole luxurious cupboard* all to himself."

"Since he's gotten to Hogwarts..."

"He's repeatedly had his life threatened, and been bullied and badgered..."

"You being chief amongst his bullies," Snape pointed out.

"Well *I didn't know*. I didn't know how he'd grown up, I didn't know... any of it. And besides, I was 11. You... you KNEW. You knew this boy had grown up abused and you were... horrid. *Horrid to a child*! Who could *ever* love you? Who could ever want to be with someone as-" Draco's speech was cut off by a slap to his face. Draco wasn't adept when it came to Muggle fighting, yet he raised a shaky fist. Then he caught sight of Snape's wand. Fear coursed through his veins and his hand dropped into his lap.

"We've gone off track. *Potter* and his tormented childhood is beside the point." Snape kept his wand poised at Draco as he settled his other arm around him. He watched the rapid rise and fall of the boy's narrow chest, but there was nothing for it. He needed to get this all out to Draco whether he liked it or not. "I had hoped to talk to you about this without interruption before something as dramatic as the attack on Miss Granger happened. However, you are as stubborn as your father."

"And I'm as patient as my father, so move it along," Draco hissed as his hand moved up to the burning flesh of his cheek. It wasn't the hardest slap he'd ever endured, but it still infuriated him.

There were so many things Snape wanted to say to Draco. He wanted to explain to him how he wanted this whole conversation to go. He wanted the boy to know how much he truly cared about him and his welfare, and that pinning all of his hopes and dreams on a boy whose life may imminently be cut short was foolish. That Snape had a toe in on both sides and that no matter what happened in the end, he was covered. He idly stroked Draco's flaxen hair, which radiantly shone in the final rays of daylight.

Snape sighed to stall as he arranged his thoughts. "I realize that you do not wish to betray Potter, and I wouldn't goad you if it were more probable that the boy would prove victorious. However, by joining the Death Eaters, you could be like me. Work with me playing both sides. You could get invaluable information for your boyfriend by working within the system. You already have the Occlumency skills required. All you have to do is come with me. Work with me. Take the Mark. Then, should Potter and the Order not prove victorious... you would be counted amongst the faithful with the Death Eaters and survive."

Draco detested Snape touching him, but he was trapped and now he was burdened with the decision of whether he should join up with the Death Eaters to spy. He brought his hands up to his face and rubbed at his eyes. Then he squeezed pressed his fingers to his temples as he considered. "Does the Order even *need* another spy? Wouldn't Vo- Vo... the Dark Lord be suspicious of me? How much information would he trust me with?"

Snape was taken aback with that astute observation, and he took some of pride in it. Draco was a clear thinker, and that was definitely in his favor. It improved the odds for his survival in this mess. However, it would make talking him into this thorny. "The Order needs as much information as it can get. He may not trust you with much information at the start, but as the final battle nears, you will be trusted out of sheer necessity. Also, remember that your friends are being indoctrinated as we speak. Perhaps you could keep Crabbe and Goyle out of the line of fire."

Goyle. Damned if Draco hadn't thought of Goyle even once over the whole summer. He may be brighter than those two, he thought, but he wasn't a good friend at all. He winced and rubbed at his forehead. It all made sense on the surface, but very deep into it, it just sounded like a good way to get himself slain. Just how would he keep Goyle 'out of the line of fire' anyway? If Goyle wasn't on the Order's side, he'd be imprisoned at the conclusion of the War anyway. Goyle wasn't really clever enough for the amount of deception that would be required to join him in spying.

Still, the idea of being a hero, saving Harry, being someone who helped to turn things further in his boyfriend's favor was appealing. Very appealing. He leaned back against the back of the couch and stared at the ceiling. "And this is *all* you wanted to talk to me about all summer?"

"Yes, Draco. This is why I've been so desperate to talk to you. Before the Lord went to extremes to get you out of that house," he said as he watched the boy furrow his brows as he weighed his options. "Of course, should you go this route... you will be withdrawn from Hogwarts. And because of the possibility of the Dark Lord using you against Harry, you will be required to end your relationship with him. That shouldn't be difficult, given the state of things." Snape scooted forward and rested his hand on Draco's sternum. He expected Draco to shove him away, but he didn't; the boy didn't even seem to notice that Snape was touching him.

"Break up... with Harry? End it?" Draco swallowed hard as he felt everything inside of him ice over. It was nearly impossible to breathe at the very concept of not going to Hogwarts. Not seeing Harry. Not touching him. Not waking up to him. He let out a quiet whimper and squeezed his eyes shut. Could he do this? Make this sacrifice to protect his lover?

Snape moved closer, practically on top of the boy now. Draco hadn't noticed the first few buttons on his robe being yanked undone, nor how close the teacher had gotten. "There are... other people who love you, Draco. Other people who would make you happy and could keep you safe. Even from yourself," he whispered before pressing his dry lips against the warm, youthful ones.

Grasping Draco's chin, his thumb pushed against the bone and forcing the teen's mouth open to deepen the reluctant kiss. His other hand slid down, jerking open the buttons down the front of the garment to his waist. With decisive wrenching, Snape forced the robe to give way, flinging buttons around the darkened cottage. Snape's hand snaked in for his prize; his fingers curled around Draco's flaccid length and began to stroke.

Draco's eyes opened and darted wildly around the room as he felt the tongue in his mouth. His body stiffened and he made whining noises of protest into Snape's mouth, which were cut short when he felt the waxy fingers circling his manhood. Mind flooded with panic, Draco was unable to come up with ideas for how to get out of this. He was pinned him against the couch, too small to push the larger man off. Snape threatened to have his way with him, and with Draco being unarmed, he likely could.

Not having time to plan, Draco decided that the best defense at the moment was offense. He

started to participate in the kiss hesitantly; dragging his tongue lightly over the back of Snape's yellowed teeth. Even Snape's breath was stale and foul, like old licorice and wasted garlic.

Feeling Draco participating, Snape smiled into the kiss and then broke it. He looked at the boy and then down his lithe body to the soft, pink prick in his hand. Draco looked away in humiliation of Snape seeing it, but the older man didn't notice that. "I knew you would see reason my boy, my beautiful, brilliant boy. You are too good for Potter. You need someone more refined that could understand you, that wouldn't treat you... like *that*," he said as he continued to fondle Draco's prick. "Spread your legs, Draco," he ordered. The boy sat still, though again his breathing picked up.

"Draco," he intoned. Draco moved his legs a fraction wider. Frustrated, Snape thrust his hand under the boy and prodded at his opening. Draco's face flushed and he bit back his revulsion at being manhandled by this repellant man. He wanted to be a hero. Harry's hero. If Harry needed someone who could find out what Voldemort was up to, someone who could get that information for him, then Draco wanted to be that person.

"We must do something about this, Draco," grumbled Snape as he gave the young man's disinterested prick a squeeze. Snape lowered himself to the floor. His dry-lipped gaping maw was approaching Draco's prick when the youth's arms shot out to Snape's shoulders, halting him.

"Wait. Wait-- I... "

"Draco, you need me. If you want to help Harry, *you need me*. Perhaps in time you'll realize what's important, but for now... just try to relax," he said as his fingers breeched the tight band of Draco's muscles to feel the heat inside.

Draco's hips jolted up and out of the path of the probing finger as he yelped and twisted away. "I... it's... just... maybe... could we just... maybe some tea... or... something... stronger, like... firewhisky?"

Snape gave Draco an indulgent smile and nodded. That sounded like a very good idea. Given how reticent the boy was, perhaps an extra bit of one of his potions to induce arousal wouldn't hurt, just to *help* him, naturally. "Of course. Of course. Just relax. Are you hungry? Some biscuits, perhaps?" he offered.

Draco nodded as he pulled his robes back around him to avoid Snape's leering. "Biscuits would be good. Just-- yes. Please."

Please sounded a little odd out of Malfoy's mouth, but then again, the boy was quite uneasy. Snape moved off of his knees and into the kitchen. He contained his triumphant smile until he was sure he was out of eyesight. Then he began to prepare a proper tea and searched through his cabinets to find where he'd hidden a vial of an amorous potion.

Draco sat numb on the couch, using this stalling tactic to debate his options. If he were to do

this, become a Death Eater and work with Snape, this wouldn't be the end of the fumbling attempts to seduce him. In fact, he was apparently expected to allow Snape to fuck him. Chances were that after this he'd be pressured into some manner of disgusting affair with the man. That concept was just as hideous as the idea of not seeing Harry until the war was over. No Hogwarts? No green eyes? No soft kisses and being held till he dozed off? Not seeing the boy he loved more than anything?

He probably should stay. He should be Harry's hero. It was the *righteous and self-sacrificing* thing to do. He was never so glad to be a *Slytherin*. Hearing Snape puttering around in the kitchen, Draco jumped up and began buttoning whatever buttons were left on his robes.

First stop was the fireplace. He scanned the area for Floo Powder, but of course, none was to be found. He looked under the couches, over the mantle; he tried the books in the bookcase beside the fire, all to no avail. He even checked the wing back chair for a hidden spot under the cushion and then under the cushions of the couch. It was possibly the quietest ransacking in history.

The distinctive Wizard whistle of the hot water being ready for tea brought Draco back down to Earth. Even if he had found the Floo powder, he didn't know the address he was going to. He didn't know? Or did he not remember? Was it the Fidelius Charm? Or was Draco just really scatterbrained? He stood frozen in the middle of the room in indecision until he heard the clattering of china on a tray. This was it. If he was getting out, he needed to go now. But where? Where in the world was he? Snape's house, but where in the hell was that? He didn't know. On a normal day Draco wouldn't care either. But today it was dreadfully important.

Eyes cutting riotously around him, he spotted a door and flung himself towards it. Draco silently prayed that this wouldn't thrust him into an alternate dimension. Or worse, it could open to Snape's bedroom. He threw the door open and saw that it was nighttime in what he believed to be the absolute middle of nowhere. Faintly, he could hear water lapping to the shore. A decrepit, boxy car with its lights on caught Draco's eye as it passed by on the road atop a fairly steep hill that started a few yards away. It was unlike than the cars the Ministry loaned out to get him to King's Cross. It was not nearly so shiny or pristine as those vehicles were. His nose wrinkled at the idea of being trapped in a confined space with a Muggle, but at least there was a reduced chance of being forcibly penetrated. No guarantees, however.

Hearing the loud clatter of the tea set being hastily dumped onto a tray was enough to spur Draco on out the door and into the great, wide Muggle world. Wandless. Helpless. Terrified.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 8

Snape thought he felt a chilly breeze, but he was too wrapped up in piecing together the remnants of his family's tea set to pay heed. He couldn't even recall if his family ever had formal tea in their summer home. His family hadn't been particularly well of off. They'd been rather solidly middle class, but sought to move themselves upwards. This ramshackle cottage was just another of his mother's brilliant affectations of wealth that led them to doing without in other areas. *Such as pants*, Snape often bitterly recalled.

Though the Snapes were pure of blood, they were never quite accepted beyond their middle class roots in Wizarding society. They were proud when Severus managed to become a Death Eater. His family believed the war and their son's involvement in it would bring them to the status of higher-class prestige that their Pureblood lineage deserved.

After Voldemort fell and their illusions were shattered, Snape's family imploded. None of them spoke to one another after a mutual agreement that Severus would have the cottage in Rhiw, Wales over the summers while everyone else carried on as if the others did not exist.

Growling as he found yet another chipped china cup and set it aside, he pondered whether status wasn't part of his attraction to Draco. Fame seeking was unquestionably ingrained upon his very nature. Being with Draco, provided they both survived the war, would put him on the social map. However, that wouldn't happen if he didn't get past this first hurdle of setting a proper tea and bedding the boy, he reasoned.

Finally he found two cups that matched and had no chips and set them on the tray. By the time he got to the living area, Draco was long gone. "Draco?" he asked. He dropped the tray on the coffee table and spun around as if the boy might've been shadowing him. First, he could smell the sea, and then he could hear it. The door was open. Without hesitation, he ran to the door to see Draco blundering up the steep hill to the road.

"Draco. DRACO!" Snape shouted. He saw the boy pause and then redouble his efforts to scramble up the hill. "Stupid, impudent boy," he fussed as he reached for his wand. Except... he shouldn't use it out here. He'd performed basic household magic inside without rebuke, but outside was an entirely different matter. He looked from side to side at his distant neighbors. The road above him was sporadically traveled by farmers, and after dark they were less likely to drive, so Draco would have a hard time finding a ride at this hour anyway. He would have to do this the hard way.

He started towards the hill when something unsettling the hedge Draco was running alongside caught his eye. It was the shady, stalking shadow of an animal. Snape squinted at it and then smirked and folded his arms over his chest in triumph. Draco would be back to the house soon, and of his own volition.

--

Draco never thought himself out of shape until he was running up the hill in front of Snape's

cottage. His face was red, his ears were burning and the cool sea air was cutting at his lungs as he huffed with each step. *All of this to get nearer to Muggles*. There was a time when the prospect of even *talking* to Muggles would've sent Draco to cowering behind Snape. Oh how the tides do turn. When he heard Snape calling him, he paused and gave a quick glance back to see if he was being followed. From there he saw the twinkling of a rather scenic view of the coast. He also saw how grotty the cottage Snape summered in was and wrinkled his nose in contempt.

As he turned back to carry on, he heard a noise from the hedge a few feet from him. Automatically, his hand skimmed to where his wand was kept, but alas, it still was not there. Draco thought he heard Snape cackling in the distance when he was blindsided by something mammoth and malodorous that knocked him to the dusty ground. His wand arm stretched out and flailed as he tried to grasp for purchase, but nothing was within reach. At last, he landed flat on his back, shrieking for help. Something moist and horrendously foul was slicking something sticky onto his face and he brought both arms up to block it. That's when he heard a friendly-sounding bark.

Parting his crossed elbows to peer up at the...thing, he realized it was nothing but a common sheep dog. "Ugh, don't they ever bathe dogs in... wherever-the-Merlin-I-am-ville?" he muttered to the animal.

In answer, the canine gave Draco another lick. The boy wailed and shooed the dog away and grabbed for his handkerchief in his robes.

As he dabbed his face, he heard the sound of squealing brakes behind him and he rolled over to see a brilliant flash of purple. It was shortly followed by the smell of tar and a gunning motor. Feeling the heat of the vehicle that pulled up beside him, he started to scramble to his feet while pocketing the hanky. He knew what this was, but he'd forgotten about it until now. His mother had explained to him about waving his wand hand and calling for help to summon the Knight Bus if he got stranded somewhere. Not that he was allowed to go anywhere on his own, but that was beside the point.

Before he could right himself, the doors squeaked open and an unlikely-looking, spotty young man poked his head out and tilted it down at him like a curious bird. Draco leapt up and began brushing off his robes. Snape began shouting to stop him.

"My name is Stan Shunpike..."

"Great, *Stan Shunpike*. Get out of my way and get me out of here," he insisted as he forced whatever coin that he'd grabbed from his pocket into the man's hand and shoved past him.

Stan examined the Galleon with interest. "Well, this'll getcha your 'ot chocolate, an 'ot water bottle an' a -"

"Do you understand the meaning of the words 'get me out of here?'" hissed Draco. Now that he was under proper lighting, he realized he'd miss-buttoned his robe.

Stan seemed to notice this as well. "Oooh! Woz you caught by 'er 'usband, 'ere? Get a move on it, Ern. Got us a cheeeaaater."

Thankfully, there was no way that Snape was going to make it up the hill fast enough now. Draco peered out of the windows at him and saw the man flailing and cursing for the bus to stop just before the bus screamed into a haze of magic. Draco sighed in relief and flopped down on the nearest bed.

"So, where would a cheater be 'eadin' to?" asked Stan as he waggled his brows in a way that made Draco even more irritable, if that were at all possible. The man handed Draco his hot chocolate and his hot water bottle and then held up a choice of three colours of toothbrushes between his knuckles for him to choose from.

"Secret headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix, please," he answered as he took the water bottle and set it on the pillow. Next came the mug and he took a few calming sips as he looked at the colour choices of toothbrushes. He was so tired, and couldn't be arsed to care. He grabbed the red one. It sort of reminded him of Harry.

"Can't do nuffink about goin' to Order o' the Phoenix 'eadquarters," said Stan.

"Why not?"

"It's a seeeeeecret. We wouldn' know where it is. 'Ow would we? They don' tell us nuffink 'bout that stuff."

"Oh. Right, then. Umm... The old Black family residence?"

"'Ere we go. London it is."

Stan looked as if he might want to ask Draco more questions but to stifle further conversation, Draco turned on his side with his back to the man. He set the mug on the nightstand next to him and cuddled around his hot water bottle. Staring at the red toothbrush, he stroked his thumb over the bristles, thinking of Harry.

--

"You don't understand, Ron. I wasn't *there* for him. Just like I wasn't there for... Sirius. Or for Cedric. I'm always... Merlin, what is wrong with me? I'm always... just...late." Harry slumped onto the couch and dropped his head into his hands.

Molly ended up being the one who let the boys out of the hexed door. The jinx could only be broken from the outside. Her visage was marked by the savage glare of a woman possessed with a singular mission. She was looking for Malfoy, ready to punish him for what she thought he'd done to Hermione. Harry brushed past her while Ron explained why he didn't believe Draco sent

the book. It took all of his Gryffindor courage to confess to his mother that he'd been trying to woo Hermione and Draco was helping. Molly gave him a few indulgent nods as she listened to him ramble on about book buying and why Malfoy wouldn't send another. In the end, she accepted that Ron wouldn't make excuses for the Slytherin if he didn't truly deem him innocent.

In the meantime, Harry ran through all of the rooms, crying frantically for Draco. The only response he received was from the livid portrait of Mrs. Black, whose comments were no less edifying than they'd ever been. Although, once she'd interpreted the panic on Harry's face, the wretched screaming had turned into a ghastly, mocking laughter. Even Nigellus got in on the sniggering when Harry entered his own room. Molly had gone to tend to Mrs. Black by the time Harry rushed back to the drawing room where Ron was. That was where he sat, brooding over why he seemed to always drop the ball when it came to Draco and vowing never to do it again.

"Harry, you just didn't know. That's my fault. I shouldn't have held him to that sodding promise. And *he* should've let you know what Snape was up to. He's just been worried about you. He says you've been out of sorts. After that fight this morning he was in a state. We practiced our spells for a while, but then he was tired. I spelled the room quiet so he could sleep. That's why he didn't get up when Hermione was attacked. That's my fault, too. You had no way of knowing I did that." Ron tried to word it carefully, knowing how tetchy Harry was. Further, he wanted to mitigate the blame Harry was heaping upon himself.

"He's *gone*, Ron. He left with Snape. I don't blame him. Not one bit. Not after I... Merlin I accused him of... of hurting Hermione and... and cheating. When *I'm* the cheater." Harry's voice was muffled through his hands covering his face.

Ron was shocked. "You? You cheated on *him*?"

"I kissed... well, this man, one from training. Or he kissed me. I didn't... I mean, I thought maybe there was something between you two... and then... I just thought 'I'll show him.' So I went to a pub with Richard from class and he pushed me against the wall... and he kissed me...and I shoved him away..."

Ron took a moment to digest this new information. "Harry, it was a kiss. You didn't even *start* the kiss. AND you pushed him away. I don't know *why* you-- all right, I understand why you thought something was going on. But you *can* go to a pub with someone without it being...." Ron gestured in a circle with his hand flat. "You know..."

"I knew what he was about, though. I mean, I think I did. Maybe I didn't. I don't know. I guess... he'd been cozying up to me since classes began. I suppose I knew he wanted *something*. I just..."

"*You pushed him away*, Harry," said Ron as he sat down on the couch next to him. He rubbed his back in comforting circles. "Maybe you *thought* about it, but you didn't initiate the kiss, and you didn't follow through with it."

"That's what Hermione said."

Ron tried not to be offended that Hermione was told something he was not. After all, Harry thought Ron was trying to steal his boyfriend. "Well then, it's obviously true. She's brilliant." He smirked at Harry when he looked over at him to see if he was just taking the piss.

"She also said not to tell him about it."

"I..." Ron pondered this. "It would upset him. But you have to see by now what keeping things from people you care about does. Maybe if Draco had told you what he and I were actually up to, and maybe if he'd mentioned what happened with Snape..."

"He left with Snape," said Harry as he let his hands fall from his agonized face. "He's gone."

"I... I have a hard time believing that Draco would just go with him. I think that Snape just... took him." Ron immediately regretted saying this as he felt the muscles in Harry's back stiffen.

Harry sat up straight then and he glared around the room as if there would be a clue as to where Snape sitting around. "*Took him*. Do you... really think so?" he asked, steeling himself for the answer.

"I just don't see why Draco would leave willingly. Do you?" It was too late to recant, Ron reasoned. He could feel waves of rage radiating from Harry.

"Where did he take him?" barked Harry as he slammed his fists against his knees.

Ron withdrew his hand from Harry's back and folded his arms over his chest. "Bloody hell, Harry, how would I know?"

"I'm going to kill him. If Snape so much as *touches him*... or if he hurts him or traumatizes him in any way. If he... I will *kill him*," Harry vowed as his fallen hands clenched his knees.

Harry's wrath could be frightening, and it was definitely unsettling Ron to hear him speak like that. "Harry, be reasonable. If you *killed him* then you'd go to Azkaban."

It was clear Harry wasn't listening to Ron any longer, but was stuck in an elaborate revenge fantasy. "*I'll kill him with my bare hands. The last thing he'll see in this world is my smiling face as I do it, too*."

Ron gaped at Harry's maniacal expression. Draco told him that Harry was going a bit off the rails, but this was the first time he'd ever witnessed it. At a loss for what to say, and frankly too scared that he might say the wrong thing and incur Harry's fury, Ron resumed soothing Harry's back. He wondered where Malfoy was and prayed he was all right. And if Malfoy wasn't all right, whether he'd be visiting Harry in Azkaban or St. Mungo's in the near future.

--

"I'm so sorry, Draco, I just don't know how to make it up to you after such a serious breach of trust!" exclaimed Draco in a murmured falsetto voice as he bobbed the red toothbrush in time to the words. About the time that he'd resorted to toothbrush puppetry, he'd decided he'd been on this bus for far too long. He'd intended to sleep; he was exhausted. However, given all that had transpired, his mind was in too many directions to allow him the peace of slumber. Thus....

"I don't know, Harry. I'm not sure if I could ever forgive you for thinking that I'd sleep with a Weasley," he whispered harshly to the toothbrush-Harry. "I have better taste than *that*."

"I know, I know, Draco. I blame the blood from my Mudblood mother for my lack of judgment. I could never be as reasonable and perceptive as you are. I'm just a half blood, have mercy!" he made the toothbrush beg in a whiney whisper.

"Further, you thought I would harm Granger." He paused for a moment. No, that wasn't so irrational, was it? "You thought I would harm Granger in a really foolish way that could be easily traced back to me. I'm a *Slytherin*," he insisted in a low voice.

He had no idea what in the world had happened, but it was something that linked to him in such an obvious way that even a *Gryffindor* could sort it out. He'd deal with that mystery later. There was no use wasting good puppeteer time pondering what would be explained to him later. Right now, he needed to figure out how to play this out with Harry.

"I'm so sorry, Draco! It's because I'm a Gryffindor and we're as thick as they come! We don't think at all! Of course if you wanted Hermione dead she'd be dead! And no one would suspect you *at all*. Please, please forgive me!" the toothbrush implored.

"I don't know.... I don't know if I ever can. You hurt me. You *never* let me top. You shoved me against a wall and by throwing me at Ron made me have to touch a *Weasley*. *Which I never wanted to do, no matter what you believed at the time*. Then you let *Snape* toddle off with me! I just spent half my youth on that Witch-forsaken bus to get back! How can I forgive that? What can you do for me?" He was a little surprised that the litany of Harry's sins went on that long. He'd been putting up with quite a lot, hadn't he?

He angled the brush down with his index finger as if it were lowering its head in dire shame for its transgressions. "I... I don't know why you would ever forgive me. Or if you ever could. I just... I love you. Please forgive me."

Draco frowned at the toothbrush and he sighed and reached up to push it up by its white bristles with his thumb, as if he were nudging the brush to look into his eyes. "I love you too, Harry. But you've been *wretched* to me. Now after all of this..."

He looked maudlin. After all that had happened... how *did* he feel? He loved Harry. He'd gambled everything on this relationship working. Maybe Snape was right. Perhaps he was a ridiculous boy. His brows furrowed and he stared at the toothbrush. He shook it as if the brush

was taking a moment to think; he wished it would respond with the right answer. Receiving no reply, Draco tried again with his own verbiage. "Anything, Draco. I'll do *anything*. I'll bring you breakfast in bed, I'll suck you off every night!"

"You already suck me off." He gave the toothbrush an unimpressed look.

"Anything, Draco! I love you so much! Don't leave me! I need you, please! I'll... I'll let you fuck my tight virgin ass!" the brush cried.

"Your ass? Me? You'd let me do that?" he asked, raising his brows. It wasn't this simple, he knew that, but he also knew via this little reenactment, he wasn't quite ready to give up on Harry. Not merely because he had nowhere else to go, but because of the idea of *not being with Harry* caused a deep twisting in his stomach. He loved him. He felt he needed him. He didn't have the whole story. Draco had been holding things back, perhaps Harry had too. He had to sort it out, no matter how wounded he was.

"Yes, oh yes Draco. I want you to! I want your long, rock hard prick to split open my tight virgin ass! I want..." Draco broke off in alarm as he heard Stan clearing his throat behind him.

"Las' call for Grimmauld Place?" Shunpike announced. His voice was muted by his hand, which he held over his mouth to keep from giggling.

Draco blushed furiously and jammed the toothbrush into his wand pocket as if hiding it would erase Stan's memory of... dear Merlin just how much had he heard? Draco rolled out of the bed and avoided eye contact as he nodded and waved his hand to indicate he was going.

"Keep the toofbrush, eh. 'Ate to be breakin' up the 'appy couple." Shunpike tittered.

Draco sneered, but really, what could he say? He pretended not to hear it and exited the bus. He looked around and then turned, about to ask which house belonged to the Black family, but with a loud shriek, the bus was gone again. Dejectedly, Draco stepped onto the sidewalk and stared at the houses in front of them, praying someone would see him soon.

--

Someone did see Draco soon. Someone he wouldn't have wanted to see him. Someone he didn't consider might be there. "Spien. *Spien*," hissed Bellatrix. Their vantage point was a porch a couple of houses down. The Muggles who had owned the home were long since departed and their bodies removed. Bellatrix and Richard were on their shift of monitoring the comings and goings of the old Black family home.

The Death Eaters had been staking out Grimmauld Place for nearly as long as the Order had taken up residency there. As things often do, the care with which they concealed themselves had diminished since they had not been found out. At this point their "cover" only consisted of wearing Muggle clothing and not sitting directly in front of the spot where the Order members

vanished. Normally, that worked brilliantly. Today, Richard found himself longing for the comfortable anonymity of their robes and masks as he trailed after Bellatrix.

Snape was aware that Grimmauld was being watched which was why he had the Portkey to his home set up for visits so he wouldn't be caught wandering in a suspicious area. Knowing that Draco was likely to try to get back inside the house, Snape Apparated a few streets over and paced the rest of the distance. The boy had no clue that Death Eaters would be laying in wait for something like this to happen, and only Snape knew that Draco would be vulnerable. He watched the area from a shrubbery across the street. He wouldn't reveal himself unless it became essential, but that time appeared to be much sooner than later.

Draco was pacing nervously in front of where the Knight Bus dropped him off. He wasn't sure what to do; as far as he understood, knowledge of the house made it appear? That was how the Fidelius charm worked, anyway, and he was pretty sure that's what kept the house from view. But that wasn't it, was it? One had to know the address. Draco didn't. He didn't *expect* to be outside. He didn't *expect* to be falsely accused of hurting Granger by his lover. He didn't *expect* a lot of things that were occurring. Most of all, he didn't expect the soft purr of Bellatrix Lestrange behind him.

"My nephew! Goodness, I haven't seen you since... *ever*, have I? But you are unmistakably my sister's son. Although..." she cooed. "You do look much like your father when you're afraid. Are you *afraid*, little rabbit? Afraid of your sweet ickle Aunt?"

Spien stood behind her inwardly cursing her audacity. He had much to lose if he were found out; a point that Richard clearly hadn't impressed enough upon Bellatrix since they were now confronting a possible Order member, even if it was a Malfoy.

Draco whirled around at the sound of her voice. He'd only ever seen pictures of her in his mother's photo album and on the front of *The Daily Prophet*. Naturally, he was terrified. His hand went to where his wand was, but as his fingers mashed into the bristles, he realized he was armed with nothing more but a toothbrush. His "Harry" toothbrush. *Harry, where are you?* Poking the narrow brush against the fabric, he bluffed it was a wand. "Don't come any closer."

"Scared ickle wabbit. Are you afwaid?" Bellatrix asked in her annoying baby voice. "*You should be. You betrayed your family, your name, and the greatest Wizard alive*!" Seeing what she presumed to be his wand pointed at her, she brandished her own. Spien stayed a few steps back from the two, but produced his wand as well.

Draco began to panic. He prodded the brush forward; tenting the material further. "I mean it, not a step closer!"

Boldly, Bellatrix brayed before stepping forward not one, but two steps. Her smile was her dare.

Letting out a quiet squeak of alarm, Draco tripped over himself backing up. At the sudden noise and movement, Spien and Bellatrix simultaneously wielded their wands. Draco was hit square in

the chest with twin red beams of light. His face froze in shocked terror as he tipped backward onto the pavement, landing with a revolting hollow thud.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 9

Snape watched Draco crumple to the pavement. He held his breath, hoping the lack of oxygen would help him remain detached. It happened so quickly that he hadn't had time to decide what to do. As a result, he froze and did nothing but monitor the proceedings. Now, there was his Draco, stiff and laying on Muggle pavement with two Death Eaters arguing over what to do with him.

"We were sent to *observe*, Bellatrix, not to *capture*," protested Richard. His eyes darted around the forlorn street to see if there were any witnesses.

"Only because *capturing* wasn't really an option before. The Dark Lord wants him to join with us or perish." Bellatrix glanced around holding her wand, readying to end any onlookers. "Let's just take him."

"We don't know why he was out here. What if he was bait? We never should have approached him." Richard peered down at the limp boy; white hair splayed on grey pavement, the wide eyes and open mouth. Curiously, Malfoy clutched a red toothbrush to his chest. Richard snorted, that must've been why the boy hadn't pulled his wand on them. He didn't have it. Still, a toothbrush seemed rather a random thing to be carrying around. Stepping over to the body, he stared at it enquiringly when out of nowhere none other than Harry Potter bounded into view, followed by Ron and Molly, all three with their wands drawn.

"RICHARD!" Harry was quite taken aback to find his classmate standing over the frozen form of his boyfriend. He moved his wand from Bellatrix to Richard and back, not sure whom to hex first. Both were vile, and both had a hand in all of this. At least that's how Harry saw it. After Ron and Molly shared a glance it was sorted out that Ron trained his wand on Richard and Molly on Bellatrix.

They'd heard and felt the vibrations of the spells inside their magic-hidden building, thanks to a ward Dumbledore had placed on Grimmauld in case something like this should happen. The internal alarm had sounded and Harry just knew. He knew it *had* to be Draco. It didn't even occur to him that Draco might be without his wand until he glimpsed Draco holding a red toothbrush in his wand hand. He flushed with remorse at the fact that not only had he allowed Draco to be kidnapped by Snape, but also he had withheld Draco's wand, leaving him unarmed. Harry was a little taken aback that Snape wasn't in sight, being that he was the one who had taken Draco in

the first place. He would deal with that later, though. He had to stay in the present.

Due to his astonishment, Richard found himself unable to move. He mouthed an assortment of muddled words. What could he say? He was spotted and on point.

Bellatrix, however, seemed thrilled to have an opportunity to confront Harry again. "Aww, ickle Potty come to save his boyfwiend?" cooed Bellatrix. "That's so cuuuuute..." She jabbed her wand in Harry's direction, more than willing to duel the boy.

All of the anger and frustration, the self-loathing for his action and inaction welled up inside of Harry. His green eyes blazed and before she could continue her grating speech, Harry screamed, "*CRUCIO*!" This time he was not in shock. This time, he knew how to *mean it*.

Bellatrix fell to the ground writhing and screaming, her body surrounded in a glow of cruel magic. She convulsed as every fibre of her being was filled with the electric current of pain wracking it. Her mouth started to froth as Harry kept the wand trained on her. His eyes narrowed in determined focus to make her experience his wrath.

Richard's retreat broke the shocked stillness of the Weasleys as they watched in horror as Harry Potter tortured Bellatrix. Certainly she deserved it, but the idea of the Boy Who Lived being so malicious had rooted them to the pavement. But now, Molly hit Richard with a stunning spell. Ron took the initiative to stop Harry and clamped his hand down on his best mate's shoulder.

"Harry? Harry..." Ron tried, shaking his friend. "Harry, you're going to drive her mad. Stop it. Stop it, *now*."

"She's *already mad*." Harry felt his anger coming in waves and he focused it into his wand and watched it pour over the skeletal woman. This wasn't just for harming Draco. It was for everything; for growing up without his parents and not knowing the truth of their lives or who they were as people. For oversized clothes and birthdays and Christmases with no presents. For growing up not knowing he was a wizard. For Sirius Black. For Neville's parents. For Cedric Diggory and that awful first kiss with Cho. For the nightmares he had to endure, and for never, ever having a normal life. Someone had to pay. Today, that someone was Bellatrix Lestrange.

Ron finally shoved Harry, knocking the concentration of the spell off-kilter, breaking it. Bellatrix's body lay there twitching in after effects of the Unforgivable.

"*Stupefy*!" Ron sent a stunner at the woman on the ground to end her frenzied thrashing.

Harry panted, looking down at the damage he'd done with angry indifference. Then he knelt down next to his boyfriend. "*Ennervate*!" Instead of rousing, Draco's eyes closed and his rigid body went limp. "Draco!" wailed Harry. He wrapped his arms around his wilted lover and pressed his head against his chest, grateful to still hear a heartbeat.

"He took two stunning spells, he's going to probably rest for a while," Snape said, having made

his way over once it was clear the Death Eaters were captured.

Molly nodded and then pursed her lips.

Ron stood very still.

It took Harry a moment to register whose voice he just heard. Glaring up at Snape, he snapped, "You... how do *you know* he took... you *watched*?"

"I could not compromise my cover." Snape crossed his arms.

"You *watched* while Draco was *attacked*? This person you *claim* to care so much about?" Harry's eyes were wide with incredulous resentment that Snape could be such a complete coward. Even though Harry felt as if he was no longer good enough for Draco after how he'd let him down, at least he wouldn't stand by and *watch* while he was hexed.

"You do not understand, Potter. I must maintain my cover, no matter how difficult it is." Snape peered down at Draco's crumpled form. Pulling his wand, he began to cast, "*Mobili*-"

Harry cut him off. As much as he wanted to hex Snape into oblivion, he felt too magically drained to do it properly right now. Plus, he wasn't sure if he was going to get away with what he'd just done to Bellatrix. Hexing someone presumably on his side *in front of everyone* would push everyone too far. "Don't. Don't do anything to him or for him. You don't *deserve* to." Harry pushed his wand into his back pocket and slipped an arm under Draco's knees and the other under his back and lifted him precariously to carry him back to their room. "He's mine and I'm going to take care of him."

--

Harry had taken his supper in the room with Draco, keeping his vigil next to what he'd hoped would remain his boyfriend. Molly fussed to him that Draco wasn't likely to wake till the next day, but Harry was insistent. "*I wasn't there for him before. I'm not going to abandon him now. I don't want him to wake up alone*."

Snape opened the door midmorning. Harry lazily grabbed up his wand and pointed it at the man. His eyes were bleary from a restless sleep and his vision hazy since his glasses were still on the nightstand. Since Harry had brought Draco into this room, cleaned him and tucked him into bed, Snape had tried twice to check up on him.

Harry refused to let Snape near Draco, particularly after his examination of Draco's torn robes revealed stresses in the fabric that indicated more than just the roughing up they'd endured from Harry's tantrum. Though he hadn't gotten far in Auror training, he'd had at least a few classes on investigation. He shuddered to think of what Snape had tried to do to Draco.

"Harry, hold on."

Surprised by a familiar-sounding voice that wasn't of the same tenor of Snape's, and the use of his first name, Harry sat up and squinted, still keeping his wand pointed at the professor. A wan figure slid past the darkness of Snape and his greying sandy-brown hair lit up in the morning sun.

"Remus!" Harry slapped his wand on the nightstand and grabbed his glasses as he slid out of the bed and gave his friend a firm hug.

Lupin hugged Harry back with as much strength as he could muster. "I would have come sooner, Harry. But... the lunar cycle..."

"It's all right. It's fine. I'm so glad you're here! Although... I mean... you haven't been here all summer..." Harry inwardly frowned, realizing just what a horrid friend he was. He was so wrapped up in his training and goings on with Draco, he hadn't thought at all about where Remus was this whole time.

Lupin smiled indulgently down at Harry. "Shh, Harry. No, I know I have not been around, but it was for a good cause, I assure you."

"Where have you been?"

Since Sirius's passing, or perhaps some time before, Remus had come to think on Harry as a son. It pained him that he hadn't been there to listen to Harry. Perhaps, if he had been, it might have prevented some of the trouble the boy had gotten into. "I was attempting to gather and organize others of my-- other werewolves-- to assist in the battle against He Who Shall Not Be Named."

Harry's face expressed a bland shock at this. It made sense, but from Lupin's tired demeanour and the studied impassiveness of his expression, Harry surmised it must not have gone well. "Oh, I see. Did it work? Are they... on our side?"

Lupin nodded. "Though the Ministry did its best to alienate all werewolves, it would seem that the idea of working for someone who would see them all dead is even less appealing. Their allegiance, such as it is, is with the Order. Or rather, several of them are with the Order as there is no actual governing body of the werewolves so much as a few small nomadic clusters in and around London. I reached all that I could. The rest is up to them. However, none of them seemed interested in joining with the Death Eaters, but their minds were already made up on that. Nothing I did really... well, I'm here now." His voice was distant and cool. He was surprised by how few were willing to fight for the Order, and yet he was not armed with a particularly compelling reason to convince them with.

What could Harry say to that? Remus didn't seem keen on what happened, and what he'd said summed up his summer. "I'm sorry that it didn't work out as you'd hoped. But it is good news that we won't have to fight them." Harry winced at how lame that sounded, but he was trying to be supportive. Releasing Remus from their embrace, he sat back down on the bed and stroked Draco's pallid arm.

Remus looked down at Harry, feeling little other than sympathy for him at the moment. While what he'd done to Bellatrix was very wrong, Remus couldn't say that he wouldn't have tortured her or just killed her on sight himself, and he didn't have nearly the stresses that Harry had on him now. He crouched down in front of Harry and studied his downcast eyes. "Are you all right? It's been quite a summer for you as well."

Quite a summer, indeed. Harry nodded, "I'll be fine, I think. I don't know... what to say. So much happened... so fast. I was very excited about being in Auror training, but no one-- they all seemed afraid of me. I guess with good reason." Harry let out a bitter staccato laugh and then bit it back. He didn't want to play the drama queen with Remus, or with anyone. "It's just that... not being here... being stuck away from my friends all day... and then Ron and Draco started to get friendly, I just didn't know how to take it. I assumed the worst."

"That's easy to do, Harry. You're both so young. This is all very new to you, and it takes a while to learn to trust." He raised his hand to quiet Harry's protests. "I know you've experienced a lot, but this really is your first relationship. Sirius and I, well, we were probably about your age when we... experimented."

Snape stepped into the room with a victorious expression. "I knew you Marauders were all up there having orgies..."

Grabbing his wand off of the nightstand, Harry pointed it at him.

Remus pushed Harry's wand back down and shook his head.

Snape glared, but went silent.

"No, Severus, it was just Sirius and me." He shook his head and turned to Harry to explain further. "Regrettably, I didn't pursue it and he moved on. We fought quite a bit over childish things. Petty jealousies got blown up into epic battles, because we were both so sure we knew what the other was thinking... we'd have entire arguments before we even bothered to consult the other. We never talked seriously, Harry. We were always on the cusp of making things work, but our lack of communication just kept us... apart. It's why in the end ... we ended up suspecting one other of being spies. It made our time together-- when he finally got out of Azkaban-- terribly short."

"Oh, Remus!" Harry was at a loss for what to say. He had no idea that the two of them were together. It made sense now that he thought about it. He should have known from the joint Christmas present, although at the time he assumed it was just because Remus didn't have much money. *Remus is gay. Sirius was gay or at least bisexual*. It changed everything and nothing all at the same time. "So my father... did he know?"

Remus nodded. "Both of your parents knew, Harry. If you're worried about how they would feel about your relationship, I can tell you this; they never had a problem with us. Your father was

politely disinterested in our sex lives."

That pleased Harry. He supposed if his parents had lived, they would have loved him enough to deal with anything, but it was good to have it confirmed that they'd be fine with his sexuality. He knew full well that his lover's parents would never have accepted him. Caressing Draco's skin again, he wondered if they would have lasted at all if Draco had had to deal with his parents or if he would have caved and broken it off.

"I didn't tell you about my relationship with Sirius to tell you about your parents, Harry. But rather I brought it up as a cautionary tale. It sounds as if you've been making the same mistakes with communication that Sirius and I did. Though you've already gotten much further than we did, you must be careful. Love is so very fragile, particularly when you both have so much on the line. Just talk to him, be honest. It seems like he went to great pains to get back here. I'm sure he wants to forgive you."

Harry looked at Remus with hope shining in his almond-shaped green eyes. "Do you really think so?"

Snape cleared his throat. "But he should not forgive you. Your behaviour was contemptible, Potter." Harry welcomed Snape's intrusion by directing his wand at him. "If you hex me, Potter, you had better make it a good one." Snape patted his wand in his robes.

Standing up because of the sudden palpable tension in the room, Remus slid his fingers over his wand and looked between the two uncertainly.

"Oh, it will be a good one, I guarantee you that, *Professor*. I mastered a new one yesterday. A really good one. *An Unforgivable*. Fancy a demonstration?" Harry's eyes glittered with malevolence as he felt his rage building.

Snape could tell the threat was real and took a step back without intending to. "You are unhinged. You should be locked away."

"Oh, that would be interesting. Lock me away in Azkaban and then check me out like a library book when you need a dark wizard defeated? Clever, and yet... I don't see it happening. You overestimate your importance in this War, *Snivellus*. Without *you*, the Order might get less information. Without *me, the one whom the prophecy was about*, Voldemort wins. A *dead turncoat* wouldn't warrant many tears. A *dead savior* makes the War futile." Harry looked smug as Snape paled and backed up to the doorway.

Remus was utterly gobsmacked by Harry's words. "Harry, you don't want to..."

"Very Slytherin of you, Potter. Perhaps all of that Malfoy sperm you've been consuming has finally *penetrated*. Speaking of... *penetration*...." Snape's leer turned depraved. Potter didn't have the nerve.

"*Furnunculus*!" shouted Harry, covering Snape in boils. The word "penetration" rang in Harry's ears and fuelled his fury. So help him if Snape really had...

After a quick counter curse, Snape snorted at Harry. "Very fourth year of you, Potter..."

"Severus..." warned Lupin.

"*Expelliarmus*! *Priapistula*!" Beams of light shot from Harry's wand in rapid succession. It could have been worse, and would have been if Remus weren't standing right there.

Catching Snape's flying wand, Remus looked at Harry incredulously. "What was that second one?"

Snape started to howl and his hands clutched his crotch.

"Priapism. If he's going to act like a walking hard-on around my boyfriend, then he can have a very long-term, painful one." Harry thought it was witty, anyway. "I actually learned it to cast on Mal-- Draco, but never had a chance."

"Very good, but..." Remus frowned as Snape's shrieks triggered Mrs. Black's and the entire house was now set to a hellish screeching chorus. "What is the counter?"

"Never learned it." Harry sneered and folded his arms in defiance.

"Right, Harry. Tell me the counter curse. I know you would have learned both. You're not that irresponsible." Though Remus was amused, enough was enough. He didn't notice that Severus had recovered his initial shock and was creeping towards his wand in Remus's hand.

Harry attempted to look innocent, although it didn't quite work. "It must've slipped my mind, sorry."

Snape seized his wand from Remus and pointed it at Harry. "*Flagrate*!" he shouted, spewing flames from his wand.

"*Protego*!" Harry promptly countered before he and Draco were singed. He trained his wand at Snape's prick again. "That could've burned Draco," he seethed. "*Diffend*--" He stopped casting the cutting curse as Remus slid between Harry and Snape. "Get out of the way, Remus!"

Snape started to flourish his wand to start another hex, but Remus yanked it out of his hand. "Severus, stop!"

Wrenching his arm back, he made to backhand Remus, but Lupin ducked.

Harry took the break in Remus's blocking of Snape to start, "*CRU*--"

Snape paled and prepared to be hit.

"--el of me to tell you this, Snape, but you're not worth it. Get out. If you come back into this room, I *guarantee* you that you will find out just how good I'm getting at Unforgivables." With that, Harry sat back down.

Remus was shaken, but relieved that Harry had reined himself in before doing something so imprudent. Even Remus would have had a hard time rationalizing that action. He stood up and shoved Snape out of the room ahead of him. Snape was too breathless with fear and soreness to protest. "Let's see if we can't find the counter to that hex in one of those books in the drawing room, Severus." That behaviour was pure James, Remus decided. Harry was more and more like his father every day, and Lupin wasn't sure that was a good thing.

Though Harry found it regrettable that he'd scared Remus, but he couldn't lament that he'd instilled the fear of his reckoning into Snape. It wasn't all he wanted to do to the man, but it was a start.

--

While Molly very much wanted to talk to Harry about his recent spate of hexes and over-the-top conduct, Remus kept her at bay, giving the boy some time and distance. He was optimistic that Harry just needed some quiet time to sort through everything. After some introspection, Harry would cool off.

Had Harry known that was what everyone was hoping for, he would've sniggered. However, at the moment, he was focused on keeping Draco warm and safe and fretting about what might have happened to him. He ran the wet cloth over Draco's pointed features, worried about how dull his complexion had become. Was that just because of the unconsciousness? No, Harry berated himself, Draco had been looking rather gaunt for the past couple of weeks. Harry noticed, but hadn't really *seen it*. Not until today.

Feeling Draco start to twitch, Harry both hoped and dreaded that this might be the final throe of his magic-shocked body finally recovering. He didn't have long to ponder this before Draco sat bolt upright in his bed. His hand slapped against his naked chest, searching for his wand.

"Huh... what?" Draco puzzled as he glared around him. The afternoon sun was streaming in through a window, lighting dust bunnies in the room that he had unsettled. He'd awoken thinking that he needed to defend himself. Finding that he was in his erstwhile bedroom naked and wand-less next to the boy who had given him away to Snape... was a shock of a different sort.

His hand flew up to his clammy face as his eyes fixed on the white cloth in Harry's hand. He started to do the mental math that Harry was caring for him. Draco felt a guarded relief at this revelation. Things had evidently sorted themselves out on Harry's end, which left Draco to deal with how he felt about it. This time he swore he wasn't going to set aside his emotions. That got them nowhere.

Draco had a thousand questions all buzzing in his head at once. Was he safe now? Where was Snape? What happened to Hermione? Though he'd been stunned, he was still mentally conscious enough to be aware that Harry had rescued him and used an Unforgivable. It wasn't until he'd been released from the hexes that his body had shut down. What he didn't know was how much Harry knew about what happened at Snape's cottage or what he thought of it. So he decided to play dumb. "What happened?"

"Shhh... Lay down, Draco. Lay down." Harry was thrilled that Draco didn't throw him out, so at least he wasn't *that* angry. "Please," he added, hoping the politeness would hedge his bets.

"How did I get in here?" Draco flopped back down on the bed, a decision he regretted as it made his head throb as if he were hung over.

Molly told Harry to anticipate some dehydration and disorientation. Harry picked up the glass of water he'd placed on the nightstand along with some biscuits and toast and held the straw to Draco's lips.

Eying the straw for a moment, Draco took the glass and then a quick sip. "A glass of water isn't an answer."

Harry frowned. He didn't want to get into it right after Draco woke up; he wanted to give him time to recover. But, given the fact that Draco both wanted and deserved answers, that wasn't an option. Harry had a few questions of his own. He wanted to know how it was that Draco ended up outside of the house, where he'd been, had he been out there the whole time? But barraging Draco with questions would've been wrong. Especially considering how much explaining he owed Draco for his behaviour of late. He would play by Draco's rules for now. "You were outside being attacked by Bellatrix and Richard. We heard alarms that magic was being used in close proximity; a warning in case the house was ever under attack. I rushed out and...."

"Richard?" So that was the name of the other Death Eater. Draco eyed Harry inquisitively as to how he knew the identity of the mystery man.

"He was in Auror training with me. He's the man... " Should he tell Draco everything or should he stick with what Hermione had advised him? Draco looked so frail, and in the end, that kiss had meant nothing. Less than nothing, it had been a trick to get close to Harry or at least throw him off balance. Telling Draco about it would only upset him. "The one I was telling you about. The only one who really talked to me; but it was only a ruse to gain my trust and infiltrate the Ministry, obviously... since he's a Death Eater. I didn't know that until... right then, though."

"Oh." Draco felt rather sad for Harry. He only had one friend in Auror training and he was only talking to him to spy. Placing his hand on Harry's he squeezed it. "Ministry's full of lackwits. Sounds like they're doing their damnedest to keep themselves full up of idiots. No wonder you didn't fit in."

Harry smiled, mostly because of Draco's hand on his, although the odd compliment touched him as well. He turned his hand over to interlace their fingers and he was pleased that Draco didn't pull his hand away. "I'm sorry."

Smirking, Draco said, "I am, too. The Ministry needs some real leadership."

"Draco," said Harry. Meeting Draco's eyes, his expression pled for him to be serious. "I mean it. I'm really sorry. For all of the... assumptions and the... the way I treated you. I took you for granted and then... I just..."

Draco's smile faded and he averted his eyes. "I should've told you what was going on with Ron the first time you asked. I had no idea you'd really believe *that*. Neither of us would do that to you. Not to mention... ugh, Weasley."

Harry sighed and rolled his eyes. Right. He momentarily forgot whom he was dealing with. He'd argue with him that Ron wasn't *that* awful, but that would be self-defeating. "I'm just glad you get along with my friends now."

It was Draco's turn to roll his eyes. "Well if their presence is going to continue to cock up my relationship, I can't be buggered."

"Draco..." No, there was little point in arguing it. Draco would do what he would do, but he didn't think Malfoy would honestly stop talking to Ron. Although a guilty part of him wouldn't mind if he did. "You should have let me know about Snape, too."

For a moment, Draco's face reddened and he looked into Harry's eyes and then he turned away again. "I... you... the... it..." His hand tightened on Harry's as he stuttered, visibly shaken. Draco wondered just how much Harry knew about what went on at Snape's house. No, Snape wouldn't have told him. Perhaps Weasley or Granger told Harry about Snape's "visit." Granger, what had happened with her? That seemed a good way to throw off the subject. "So I suppose Granger filled you in. What happened to her?"

Not to be dissuaded from his point, and because Harry as so concerned about what happened to Draco during those missing hours, he summed up curtly. "No, *Ron* told me about the visit and scrolls. Hermione received a book by Eagle owl meant to look like it came from you and it blew up in her face, rendering her unconscious for a few hours. I think Snape did it, particularly since he showed up so conveniently. Where did he take you?"

That rundown took Draco by surprise and the shock prompted his quick answer. "To his home." Draco's face began to screw up in upset as the memory of what happened at Snape's cottage flooded in, and he fretfully attempted to change the subject again. "So is Hermione all right?" he asked in a strained voice.

Harry didn't like how Draco was recoiling, nor did he care for the manner in which Draco was evading him. This wasn't his usual caustic response. Draco was obviously profoundly disturbed

by something. Granted, he hadn't had much time to process what had happened and it was liable to still be pretty raw. Though Harry felt a bit guilty for pushing him, he wanted the truth and less of Draco's avoidance. "She's fine. *What happened at Snape's house*?"

"He... umm... well, I didn't want to go to his house, Harry. He had a Portkey. I wanted to stay here and find out what happened... to talk to you." Draco stared hard at their entwined hands, looking at how white his knuckles had gone, and how Harry's were turning a similar shade. "You're right about Snape, though. He... er... knew about it anyway. He said that You-Know-Who had a plot..."

"*Voldemort* sent the book?" Draco flinched when Harry spoke the name and while generally the balking would be followed with a stern rebuke, Harry didn't have it in him to say anything about it.

"I suppose. Although how would V-Vold-You-Know-Who know where to send it?" Draco took another sip of the water.

Snape was following orders to cover himself again. Or that's what he'd say. One day Harry hoped that excuse wouldn't hold with Dumbledore, but he had a sinking feeling this wasn't going to be that day. On top of that, Draco was still dodging the question. Harry was now desperate to know and blurted out, "Did Snape force you to have sex with him?"

Draco's head snapped up and he looked into Harry's furious eyes. He shook his head.

"Did he try?"

Draco's jaw clenched, but otherwise he gave no response.

"Your robes are... the buttons are pulled off in places, Draco." Harry covered their joined hands with his other and squeezed. "I know you didn't... on purpose. So you ran?"

"I wanted to get back to you, Harry. I wanted to know what was going on... I wanted to... but you... you... you *gave me away*."

"I'm sorry, Draco. I was... I'm sorry." Harry worked hard to control his rage at Snape and his personal guilt for that impulsive act to focus on Draco. He needed to focus on something else. "How did you get back?"

"Knight Bus." Draco's voice was tight, but his grip on Harry's hand lessened, thankful not to have to go into specifics. He could tell that Harry was on edge over Snape. Draco was as well, but right now he didn't want to deal with it. The rush of emotions around what happened had already exhausted his beleaguered body again.

Sensing Draco's weariness, Harry eased up on his line of questioning. "Stan Shunpike still conductor?" He reached up and caressed his cheek as he moved in closer.

Draco snorted and distantly wondered what had happened to his toothbrush. Setting the water down after taking long sip, he spotted it on the far corner of the nightstand. "I didn't know you'd ever ridden. But yes, *Shunpike* was there," he said, emphasizing the name in distaste.

The annoyed tone of his boyfriend's voice made Harry grin in spite of the tense talk. Shunpike must not have changed much. "He makes an impression."

Closing his eyes, Draco shook his head and rested against the pillows again. "Definitely." He still felt tense about the previous subject matter, but it was giving way to his exhaustion.

"Do you need me to get you anything?" Harry looked at the half-empty glass and then to Draco, wondering if he should push more fluids on him to prevent dehydration.

"No, stay here. Hold me." He opened his eyes and released Harry's hand to reach for him.

Feeling waves of relief crashing over him, Harry exhaled and adjusted his position to lie on his side next to Draco. He slid one arm under his neck and the other around his waist. Feeling another urge to explain himself, he whispered, "I love you, Draco. If I didn't, I wouldn't have acted like..."

Draco clamped his hand inelegantly over Harry's mouth. He didn't want to hear it again. He understood. Jealousy wasn't *that difficult* a concept. "I love you, too. Now hush up and hold me."

Obediently, Harry hushed and cuddled Draco tighter, grateful to be both understood and loved.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 10

"Draco, I am going to tell you something and it will seem terribly-- well, I think you will understand it better than Harry would. Hopefully you will understand my position and why I must ask you to do this." Dumbledore spoke across the wooden table in the basement kitchen of Grimmauld place. Everyone was shocked when it was Draco that Dumbledore had sent for after returning from his unexplained absence.

Draco was tense. Dinner had long been cleared away although the muted scent of the meal hung in the air. He was terrified that what Dumbledore was going to ask him to do was going to break his heart. It was just that sort of summer. He nodded his acquiescence.

"In spite of what I *say* is my utmost trust in your Head of House, I do realize that he has *practical concerns of his own* and that they often *conflict* with the *greater good*." Looking at Draco's nonplussed expression, Dumbledore put it in plainer terms. "In other words, I am well aware that he is playing both sides." Dumbledore paused to allow this to sink in.

Again, Draco nodded. Snape told him as much. However, the fact that Dumbledore already knew this didn't bode well for his promotion of the idea that Snape should be dismissed. Or, at the very least, Draco should have his own room. Somewhere away from Snape and his influence. He hoped that this fuss was leading up to Dumbledore having come to one of those conclusions on his own. The fact that he was there alone and that he was being told because he would understand it better than Harry led him to believe that this was going to be bad. Very bad.

"The sad truth of it is that... whilst I realize what a threat his intentions are to you, I have *no other means* of finding out what the Death Eater's plans are. Severus is the conduit of information between Tom, that is, Voldemort and I. Whilst I *could* strip him of his duties but still keep him around Hogwarts, or even here, it would raise too many eyebrows to do so at this juncture. Now that we are on the brink of the final battle it would put our source too much at risk, and we could miss valuable information. Information that could well *save Harry's life*."

Draco exhaled loudly and he gazed at his hands respectfully folded on the table. No, he did not want to put Harry at risk. "But giving me my own room wouldn't alter Snape's situation--"

Dumbledore held his hand up to halt the protest. "I need you back in *Slytherin*, Draco. I need you to *watch Severus*. I'm not saying that you must provide *favors* or get that close to him, but I need someone that... " Dumbledore paused, searching for a genteel phrasing. "Someone who can keep Severus off-balance enough to reveal more than he intends. I'm not suggesting you string him along if you're not comfortable with that manner of manipulation, but he is... keen to please you. In that regard, you have a power over him the rest of us do not."

Those words made Draco cringe. "Yes, well-- I'm *not*..."

"I'm not asking you to do *anything* you're uncomfortable with, Draco. I just want you to observe him. Talk to him if and when he asks that of you."

"Alone? In his office?" squeaked Draco. He didn't know how to react. Dumbledore didn't want him to do anything he was uncomfortable with? He wasn't comfortable being in Slytherin House at all, let alone left unprotected in Snape's office.

"The house elves will be on alert to keep track of you when you're in the presence of Professor Snape." Dumbledore tried to be reassuring. He realized he was sending mixed messages. He tried to come up with less suggestive phrasing. It was monstrously important that they get as much information from Snape as they could and as good as the man was at Occlumency, Draco was the only person who could make Snape slip up.

"Well, why can't the *house elves*... observe him?"

"Because Draco, he will not *confide* in the house elves. He will confide in *you*. He trusts you, he believes in you and as muddled as he is, I believe he truly does care about you. He is... rather confused. You should have some pity for him. The pressures that he is under are great. He often makes poor choices. I do not believe he is alone in that regard," he said, raising his brows. He gave Draco a meaningful look. Sorting out Harry's very public Unforgivable blunder at the Ministry was what had kept him from coming to Grimmauld before now. "I believe he can yet be redeemed. He will need an ear and a friend. I understand that this is a tall order as he has abused you, as well as your trust. I would not ask this of you were the need not so dire, not just for Harry's sake but also for the Wizarding world."

Draco huffed and fell back against the chair and stared at the ceiling. All of this being a hero stuff was... well he'd rather leave it to other people. He'd decided that much over the last few days. It was once appealing, but he just wasn't cut out for it. Leave that rubbish to Gryffindors, as far as he was concerned. "Snape asked me to join up with the Death Eaters and be a counterspy with him. I just..."

"Did he?" Dumbledore leaned forward, although he didn't sound surprised. "He proposed that to me before this mess. I am grateful that you did not accept that option. It would be an enormous undertaking and while I believe you are strong, it would be too lethal a risk. Severus came to me frightened and already marked. It is quite another thing to go into the lion's den with the direct intention of spying. Aside from which, I believe that severing your contact with Harry would be detrimental to you both. No, I would prefer it if you restricted your spying duties to your Potions professor. To that end, I have reinstated you in Potion's class."

Draco sat up and glared at Dumbledore. "So I have no choice. The lecher gets his way?"

"Draco, I am not asking you to do anything but be there and listen to him. If he touches you in *an inappropriate way*, Dobby is empowered to-"

"Dobby? Dobby *hates* me. He was *my old house elf*." Banging his fist on the table to punctuate his point, he looked every inch the petulant toddler Dobby had once feared.

"I do not believe that Dobby bears any animosity towards you for what you did as a child. Even if he did, he adulates Harry and he would not hurt someone important to him. He is the only house elf at Hogwarts not bound to serve whomever makes an order. I'm afraid I have little choice. I can have Harry ask him to watch you personally..." Dumbledore hadn't moved much during their conversation, but simply watched Draco, remaining sympathetic and yet firm.

"*Harry* is not going to like this." On this point Draco was certain and he took the opportunity to look smug.

"I do expect a rather vocal rebuke from your other half on this matter. But understand that this is *for his protection* as well as important to the War. I will also be talking with Severus about his behaviour . You will not have to endure another episode such as you have."

"He *threatened me*. He would have *petrified me* and...." Draco's tone was strained and he gripped the table in front of him till his knuckles turned white.

To retard Draco's outburst, Dumbledore peered at him over the rim of his glasses, a gesture that silenced students as it signaled impatience. "I am not denying that his behaviour was reprehensible, Draco. I just have no one else that could get through to him. No one I could send in your place. Your relationship with him was once very close and he wishes that again. The elves will be watching and Dobby will be there. You will be safe. Should things still go beyond your comfort level, I do believe Mr. Potter has devised a means to vent his frustration."

Draco's eyes widened at Dumbledore. Of course, Draco had only heard about what happened to Snape and the priapic hex a couple of days ago. Not to mention the Unforgivable he'd thrown at Bellatrix. He couldn't believe that Dumbledore was going to give Harry a pass and encourage further destructive outbursts. Then again, Dumbledore often did indulge Harry. Usually the notion made Draco feel bitter, but this time it just made him worry. "Perhaps."

Sensing Draco's disenfranchisement, Dumbledore attempted to explain. "This is war, Mr. Malfoy. War is hell. Sometimes you must do what you will to get by. I dislike it being this way, but we are running out of options. I'm sure you understand."

"Oh, I understand, Headmaster. I understand *all too well*." Slapping his hands on the table, Draco pushed himself up. After a curt nod, he excused himself from the room.

--

"So? What did Dumbledore say?" Harry was lying on their pushed together beds in his pajamas.

Though it was rather late, Ron was intentionally absent from the room. The idea both thrilled and frightened Draco. He and Harry had not done anything beyond snuggling since *the incident*. It wasn't for lack of hormonal interest on Draco's part; it was that the memory of Snape touching him was still too fresh.

Draco fiddled with the fussy collar of his robe, trying to unclasp the frog closure. "Dumbledore said, 'I'm old and senile, would you please run Hogwarts for me?'" His old man voice wasn't a solid imitation, but he'd hoped it would bring more of a smile to Harry's face than it did.

But how could Harry smile? A caustic response meant that Draco was uncomfortable with something, likely something he'd been told. "Oh. Well... did he ask to see me?"

The sly old dog... No, he hadn't asked to see Harry, had he? He was going to leave Draco the unpleasant task of informing Harry about this *arrangement*. "No, he didn't." Draco rustled through the wardrobe and pulled out his pajamas and a dressing gown. He left the door to the bathroom open, but moved out of Harry's view to change.

This was how it was since Draco came back. No more sleeping almost naked and he no longer changed clothes in front of Harry, either. It hurt a little, but mostly it stoked his anger towards Snape.

"I see. So, does that mean I get to guess what he really said?" Harry wiggled back to allow Draco room and held the covers up for him when he returned donning his many layers of sleep clothes.

Sliding into bed, Draco snuggled up to Harry. "He reminded me I was sorted into Slytherin and that is where I'm going to stay. Further I'm supposed to *observe* Snape and get him to *confide in me* since he *still cares about me*."

"Excuse me?" Pulling back to look at Draco's face, Harry couldn't discern the seriousness of that statement. "That's not funny, Draco."

"Note the absence of laughter." The stern expression on Draco's face validated what he'd heard.

"No." Harry pulled Draco tighter to him, crossing his arms over his lover's back protectively.

Draco buried his face in Harry's neck before asking, "No?"

"No."

"Well, good then. At least that's settled." Draco wanted to believe it was that easy, but it wasn't.

"I *forbid* you to talk to that man," Harry whispered into Draco's hair.

"I'll write that down."

"Draco, you can't!"

"What, write it down? Well, that's true, I can't write at the moment. My hands are rather full," he said as he squeezed at Harry's back.

"Draco, I'm serious."

Draco sighed heavily against Harry's neck. Releasing Harry from the embrace, he flopped onto the pillow. "I don't want to. There's just no one else."

"Don't I get a say in this?" Harry caressed Draco's cheek, trying to reassure him he wasn't angry with him, but with the situation.

"I suppose not, since Dumbledore ambled over here late and then didn't call you in for a meeting.... I would have thought he would've been here to talk to you about the Unforgivable, at least. But no, he just shows up to dump this on me and leaves me to tell it to you. That's just *so*

Slytherin." Draco was relieved that he wasn't blamed. "He also said he expected an earful from you, which leads me to believe it's non-negotiable; although you're free to complain. I'm going back to Slytherin House and I've been reinstated in Potions."

"Then I'm taking Potions as well. AND... I'm coming to your room every night to make sure nothing happens to you." Harry's arms tightened around Draco, cutting off his air. Draco squirmed until the grip lessened.

"Oh sure, just come on in. I'll leave the back door open for you." Though he rolled his eyes, he really hoped Harry would.

"I have my Invisibility cloak and the Marauder's Map. I'll be in your room," he assured Draco.

Draco was touched and a soft smile played over his lips. "You'd do that for me? Sneak in *every night*?"

"Of course. Besides, all of the smelly people in your room have been withdrawn." Harry leaned in and kissed the corner of Draco's grin.

"It will certainly be *quieter*." Draco frowned as he wondered where Goyle was and if he was all right. Not that Draco could do much about it even if he wasn't. The War was going to happen either way. His thoughts were so far away from his proximity to Harry that he jumped when he felt Harry's hand snake under his nightshirt. "Oh!"

"Sorry..." Harry winced. He'd thought he'd been rather obvious in his approach. He was trying to be respectful and take things slow. Though he started to draw his hand away, Draco placed his hand over Harry's and nodded.

Massaging his fingers over the supple skin in random patterns, he gave Draco a tender tummy rub. Harry delighted in the way that Draco's eyes fluttered closed and his breathing deepened as he relaxed into the touching. He couldn't help but notice that this treatment was having a definite affect below Draco's belt line as the silvery silk pants tented. They'd tried a few times before tonight. Harry was trying not to get his hopes up for much to happen given the upsetting news about the next school year.

Draco's head mashed into the pillow as his back arched and his hips dipped into the mattress, driving Harry's hand down his abdomen. He bit his lip and let out a soft whimper as he felt Harry's fingers massaging down his body and deftly slipping under the waistband. He was shivering with the hesitant teasing of Harry's fingers gliding past his prick to snake over his thighs.

"Are you... ready... do you... want me to?" Harry was so tense; he wanted to touch Draco so much, but each time that he did it and Draco got upset, it split his heart in two. It seemed like there was so little he could do now, and the guilt of knowing that he was partly the cause of Draco's anguish towards sex ate at him. Not that he would ever say.

"Yessss," answered Draco in a wavering voice

Harry traced the pads of his fingers dexterously over the ridges of his prick. He wanted to see it, but given the fact that Draco hadn't even removed his dressing gown, he decided to leave it for now. Taking great pleasure in the way that Draco was responding, the pointed features flushed as his hips thrust forward, forcing his length more into Harry's hand, he encircled his fingers around it.

Draco's platinum hair splayed over the plain cotton pillow as he pressed his face against Harry's and nudged his head up to kiss him. Harry's hand was soft, very soft. Not calloused like... No. He couldn't think about *him*. This was Harry. He needed to concentrate on whom he was with. "Kiss me, Harry."

Kissing Draco, Harry became anxious as he felt his lover starting to tremble. He tried to keep the kiss light, touching their tongues in gentle strokes, but Draco kept deepening it in a frantic gambit to keep the sexual energy going. *Fuck*, thought Harry as he felt Draco starting to soften in his hand.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Harry," Draco murmured against his lips. Tender lips. Youthful lips. Lips so unlike the scaly dryness of Snape's. He was so frustrated-- he wanted to cry. His prick was still semi-hard and he tried to press it into Harry's hand and then slid his own hand down to knead it.

"Draco, Draco, stop... it's all right." Harry kissed over Draco's face. It hurt. It hurt him so much, but it wasn't Draco's fault and seeing the anxiety in those grey eyes tugged his heartstrings. "Please stop. It's all right."

"But... but you're..." Harry pulled his hips back too late. Draco's hand was already stroking his erection. Putting his hand over Draco's, he shook his head. "No. Don't... not like this. I want to... I'm going to wait. Until you... I want us... together." He pulled Draco's hand up to his lips and kissed each knuckle individually. "When you're ready... I want us to come together, Draco. I don't care how long it takes. I love you."

Draco's eyes prickled with tears. He was both upset and touched. "I love you, too. I just... I don't know when... I don't want you to... I mean..."

Harry pressed Draco's elegant hand to his face and then kissed his palm. "*I don't care how long it takes, Draco. You're worth it*."

--

Harry was the first to wake that morning and he slipped out of bed carefully so as not to awaken Draco. The previous night's misadventure irked him, but Harry decided now that the blame fell squarely on Snape's shoulders. All he felt towards Draco was extreme sympathy and his guilt for

his part in it. He wanted to help his lover to get past this. He would treat him better. Harry vowed that he would be there as much as he could. To that end, he decided to treat Draco to breakfast in bed.

Draco hadn't left the room much since he'd gotten back, and while Molly advised that Draco should be encouraged to be more social, Harry wasn't about to push the matter. He wasn't going to push Draco into anything; he was going to protect him.

Passing by the drawing room on his way down to the kitchen, Harry paused at seeing the mass of blankets and greasy hair sticking up on one end of the couch. Every muscle tensed as he realized Snape was still there. He had been warned that Dumbledore's visit was going to include Snape showing up, but he hadn't been clued in that Snape was going to *stay the night*. He tried to comfort himself that Draco must not have seen the man the night before or he would've said something about it. Still, he was going to give Snape a piece of his mind now that he knew what he'd done to Draco.

He was just starting towards Snape when he felt a hand on his shoulder. Appearing rash and wild as he whirled around, his eyes fixed on Remus. The man's empathetic expression did little to sooth the rush of nervous energy Harry generated on seeing Snape. He was riled and ready to fight. Remus's hand moved to Harry's bicep and he tugged. It wasn't a violent move, but it brooked no argument. "Come along, Harry. Get some breakfast. We'll have a chat."

"I don't want to '*have a chat*,' Remus." Harry attempted to wrestle away from the grasp, but Remus dragged Harry down the steps.

"I know you don't want to, Harry, but you will. *Right now*." Remus's tone was so paternal that Harry conceded. Besides, he wasn't going to hex Snape right in front of Remus again. He'd be stopped. Remus directed Harry to one of the chairs.

"I was going to take breakfast up to Draco." Harry took a chair and sulked at being caught. He had so much he wanted to tell Snape. Although most of the message he wanted to give was liable to come through his fists.

"Is he waiting for it?" Remus took a spot across from Harry and poured himself a fresh cup of tea. It was midmorning on Saturday and the Weasleys plus Hermione had gone for the day to Diagon Alley for shopping and ice cream. Molly had left the food out and charmed to stay fresh for those who weren't awake when they'd left.

Harry shook his head. He picked up the plates left out for him with breakfast and began to arrange food on them.

Seeing that Harry wasn't going to be kept from Draco for very long, Remus decided to cut to the chase. "As unpleasant as it is, Harry, Snape is an integral person to this war. By now you have figured out that he's not completely... that his habits and behaviour occassionally lend him to the Death Eater side of his personality. We are not ignorant to the dual nature of his loyalties, but at

the moment that is the only way we can keep up with what they are doing. This is a chess game, unfortunately."

"And I'm the pawn?" snapped Harry as he slammed the eggs onto the plate and tossed the utensil back onto the bowl.

"No one's the pawn, Harry. Perhaps chess is a bad analogy. The point is, it's a game of strategy and what we're trying to do is to give you every advantage we can buy you for the final battle." Remus maintained calm in spite of Harry's petulance.

"Oh no, I think chess was spot on. Maybe then I'm the king and Draco is the pawn? You're letting his attacker not only *live* but stay the night?" Jumping up from his seat, Harry paced the kitchen before he remembered he was going for a tray and then headed to the proper cabinet to retrieve one.

"Harry..." Remus's tone was exasperated, but he couldn't help but feel pity for Harry his plight. His eyes followed Harry as he paced and then settled on getting the tray. "No one wanted Snape to stay the night. He came to talk to Albus, and when that was through, Snape insisted that he was too tired to go home."

"Oh *please*. Too tired? Too tired to *Apparate*? Or use his *Portkey*? It's talking to Draco he's after and that's *not going to happen*." Harry started to slam the tray down, but Remus's hand shot out before it hit the table and nodded towards the hallway to remind him of Mrs Black's portrait. Bringing his index finger to his lips reinforced the message for Harry to keep quiet. Harry gave a pained expression, but nodded his acknowledgment.

Point made, Remus withdrew his hand. "I realize that the hope to talk to Draco is likely his reason for staying the night, and I realize how bothersome that is to you. I kept him at bay last night and I will again today."

"*Today*? What? How long is he going to stay?"

"I don't know, Harry. Knowing Severus-- I'm afraid he can be rather tenacious when he wants something. He wants to straighten things out with Draco." Remus took another sip of his tea, but kept a wary eye on Harry.

Harry did a poor job of concealing his rage. His face flushed and his lips tightened as he set the dishes onto the tray with an affected carefulness. "*That is not going to happen*."

"No, it isn't. I'll be watching Severus to make sure he does not perturb you." Remus glanced back up the stairs, but he knew he'd hear it if Snape roused.

"I thought Dumbledore wanted Draco to *watch Snape*." His tray set, Harry glowered at Remus, too overwhelmed with resentment to be picky about who was on the receiving end of his ire.

"At school, yes. And in general." He set his teacup down.

Harry hoisted up the tray and leaned it on his stomach for balance. "Then why are you going to watch him?"

"For you." Remus spread his fingers on the table and then folded them.

He all but dropped the tray. "What? Why?"

"Because it will ease your mind to know that someone is watching him. This is outside of Order business, Harry. I don't want you to mention it to Albus or even Draco. This is between us. I think that as capable as Draco is in some capacities, he's still very young and Snape... is clearly more wily than even Albus gives him credit for." Of course, Remus's other reasons, that he didn't want to see Harry get into any further trouble because of his inability to control his temper, went unstated.

"I... I don't know what to say. Other than... thank you." He was too flabbergasted to say much more than that. He hadn't dreamed that anyone in the Order really took Snape as the serious threat that he was, but at least Remus was on his side. He was awash in gratitude he had no idea how to express.

Remus smiled a quiet understanding of Harry's subtext. He hoped that it was enough to keep Harry from doing something else that was reckless, but there was so much of James in the boy, he wasn't sure. "It's my pleasure, Harry. Well, not really a pleasure to deal with Snape," he said, smirking. "But you know what I mean."

For the first time that morning, Remus caught a glimpse of Harry's lopsided grin. "I do." Suddenly he wasn't in an urgent rush to leave the room, but wanted stay to show his appreciation.

There was never a time where Remus felt more like a father to Harry than right now, and he was loath to let that end as well. "So, classes Monday?"

Shaking his head, Harry dropped his gaze to the platter in his hands. "No. I don't think so. I want to spend more time with Draco. And really... after... well, the thing with Richard... "

This surprised Remus. "I thought you were enjoying yourself. It was your dream to be an Auror."

Harry sighed heavily. "It was. But... I wasn't enjoying myself. No one... talked to me. They were all scared or intimidated or something. I'm not sure I'm cut out to work for the Ministry. They're just so... I mean... how did they not see that Richard was a spy?"

Remus chuckled. "Yes, you'd think with a last name like 'Spien' they'd be more wary. It's a governing body and like any governing body it is subject to corruption at worst and misguided policy at best. I can understand your hesitancy, however. You have time to think about it, still.

Anyone who doesn't talk to you is missing out. I know a bit of something about how that feels. People can be unintentionally cruel. I have the feeling that in your case they were intimidated by your accomplishments. Can't blame them that."

"That makes sense... about the Ministry. I don't know about the accomplishments, though. I didn't really achieve much by myself," he said, lighting up with a modest blush. He felt another spark of kinship with Remus over feelings of isolation. He wished he could make it better for him.

"Nonsense, Harry. You're a special boy no matter what. A bit reckless, but you have the exuberance of youth. Much like your father. James would be proud of you."

Harry was aglow at the notion. "Really?"

"He would be just as proud of you as I am." Remus gave him an affectionate smile and then gestured towards the stairs. "Now go on, get to your boyfriend before those warming charms wear off."

Beaming at Remus, Harry nodded and said, "Thanks again. I'm... I'll try to keep making *you* proud." With that, he headed up the stairs, still giddy from the praise, particularly since he'd felt like such a failure for the past few days.

Remus watched him go, satisfied that he'd cheered Harry up. He still felt anxious, however, dreading what was to come.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 11

Harry couldn't sleep. Or rather, he didn't think he could sleep. However, as he rolled over to look at the clock, he noted it was now half two in the morning. He must have dozed off at some point, since it was much later and Ron was no longer in the room.

Because his arms had been around Draco, the one under his lover's neck was asleep. Pumping his fist, he winced at the pins and needles that the blood flushing back into the appendage caused. In spite of having a nap, he felt listless. Worse yet, he was wide-awake now.

He watched the regular rise and fall of Draco's chest, frowning at how he had his dressing gown pulled tight. Draco was undeniably broken on some level that in spite of talking, holding, and trying to just be there for him, Harry was unable to fix. This was all Snape's fault, and this time there was no quibbling about that fact. Severus Snape broke his boyfriend and was now sleeping

in the drawing room where Draco had once sought refuge. Because of that, Harry refused to let Draco leave the room, although he failed to inform him of Snape's presence in the house. Draco seemed content to stay in the room, which was a small mercy, as Harry knew he couldn't lie to him.

Harry assumed the reason Snape hadn't burst in on their little nest was that Remus was keeping him at bay. It felt good to have someone on his side regarding Snape, although he knew that Ron and Hermione were probably also doing what they could. He wished that Molly and Arthur were there; Molly would certainly have sent Snape packing by now. But they had been called away from their shopping trip in Diagon Alley to tend to Charlie, who had been poisoned by a Peruvian Vipertooth.

Why the Romanian sanctuary was housing a Peruvian dragon was never explained. Not that he cared much beyond worrying that Charlie was going to be all right, which he was assured that he was. Had he been of a clearer mind he might've sussed that Charlie had gone to Peru rather than the other way around, but his brain was too full with the immediate. The elder Weasleys had gone along with Ginny to Romania, leaving Ron to tend to Hermione who was still occasionally weak from the shock of Voldemort's cursed book.

Mulling these thoughts, Harry had a revelation. Remus would be asleep in Sirius's old room upstairs. Ron and Hermione were asleep in her room. Draco had likely taken the sleeping draught he'd been provided. Snape was alone in the drawing room. Artfully, he wrangled his now mostly-functional arm out from under Draco and slid his wand into his waistband. It was time he had a chat with the greasy git.

--

The first blow was immediate. Harry had crept into the room full of intentions of telling Snape off, not hitting him. Granted, he was likely to yell at him at wand-point, but he intended to let him know that he didn't care for his hanging about waiting to talk to Draco. Instead, brooding over how Draco was traumatised nearly beyond recognition, his fist balled up and flew at the man's face.

Snape's beady black eyes opened, trying to register what was going on. Harry hit him again, harder this time. He could hear the cartilage snap and the sickening give of the solid mass under his knuckles. Then he hit him again, on the jaw. He didn't care that Snape was coughing and sputtering. The thrill of seeing blood pumping out of his nose and filling in his pallid features incited Harry. He leapt upon the man's torso, now hitting hard with both fists, letting them fly at his face, down his shoulders, occasionally blocking the older man's flailing. Each meaty connect of skin-on-skin thrilled him till he found that he was just pounding the flat side of both fists into Snape's chest in unison.

"Harry, stop."

The voice was barely above the whisper, and thick with emotion. Harry dropped his fists and

glanced at Snape, whose eyes were closed and body still. He looked towards the door to see the small, ghostly pale figure framed in the waning moonlight.

"Oh, Harry."

Harry's chest tightened at the intruder's quiet sniffles, and then the pale figure disappeared. *No*. He stared in horror at the empty doorway, puzzled by Draco's response. Was Draco *crying over Snape being injured*? He rose and started towards the door, halting as the shimmer of Draco's dressing gown caught his eye.

Draco fled back through the door, his wand in one hand and a vial in the other. "Harry, Harry... what have you done?" he asked as he paced in front of the Black family tapestry. He glared disdainfully at the wall hanging and then turned back to Harry and shook his head.

"Are you... angry? He... he attacked you, Draco. And he's... " Harry gestured in a broad manner, not sure how to explain.

"He's been here. I know."

Harry noticed that Draco couldn't meet his gaze, and only then did the words register. "You... knew?"

Draco nodded. He glowered at Snape's unconscious form and then looked back at Harry. "I... yes. I saw him on the way back from meeting with Dumbledore. Then I checked last night and saw he'd stayed the night. I was just going to see if he was here again, but you were out of bed and... well..." He gestured at Snape and his nostrils flared. "This was stupid, Harry. It's not-- I can't blame you, but it-- " His hand flew up to his forehead, the potion still clutched in it. "Let's talk about this later." He made his way to Snape and grimaced at the injuries. "I can't... fix all of this."

"Fix it? Why would you fix it? He should have these injuries and pain to remind him of the consequences of touching you!" Harry's gestures went wild as if his hands alone could make his point.

Draco peered at Harry as if he were a slow child. "Harry. He's a Potions master. He won't experience the pain for so long as it takes him to drink a few of his own concoctions. Oh, but he'll leave the injuries to prove what a danger you are, how unbalanced. And you know? At the moment I'm not sure I could disagree." He knew he was being snappy, and he understood that Harry had done this for him, but he was so worried about what mileage Snape could get out of this, he was determined to fix it.

"I-- I'm not... unbalanced," Harry complained. Looking at Snape's face, however, it did provide compelling evidence to the contrary. "Do you think I'm unbalanced?"

Setting his wand on Snape's chest, Draco took Harry's hand and kissed it. "I do. But I love you

anyway.”

Harry had started to smile when Draco took his hand, not expecting the answer he got. "Hey!"

Draco nodded his head at Snape's face. "Now hush so I can deal with this. Although... I don't know any charms for mending bones. I can probably get rid of most of these bruises."

"Maybe we could just throw him down the stairs and claim that he's clumsy?" Harry offered, but the look Draco gave him, made him hush. His Auror training taught him better than that, anyway. "Wait, I know some charms for that. I wasn't brilliant with them... his nose might look a little funny..."

Draco snorted and nudged Harry.

It took Harry a moment, and then he covered his mouth to chuckle. "Point," Harry admitted. He eyed Draco and saw the boy grinning back up at him. It had been days since he'd seen him smile. He leaned down and kissed his forehead, and this time, Draco didn't flinch, but tilted his head up and caught Harry's chin awkwardly with a quick press of lips.

"Right then." Draco used his wand to set a couple of candles alight and the boys set to work, mending broken capillaries and a few small cuts and abrasions from Harry's nails. Taking Harry's hand, Draco deftly charmed the bruises as well as he could, although it would take some time for the swelling to go down on him as well as Snape. Finally, Harry concentrated and tried his "Immendo" charm. Snape's body twitched and flinched. Draco cast a silencing charm just in time to keep the man's scream from escaping.

Snape's furious expression made Draco gasp and Harry grabbed his shoulder as they both watched the man go for his wand. "Petrificus Totalus," Harry snapped.

Draco grabbed the sleeping draught he'd brought and poured it into Snape's gaping mouth. He swallowed out of reflex and after a few moments, his eyes looked hazy and his eyelids lolled, and he settled in to sleep. Dropping his wand on Snape's chest, Draco brought his hands up to cover his face.

Harry bent down and kissed his temple. "You're very brave."

He was trembling and the last thing Draco felt right now was brave, but at least now he wasn't a victim. "I'm smart too," he said, his voice muffled by his hands. Gradually, he lowered his hands and peered up at Harry. "And very attractive."

Harry grinned at him. "Don't forget modest." He gave Draco's shoulder a squeeze and then helped him up, grabbing up his wand so they didn't forget it.

"I leave the modesty to the Gryffindors." Draco didn't protest when Harry wrapped his arm around him, nor when he kissed him on the corner of his mouth.

"Well, we are better at it," he teased, pulling him out of the drawing room.

"Oh yes, modesty, such the skill. It gets you *so far* in life to muck about pretending you're not my hero." Draco slipped into their bedroom followed by Harry and closed the door.

"Your *unbalanced* hero." Harry pointed out.

"That does make it all very exciting." Draco slipped out of his dressing gown, but still got into the bed with his pyjamas on. It was a good first step. "But... I am concerned about you. You're..."

"Aggressive?" Harry hopped into bed with Draco and wrapped his arms around him. No matter what Draco seemed to think of his mental state, he wasn't shying away from the cuddling.

"Let's go back to *unbalanced*." Grinning playfully, Draco scooted closer.

"That's-- I'll admit I've been more aggressive, but I... I kind of need to be. I suppose I'm realizing that now. I have to-- there's something I didn't tell you. But then, I haven't really told anyone. Although most of the Order knows anyway, as they... need to." He ran his fingers through Draco's hair, savouring the feel of how silky it was compared to his as he tried to collect his thoughts.

"Oh?" Draco's body tensed, not sure what to expect.

"I have to kill Voldemort. I don't... have a choice. I used to-- I guess when I was younger and thought Sirius betrayed my parents, I thought I could kill *him*. But I didn't think that... I guess... it's weird now. *Knowing* I'm going to have to kill Voldemort. Even if he is... and I have every right to... it's just..."

"Taking a life...." Surprisingly, Draco's gaze was directly on Harry's face and he met his eyes with intensity. "It's not easy. It's worse to live with. Even when you're sure you made the right choice, even when everything inside of you knows that there was no other solution, it's always there. You ended someone. I'm... I'm here, Harry."

Harry felt guilty for not having been there for Draco. Obviously, he'd been carrying all of this around since he'd killed his father. "Why didn't you tell me...."

"I'm telling you now."

"But you should've-- you could've..."

"I wasn't ready," said Draco. He entwined their fingers. "And I didn't want to burden you. No, that's not entirely fair. I just didn't want to talk about it. It hurt too much, and it still does to a point. I'm getting used to it, though. At first it was such a relief, to have him gone and to be able to make my own choices. Then... I felt guilty. I second-guessed things I could've done. But you'll

have none of that. You know you're supposed to do it. I just don't want you to change too much, Harry. Seeing you out of control like that... in the other room... it scares me."

"It scares me too, Draco. I just... thought of all of the things he'd done. I didn't-- I thought I'd talk to him, but... I just lost my temper."

"You lost your temper to a sleeping man?"

"You pointed out that I'm unbalanced."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Right, well... balance up a bit. Although I have to admit to finding it cathartic and a bit sexy to see you... that riled up."

"Attacking a sleeping man is not my finest hour." Harry frowned, but at least Draco wasn't terrified by him.

"No, but Snape isn't the finest man. All I could think about was how much I loved you and how scared I was that they were going to lock you up at St. Mungo's for that. You just had this manic look... "

"I thought you ran away never to return." Harry yawned, realizing suddenly how late it was, almost four and he'd expended quite a bit of energy.

The yawn awakened similar urges in Draco and he repeated it. "I almost did. Actually I was going to take the sleeping draught and try to pretend I didn't see anything at all, but then I realized that you were a Gryffindor and therefore you'd need to be bailed out."

Harry decided to ignore the snark on his House, and just enjoyed that hisDraco was coming back to him. "My hero."

"Your *balanced* hero."

Harry readjusted the covers around them and gave the ceiling the indulgent smile Draco would've gotten if he hadn't settled his head on Harry's chest to listen to the steady thrum of his heartbeat. "*Very balanced*."

--

The next morning, Harry was surprised to awake to Draco fully dressed and reading. The smell of lavender and rosemary wafted through the room, indicating to Harry that Draco had already showered. "Mmm, time is it?" grumbled Harry.

Draco marked his place in the book and plucked Harry's glasses from the nightstand to hand to him. "Half eight."

"Early. You smell good." Harry rubbed his eyes, and gave a long yawn as he sat up. Then he pulled his glasses on and looked around, oblivious to his extreme bed head.

"Smelling good comes from bathing, which I suggest you do. In spite of the dubious smells coming from downstairs, I'm rather hungry."

That snapped Harry awake. "You want me to bring you food?"

"No, I'm going to breakfast. Enough of this maudlin hiding, I've had my fill. I'm going to go to breakfast and you're coming with me. Bud do have a shower before your rankness spoils my appetite." Draco smirked.

Harry couldn't help but brighten. Draco was being a playful prat. That in itself was encouraging, but he also wanted to leave the room. He was almost too pleased to remember that Snape might be out there. If that man had any sense, he would've skittered home. "Right, then. Be right back!" he said, scampering to the shower.

Draco smiled to himself and took up the book.

--

On their way down to the kitchen, Harry paused him. "Draco... one thing... about last night."

"You're still unbalanced. Sorry. I still love you, if that helps?" He smirked in his superior way and Harry couldn't keep from kissing the corner of his mouth.

"No, not that. *Arse*. I meant with Snape." Harry frowned as Draco paled and flinched. He looked over his shoulder as if the man was there.

"He's not here, he left," whispered Draco after confirming the man hadn't crept up on him.

Harry's eyes widened for a moment. "He did? Err-- I mean, good. But that's not... what I was going to ask about." He was astonished that he hadn't thought about that. This other consideration had blocked out the others.

Draco toyed with the sleeve of his taupe robe. "Harry, I'm hungry. Can we talk about all this later?"

"I just... shouldn't we have wiped his memory?" Harry gave Draco an anxious look. It had occurred to him in the shower, and he just couldn't wait to talk about it now. He should've said something in the room, but Draco had rushed him to get dressed and he'd forgotten again until now.

"No. No, wiping his memory would be very bad." His eyes glittered with malice unlike Harry had ever seen, and he'd seen quite a bit of Draco's nastiness in the past. "I want him to remember

it; every blow and every broken blood vessel. I want him to remember that you did it, and that I helped. I want him to be terrified and to know that his actions have a price."

"But... but then he can tell someone, Draco." Harry tried to keep his whispering low, but he was starting to panic.

"He has no proof, does he?"

"I-- he-- well-- no...."

"One thing I've learned of late is that without proof, it didn't happen. Even when there is proof, sometimes people just don't care. Do you really think that anyone's going to investigate too hard that the Wonder boy might've knocked about a greasy old paedophile?" Draco smirked and caressed his cheek.

Maybe it was the touches, or maybe Harry just liked the way it sounded, but suddenly Draco was talking sense. He beamed at Draco. "No, they won't."

"And now he has the fear of your wrath and my ruthlessness to keep him from pulling any further stunts. Now, if we're done with the exposition, can we have some breakfast?"

Harry undeniably liked the sound of that. He grabbed Draco's hand and tugged him the rest of the way to the kitchen.

Upon entering, Harry noticed a few things. One, Remus was working at the stove. Two, the Fry-up was burned-up, casting the room into a smoky haze that reeked of grease. Three, Ron and Hermione were flirting shamelessly as they appeared to avoid the singed food before them. Four, and finally, Draco's expression was pinched up in incredulity in the way it often did before he launched into a slanderous rebuke. To short-circuit that, Harry leaned in and pressed a quick kiss to his lips.

Draco perked a brow at Harry. Tearing his eyes away, he again appeared to be trying to make his remark when Harry leaned in and kissed him again. This time Draco gave him an exasperated look and opened his mouth to say something about these abrupt outbursts of affection.

"I love you," said Harry.

Draco narrowed his eyes.

"Harry! Draco! Good to see you both up and looking so rested. Have a seat, I've almost finished with the bacon." Remus looked so proud of himself for cooking, Harry didn't have the heart to point out that he didn't appear to have the knack.

Draco started another valiant attempt to say something, when Harry dragged him to the table and gave him a quick shove into a chair. Muttering something that sounded much like cursing,

Draco sat at the table and grumbled about the "cuisine."

"Smells good, Remus," chirped Harry. Ron and Hermione shook their heads sadly over the charred breakfast. "Good to see you both. You look well, Hermione."

"Oh I am feeling so much better, Harry. Apparently, it was some sort of offshoot of a much more complex hex that would have killed me. I did some tests on the book myself, but then it went to the Aurors. They believe it came from Vo-Voldemort himself. It would have been untraceable, but someone along the line fiddled with it." She took a bite of eggs, which weren't intolerably burned.

That meshed with what Snape had told him, Although Draco still didn't know what had happened. "Book?"

"Yes, there was a book sent by your owl to Hermione. When she opened it, that's when she fell unconscious. I knew it was a frame up straight away." Ron sat up and preened in a way that Harry thought was very reminiscent of Draco. Those two had spent too much time together.

"Well, I'm glad at least *someone* had a little faith in me," snarked Draco as he tried to wave the smoke out of his face. He didn't have to look at Harry to realize that he'd hurt him. He stopped trying to clear the air and put his hand on Harry's, but really, the boy deserved to take a little abuse.

"Bacon is ready!" announced Remus, who parcelled out a few desiccated pieces to each of them. "And I think I'm done

"Quite a menu you've...burn--" Draco started.

Harry leaned in to kiss Draco again, and this time he took the hint and sighed.

"Yes, well, breakfast always was my specialty. I prefer things well-done, don't you?" Remus tucked into his plate after glancing at Harry and Draco and then smiling at Ron.

In order to keep conversation moving, Hermione took over again. "How the owl knew where to deliver the book is a bit of a mystery... to some. I think it's terribly obvious, but then, no one seems that interested in it. Clearly they're covering for Snape. After all the trouble he's caused..."

"Snape is doing valuable work for the Order. But I think that... someone has figured out how to punish him when he gets out of line." Remus looked at Harry and winked.

Harry was astonished, and wondered if Remus knew about the night before or if he meant the priapism. "Well, that's... good." Harry tried to sound confident, but failed miserably.

The rest of the breakfast went well, with casual, pleasant conversation. Everyone managed to pick around the burned bits and ate about as much as they could tolerate. Draco kept mum about

the quality of the food preparation to appease Harry. Remus seemed rather pleased with himself for his mealtime success.

As everyone began to get up to clear away the dishes Remus asked, "Harry, might I have a word with you while I clean up?"

Ron and Hermione nodded graciously and headed off to their room. Draco looked less certain, but finally offered to go to his room.

"Nonsense, Malfoy. You may stay if you wish. Both of you have a seat." Remus flourished his wand and started the dishes to cleaning and the remaining food was banished. "There. Now Harry, I want to talk to you about something."

Trading looks, Draco and Harry resumed their seating arrangement at the table and Remus moved to the other side and sat giving them both a quick smile. Like a scene from a Disney movie, in the background the dishes were magically cleaning and stacking themselves. Occasionally Remus's eyes darted up to check the progress, ensuring that nothing went awry. "I'm sure you've both noticed that Severus has left."

Again, Draco and Harry traded looks. Harry's demeanour was sheepish, while Draco's had a practiced air of calm. Finding no help from Draco on the direct question, Harry nodded. "We did."

"Do you happen to know why he would have taken off without saying a word?" Remus looked at the boys again.

Harry was staring at Draco again.

Draco was pointedly avoiding Remus's eyes until he realized he was being watched. At that awareness, Draco stared back directly back at him. "We have no idea. I hadn't left the room until this morning."

There was no visible indication that Malfoy was lying, other than Remus knew he was. His brows rose at how adept Malfoy was at eluding the pantomime of a liar. However, there was an edge to Draco's manner, one the boy couldn't quite hide, and one Remus was far too familiar with. Fear. Fear tinged with distaste. But then, most people were afraid of werewolves. "I know why he left. I believe you two know as well."

Eyes widening, Harry looked at Remus again, watching him staring down his boyfriend. "Y-y-you do?" Harry was too earnest for this particular game. Occlumency or not, some people just couldn't lie. Further, some people cannot lie to certain individuals, and Harry could not lie to Remus.

"Well then, perhaps you'd like to enlighten us? Because we have no idea." Still glaring at Remus as if he were an enemy, he quipped, "Does something smell like wet dog in here?"

"Draco!" His boyfriend was incorrigible. To punish him, Harry pinched Draco's thigh. He received a glare in return. Harry shook his head and peered back at Remus who was now concentrating on him. "We might know... something."

Remus sighed and gave Harry a disappointed stare for his attempt. "Harry, I told you I would watch Snape for you as best as I could. What did you think that meant?"

Harry's heart sank. "You saw... *that*?"

Draco went silent but took Harry's hand. Though he was going to try and protect Harry, he was glad that it was out in the open. Perhaps someone would finally straighten Harry out.

"I did, Harry. That was incredibly foolish." Remus held his hand up to keep Harry from speaking, although the boy didn't appear to have anything to say in his defence. "I understand why you did it, I understand your frustration, but you went too far. You must learn some restraint. You have pressures on you. We all see that. Dumbledore tends to turn a blind eye to your behaviour because of what you are to face. I cannot, and I will not." He held back too often when James and Sirius committed so many audacious acts, and he shouldn't have. As far as Remus was concerned, Harry needed to learn some control for his very survival.

"I...I'm sorry. I was just going to go in there to tell him to leave..."

It was hard to remain stern while staring into Harry's repentant face. Worse yet, the complications that had arisen from his actions were now going to seem like rewards. "I am very disappointed in you, Harry. Whatever your intentions were when you went into that room, you almost killed Severus. I realize that you think you have justification for that, but you do not. I do not think you understand what a mess you've left for Dumbledore to clean up for you at the Ministry with your antics with Mrs. Lestrange."

"She deserved..." Harry was cut off by the look Remus gave him. "She murdered Sirius!"

"Harry..." Remus appeared tired by Harry's reaction, worn down by the fading memory of his lost lover. "She may have wielded the wand, but Sirius killed Sirius. His impetuousness is what caused his death. He should not have followed you onto that platform. He should not have been so dismissive of Kreacher. And... he should not have treated you like James. It's his and James's brash temperament that I see manifesting in you. You mean very much to me. I don't want to lose someone else I care about to recklessness."

Draco squeezed Harry's hand, which had tensed around his.

Part of Harry wanted to rage at Remus for his blaming Sirius for his own death; Sirius was his lover! He should have been just as angry with Bellatrix, if not angrier! He should be thrilled that the woman got what she so richly deserved. And yet... he was lecturing him. "She killed him. She tortured Neville's parents."

"It wasn't your job to mete out retribution for her sins. You've taken Dumbledore away from his research and the Ministry has had to modify Mrs. Lestrange and Mr. Spien's memories so that they do not recall Snape being there on the off chance they managed to say anything. Your dubious vengeance has cost the people you care about, and will ultimately end up costing you." Remus reached his hand across the table for Harry's, as the boy looked rather upset by these words.

Draco was a bit put out that Harry took it with his spare hand, but only showed it by shifting in his chair.

"I'm... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to... cause trouble... like that."

Remus nodded. "I know you didn't, Harry. But each time you act out like that, it has repercussions, and not just for you. It's what You Know Who wants; to keep you distracted and off-balance. You cannot give into that."

Harry's brows furrowed. How could he be so foolish? Of course that's what Voldemort would want. He was giving into his base reactions it more and more. He looked at Draco, who was flexing his jaw, and remaining silent. "I... I won't. Not anymore. I'll... I won't." Remus's censure stung nearly as much as the realization did. "I'll try... and I won't... do that to Snape again."

Now came the sticky part. Remus prayed he'd sold Harry enough on how wrong he'd been. "You won't need to. Draco has been released from his obligation to keep an eye on Severus."

Draco's head snapped up and he mouthed at Remus. Disbelief tinged with relief commingled in his expression.

"He won't? Did Snape quit?" Harry asked on Draco's wordless behalf.

"No. He did not resign, although he may yet. Dumbledore feels that Draco's complicity in your attack last night has severed whatever smidgen of affection that Severus had left for him. He is not positive on this, but he feels it would now be too much of a risk to Draco to have them in contact." Remus looked at Draco, whose eyes were closed and his face was pointed up to revel in being liberated from these dreaded duties. "You will no longer be enrolled in Potions class and you are to avoid him as much as possible."

"What about... what he does? What about the spying and the message relay?" Sitting forward in his chair, Draco appeared to have moved past his werewolf anxiety for the moment.

Remus exhaled. "That... we do not know. This may well have pushed the man too far. He may have defected back to the Death Eaters. Severus's loyalties were often nebulous. I am to go to his home in Wales to try and gain some of his trust. I don't hold out much hope on my ability to succeed." He tried not to think about how this seemed just as pointless an exercise as trying to lure the werewolves to fight for them.

Harry frowned at how well he'd mucked things up. "I'm really sorry."

"It's all right, Harry. It was a mistake, we'll... muddle through. You just need to focus on getting ready to tackle the new semester. N.E.W.T.S. this year, remember." Remus tried to soften the mood with a wry grin.

"What about school, then? Will Draco still be in the Slytherin dorms?" Harry looked hopeful that Draco would have a private room again.

"Yes, he is still a Slytherin and will live in the Slytherin dorms. There is no way around that. Should the situation become extreme or if there is any indication that Snape will seek vengeance... then Draco will get his own room. As it stands, his dorm room is empty so he does essentially have a private room. That said..." Remus paused as both boys stared at him. He could tell they had doubts about how safe even a private room was when Snape was free to run Slytherin as he saw fit. "Should you feel threatened, or in any way insecure with these arrangements, I'm sure you could *manage* some *mischief* around Snape while still remaining *invisible*. Just be sure to *cloak* yourselves at all times, so as not to arouse suspicions."

After that proclamation, they all grinned.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 12

Draco was beginning to wonder how long Harry and Remus could chat about nothing when his eagle owl and Hedwig flew into the room, settling in front of the boys. Each stuck out a scaly leg and glared expectantly for their rewards. Smirking that his owl managed to get his leg out first, Draco untied the scroll marked with the Hogwarts crest from his owl's leg and read over the list of supplies.

Hedwig chirruped as Harry stroked her while he read his letter. Then he noticed the two birds edging closer to one another. For a horrific moment, he was certain that Draco's owl was going to nip at Hedwig, but instead, it started to preen her. He smiled at Hedwig who was twisting her head to allow it. "When did this start?" Harry asked her.

"It's been going on all summer. Quite the torrid affair," Draco answered for her. With that, he hopped up to rifle through the cupboard for owl treats. Finding a few, he set them on the table.

"I had no idea! I missed so much by not being here," groused Harry as he put his arm around Draco after he'd settled back into his chair.

Draco snorted. "Oh yes, owl romance is quite the reason to stay in."

"I feel bad. I don't even know your owl's name, Draco."

"Owl. His name is Owl." Draco watched the two birds quickly gobble up the treats and then return to their nuzzling.

Remus and Harry exchanged glances and then they looked at Draco. "Really?" asked Harry. Remembering Draco's dove, he reckoned that the Malfoys didn't name their owls or consider them pets, only servants.

"Gryffindors." Draco shook his head at their gullibility. "Bran. His name is Bran."

"Brawn?" Harry was reassured that Draco was just having him on. A little chagrined as well, as that was a tad discourteous.

Draco could tell that Harry wasn't catching the subtle difference in enunciation, but he decided that it didn't much matter. "Yes."

Harry smiled and slid his finger over one of the feathers that jutted out above Bran's eye. "Hullo, Brawn." The bird appeared unimpressed and went back to attending Hedwig.

Chuckling, Remus remarked, "That bird is definitely a Malfoy. I think these letters are a sign that we should all go to Diagon Alley. I'm not sure what we'd do about lunch anyhow, and you two have been cooped up here too long."

"Shopping?" Draco pricked up his ears at that idea. His only escape from Grimmauld Place had been the traumatic jaunt to Snape's, which didn't exactly count. He was anxious to get out and about.

"Well, perhaps some lunch, too." Harry rubbed his rumbling tummy.

"I want ice cream." Following his announcement, Draco decisively stood and started towards the door.

"Draco, we need to get Ron and Hermione!" Harry dashed to catch up to him.

Remus gave them an indulgent smile. "We'll all meet in the drawing room and Floo from there."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Do they *have* to go?" He glanced at Remus and wrinkled his nose and then looked to Harry.

"I thought you liked *them*." Shuffling Draco out of the kitchen, Harry headed them towards Hermione's room. "Aren't *they* your friends now?"

Draco gritted his teeth at the taunt and responded, "Pfft."

--

"Ah, Diagon Alley. Just as I left it." Draco considered the speckled mound of clove and spice ice cream on his spoon before plunging it into his mouth. The street was bustling with back-to-school shoppers. It was easy to pick out the Mudbloods from the packs of children flooding the streets. They stood dazed staring at the magical items, shocked at the new world they'd just found out about. Draco sneered at them.

Reading the expression of disdain on Draco's face, Harry sighed. He supposed the bigotry ran deep, but he'd hoped that his boyfriend would see past all of that by now. Then again, it hadn't even been a year. People didn't change overnight. Pensively, Harry sipped his Butterbeer float and reasoned that at least Draco didn't *say* anything offensive.

Now that everyone was together in one spot, Harry noticed that there was a definite hierarchy to whom Draco responded. While Draco was highly attentive to anything he said, the others were given much less consideration. He figured that was normal. A lover would warrant more attention than friends. But then Draco's consideration broke down over predictable bloodlines. He would converse with Ron, but only answer direct questions from Hermione. He pretty much ignored Remus. It was disappointing, but Harry hoped Draco would grow out of it.

"Did you see the look on Madam Malkin's face when Malfoy walked in? I thought she was going to cry, she was so happy. You being locked away for the summer must've put a quite a dent in her profits." Ron tucked into his peanut butter ice cream sundae with a satisfied relish.

Tearing his eyes from the spectacle of the shoppers loaded down with bags, Draco appeared smug.

Hermione toyed with the bottom of her milkshake with her straw. "Did you see the look on her face when he bought half the store?"

Ron thought the wanton display of money was less than amusing. However, Ron realized that pointing that out would have led to an even more libertine display of consumerism. "Clever of her to use the reducing charm on the bags, though."

Remus remained quiet, observing how crowded Florian Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour had grown in the short time they'd been sitting there. It was good to keep an eye out just in case, but he didn't expect there to be trouble here. He cleared off his last bite of Chocolate Frog Flavoured double chocolate ice cream and set the spoon down.

"Oh, she's always done that for her bigger accounts. Makes for easier shopping and travel." Draco took another considered spoonful of the creamy treat and glanced around. He froze when he spotted a dark-clad man with black hair out of the corner of his eye. His empty spoon dropped

from his mouth and landed with a clatter onto the plate.

The noise made Harry look up from his Butterbeer. His hand moved to where he kept his wand and he wrapped his arm protectively around his cringing lover.

"Are you using this chair?" the dark man asked Remus, unaware of the panic his appearance had caused.

"No, go ahead," Remus responded to the stranger. Giving the perturbed boys a concerned look, he spoke softly, "It's all right. It wasn't him."

Draco flinched and turned to look at Harry, who reached up and cupped his face. Stroking his cheeks, Harry repeated, "*It's all right. It wasn't him*."

Nodding, Draco closed his eyes and allowed Harry to kiss his forehead.

Flashbulbs pierced the air with bright lights and loud clicking. The photographer from *The Daily Prophet* had probably been waiting all day for such a display of intimacy. It further tightened Draco's knotted up stomach. "I don't want ice cream anymore."

The childish words and the mawkish tone tugged at Harry's heart, and he looked vulnerably at his friends as he hid Draco's face against his neck.

Ron and Hermione nodded and Remus stood up. "Let's go."

--

Remus had managed to procure groceries while everyone else was sorting out their school supplies and new robes. Ron and Hermione volunteered to try their hand at cooking, partially because they wanted to, but also because they were no more impressed with Remus's penchant for "well-done" food than Draco. Together they pulled off a rosemary chicken, which Draco would deem passable.

Not that they heard of his approval, as he'd confined himself to the room again, where Harry stayed, comforting him from his scare.

"It's not that bad, Harry. I just got tired of smelling Granger, that's all."

Harry sighed. "You didn't mind eating the chicken she made."

"It was marginally better than starving." Draco crossed his arms, leaving Harry to squeeze his stiff torso and kiss his temple.

"What happened to 'passable?'" Sliding his hand down to the crossed arms, Harry tugged at one of them, trying to get him to go back to clinging to him.

"I was being *polite*."

"You're not polite, Draco," he teased, nuzzling the side of his face. "Even if you were, what would be the point? They're not here to hear it."

Draco smirked. "You offend my honour. I should challenge you to a duel, but those things don't work out for me. I'd summon a snake and you'd start flirting with it again, and then I'd be jealous."

"I wasn't flirting with that snake!"

"You weren't flirting with me, either." Draco pouted as he let Harry pry his arms apart and with a playful grudging gesture, finally wrapped his arms around Harry again.

"I wasn't ready for you. I was still in my reptile phase." Harry grinned at Draco and reached up to poke at the protruding lip.

"Aha! You admit it. Pervert."

"Yes, but I'm *your pervert*. From now on, reptiles and I will only be friends." Harry held his hand to his heart. "I wouldn't mind doing a few perverted things with you... but I want to know that you're all right first."

Draco looked rather put out and huffed. "You're making far too much of this, Harry. It wasn't him. I knew it wasn't him. I just had a moment." He didn't want to get into that now. He was enjoying their playful banter, so he returned to it. Batting his eyes, he responded, "I want to do perverted things, too."

Harry wasn't having Draco's avoidance. "But we'll be in school soon and you'll see him all the..."

"I'll be *expecting him* at school. This was just a... I just wasn't prepared, is all. But it wasn't him and I'm fine."

"Draco, I'm just worried that..."

This time it was Draco's turn to cut Harry off with a kiss. As they weren't in public, Draco took advantage by sliding his hands over Harry's chest. He teased the tip of his tongue over the soft seal of Harry's lips, finding his lover pliant and giving. Harry's mouth opened slightly and Draco teased his tongue past his teeth and mingled with the soft warmth of his mouth.

It was the first time they'd kissed like this in what felt like forever. Maybe it had been the whole summer since they'd really expressed such desire for one another. It brought Harry back to the first time they made love in this bed. Caressing, tender, quiet as they were trying not to rouse

Ron. He longed for that closeness, that intimacy. Sliding his arms around Draco's waist, he pulled him atop him.

Draco broke the kiss, leaving a few sloppy pecks over his mouth. He enjoyed the feel of Harry stroking his back as they began to kiss again. Finding himself quickly breathless, he broke the kiss. This time he leaned his weight on one elbow as he pulled his hair back and looked down at Harry's foggy glasses. He snickered and plucked them off. "Getting steamed up, Harry?"

Smiling, Harry nodded. "I am, but you know... you don't have to do this... I don't want to push..."

"I know you don't." Draco gazed at Harry's face, silently calculating the number of times when Harry did push him over the summer. He'd heard the apologies and made his peace with that, but seeing this reversal of Harry's behaviour back to how it had been before this mad summer pleased him. As thrilling as some of those encounters were in their peculiar way, he missed this boy, this love, and this closeness.

"If you're having any doubts at all..." Harry offered.

At this, Draco sighed. He did have some doubts. He looked away and rested his cheek against Harry's chest. He traced patterns on his collarbone through his nightshirt, pondering his feelings. Draco wanted to push the burden of their awkward summer behind him. He wanted Harry to make love to him.

Harry broke the silence. "I want you to make love to me."

"I'm sorry... what?" Draco lifted his head from Harry's chest to look at him.

"I want you to be inside of me." Across Harry's cheeks spread a faint blush, and his expression was apprehensive, but sincere.

"You don't have to..." but Draco didn't want to finish that sentence. He didn't want to protest. This was something he'd wanted for a long time, and though he wouldn't have chosen this path to get it, he felt that at this point, he deserved it.

"I do. Draco, I do have to. You want this, and I should've... just done what you wanted. Or at least... talked... or something. I don't know. I just... didn't... I couldn't really..."

Draco pressed his finger to Harry's lips. "It's all right."

Undaunted, Harry proceeded. "That's why I thought... you know... that you and Ron. I guess. I mean... I thought maybe you weren't... getting what you needed... and that Ron..."

"You thought this up all by yourself?" Draco's brow perked and he shook his head. "So, you thought that because you, *The Boy Who Is Gay*, wouldn't bend for me... that the straightest man in Straight Town would?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "When you put it that way, it sounds stupid."

"It sounds worse when I fill in the names. But it's all right; you had a bad childhood and were probably dropped on your head a lot by those incompetent Muggles." Draco smirked at Harry's attempt to keep from grinning.

"You really are an arse."

"You are what you eat?" Draco waggled his brows.

Harry blushed and cleared his throat. "You certainly don't have to do *that* if you don't want to..."

"And if I do?" Though it seemed unlikely that Harry could blush any brighter, he did. Draco was highly amused, and better than that, he was getting aroused. He was excited about the prospect of being inside of Harry again, and it mitigated his dread of being reminded of Snape by being touched *there*.

"Maybe I should... err... do that to you." The blush faded as the blood drained from Harry's cheeks at the idea of putting his tongue on Draco's... well... *there*.

The thought of it made Draco shiver, but the expression on Harry's face-- he couldn't push him to do that. "Maybe next time."

Harry was relieved. He was already feeling rather jittery about allowing this, but he wanted to share himself with Draco. His lover deserved it, and it wasn't as if it had been the worst experience of his life. It had just been mildly uncomfortable at first. "Next time, then."

Rationalizing that Harry had certainly taken liberties with him, Draco decided to start. He pressed his lips to Harry's, kneading at them till he felt them give and he teased their tongues together. Straddling him, he reached for the buttons of Harry's nightshirt; deftly flicking them open till he reached the bottom. His hands slipped under the parted fabric and he caressed his chest.

Feeling the chill of the air over his body, Harry shivered and then gasped as the tepid hands slid over his torso. Draco's skin was so soft and the way he caressed him forced out another groan as he ended the kiss and turned his head to the side so Draco could nibble over his neck.

Suckling the spot just behind Harry's ear, Draco could taste the mellow tang of Harry's skin, relishing the texture of it on his tongue as he kissed his way down the side of his neck and over his collarbone. He tried not to think about his erection, fearing that too much concentration on keeping maintaining it would spoil it. Instead, he rubbed against Harry's thigh and contemplated what they were about to do. Draco took great pleasure in the whimper his actions elicited from Harry as his skilful fingers fondled over his sides. Hooking his fingers into the waistband of Harry's pyjama pants, he tugged them down.

It felt blissful, but Harry couldn't shake his trepidation about what was going to happen. He tensed at the mere thought of it, but was caught off guard when he felt Draco's length pressing against him. He was nervous, but thrilled. Slipping a hand between them, Harry tried to grab for him, but he was denied it as Draco pulled his hips back. He would have tried again, but the balmy warmth of the tongue ravishing his nipple short-circuited his intent and his hand dropped. He pushed his hips up to allow his pants to be removed. Fisting his hands in Draco's nightshirt, he tugged it to pull it over his head.

For a moment Draco was stuck with his shirt over his face and he had to stop to unbutton his collar so that the shirt could be pulled off. Harry snickered at the way the fine hair carried static, causing Draco to wrinkle his nose at him as he smoothed his hair back down. "Prat."

"It was sexy, you should make it..." Harry's speech broke off when he felt a wet warmth on his prick. Draco could move rather quickly when he wanted to. "Oooh."

Already Draco was pushing his legs open with as he sucked at the head of Harry's prick, sliding his tongue over the slit. Encircling his fingers around the base to steady it, Draco worked it into his mouth, covering his teeth to give Harry perfect suction. Moving down to take the entire length in, he pulled back, daintily dragging his teeth along the shaft.

It had been so long. If Draco kept up like that, Harry wasn't going to last. He sat up on his elbows, watching how Draco's lips stretched around him and how his cheeks hollowed out as he pulled away. The warm lashing of his tongue made him groan and the grazing of the teeth over him felt edgy, on the cusp of being too much feeling. Just when he didn't think he could stand the intense tickle of his teeth, Draco plunged his mouth back down, soothing the sensitive flesh with his tongue.

"Oh... Draco," he called out as he started to feel light-headed at the sensations that were mounting and becoming too much. He could feel the slick saliva from Draco's mouth running down the base of his prick and warmly sliding down over his opening. Harry's eyelids fluttered and his breathing increased to harsh rasping. His head lolled back and his hips moved in fractional jolts and his hands clutched the sheets. "I'm going... to... you..." he panted.

Forcing himself down onto Harry's prick, he relaxed his throat to let him sink the rest of the way in. He tried to keep his tongue moving, but there wasn't far for it to go, so he sucked harder until he felt the telltale throbbing and the hushed whimpers as Harry came. Draco swallowed quickly, trying not to gag as he dislodged him from the back of his throat and his mouth filled with semen. When Harry was finished, Draco fondly pulled the organ from his mouth and let it rest on his abdomen.

He was about to say something when he was cut off with a wild and enthused kiss as he felt the pressure of Draco's prick against his inner thigh. Harry wrapped his arms around Draco, sliding his fingers up and down his spine. Though he was nervous, it was hard to be too tense in afterglow. He concentrated on relaxing even before Draco broke the kiss and whispered, "Just

relax."

Harry nodded and closed his eyes, enjoying the tingling peace of being spent. He felt the shifting on the mattress as Draco pulled off his pyjama pants and heard the sharp click of the lubricant bottle. The bottle made a squelching noise as it ejected the goo and Harry pictured the way that Draco pinched up his face when that happened, as if someone had done something distasteful like burp at the table. Hearing the sound of skin on skin, he knew that Draco had lubed himself up and then he felt the prodding of Draco's cock at his entrance.

He looked up at Draco feeling innocent and vulnerable. "No fingers?"

"They don't help that much, do you want me to?" asked Draco.

For a moment, Harry pondered this. He'd been taking Draco without fingering of late, but Draco had been doing this awhile. It occurred to him that his lover might be worried about maintaining his erection. "No... I'm fine... just... go slowly."

"I want this to last; I'm going to go *very slow*." Draco's pulse was racing and he was trying not to think about it too hard, not wanting to jinx it. He reached down to his cock and nudged his hips forward until he found where there was give. "Ready?"

Nodding, Harry closed his eyes and exhaled, trying to remain calm as he felt himself breached by the head. He inhaled sharply and his brows furrowed as his body adjusted to the violation.

Harry's face had gone red and a fresh sheen of sweat brightened his brow. Draco watched carefully, sucking in his bottom lip at the heat surrounding the tip. Seeing Harry nod again to let him know it was all right, Draco inched himself in the rest of the way. He stayed there, lodged inside, loving the way the flexing muscles moved, compressing as if to expel him.

Wrapping his arms around Harry, he balanced on his elbows and kissed him. Feeling the way that Harry was trembling, he stopped to look down at him. This was the most defenceless Draco had ever seen him, and he couldn't help but whisper, "I love you."

"I love you, too," Harry whispered back, his flushed face brightened at the sentiment. With a tentative and somewhat jerky movement, Harry shifted his hips back and then forward to let Draco know he was ready for this. It hurt just a bit when Draco first had moved inside of him, but now he just felt tight. His opening felt a little strained and pinched, but it was a tolerable pain. Particularly when he could see how contented his lover was.

Draco drew back his hips and then sunk himself inside of Harry again, this time trying a new position. He could tell it felt a bit better because Harry's grip around him loosened. He thrust into him again, trying another way and Harry matched him again. Draco tried a few more times before he found the spot that made Harry whimper. Noting the angle, Draco aimed for it and then closed his eyes and started a steady rhythm. He tried to kiss Harry, but the sensations around his prick was too delectable and he couldn't concentrate on doing anything but moving his hips,

feeling the friction around his cock.

His breath puffed against Harry's cheek and on his neck and his fingers dug into his back. Draco was moving faster now, with an abandoned passion. Harry moved his hands down to Draco's hips, trying to hold him in that spot where something felt rather good. It didn't take Draco long, however, and Harry's prick never made it beyond semi-hard. Still, it *had* felt good, and Harry was almost sad when he heard Draco let out his final gasp as he made a few last, slow strokes inside of him to finish himself off before halting. Sweaty and spent, Draco flopped boneless on Harry and tried to catch his breath.

Harry had bottomed and it wasn't the end of the world. His arms went limp around Draco and he breathed out a slow sigh of relief. He squeezed his inner muscles, testing out their soreness and winced. It was a bit raw, but he'd be all right. The movement made Draco jerk and he snorted against Harry's chest as he pulled back his hips. The loss of the organ inside of him made Harry feel bereft and achy.

"Thank you," whispered Draco. "I'm sorry if I hurt you."

"You didn't. It didn't hurt. It was starting to feel good, actually." Harry flexed his passage again, as if he could stretch out the dull twinge.

Draco frowned. "It didn't hurt at all?"

"It... no... well, just a little uncomfortable, but it wasn't terrible." Looking at Draco's pout, Harry raised his brows. "Did you want to hurt me?"

"Well, no. But... I... is it... small?"

Harry suppressed a giggle. "Ooooh Draco, it was so big! It hurt so bad!"

"That's better." Draco smirked as Harry shook his head. "So it started to feel good, hmm? Good enough to do again?"

"Maybe. If you're good."

"I *was good*," said Draco as he waggled his brows. "That's why it didn't hurt."

Harry snickered and then looked paranoid. "Do I hurt you?"

"No, not usually."

"But... sometimes..."

"Well, when you were... when all of the... sometimes... yes, it hurt." Draco grimaced and rolled off of Harry and lay on his side.

Harry rolled over to face Draco. "I am sorry about that. I won't... I'll talk to you from now on if I think something's going on." He slid an arm over Draco's waist and slid a knee between his legs.

"Nothing's going to go on, Harry. If I want to be with someone else, I would let you know. But I'm not going to want to be with anyone else, Harry. I love you." Draco wiggled closer and slid his arms around Harry. He yawned, which triggered Harry to do the same.

"But Richard-- I heard that Malfoys weren't... that they... you know... slept around."

Draco raised his brows. "Richard? As in the undercover agent of the Dark Lord currently incarcerated in Azkaban? That's your *trusted source*? I'll have you know that my parents never once stepped out on one another."

"How do you know?" asked Harry. He realized too late what a rude question that was to ask when he saw Draco's annoyed expression.

"Because in spite of the occasional marital spat, they obviously adored one another. They had their issues like any couple did, but I'd be surprised if they thought anyone other than each other was worthy of them."

"I think my parents would've stayed together forever," said Harry as he yawned again.

"They are together forever, Harry. And they're watching over you." Draco smiled at Harry's grin and then yawned as well.

"And I'm sure yours are watching you."

Draco wrinkled his nose. "I hope not, that's kind of gross." His eyes fluttered closed.

"I'm sure they found something else to do during..." Harry grabbed the blankets and pulled them up around them.

"Mmm... I'm sure... lots of dead things. That's what dead people do. Things that are dead," Draco mumbled.

Draco was rambling and no longer making sense. It was time to sleep. Harry kissed his forehead and whispered, "Goodnight, Draco. I love you."

"Love you," Draco slurred and then he was out.

It took Harry a few more minutes to settle into a steady pattern of breathing. Bottoming for Draco wasn't bad. He couldn't even remember now what his hang up had been. He would do it again if Draco wanted to. It certainly wasn't worth fighting over.

--

After pulling his robes from the wardrobe, Draco started to methodically fold them. Finding himself quickly bored with this and whipped out his wand, using magic to set the rest like the first couple.

"Hey, what about the decree for underage sorcery?" Harry protested, whirling around to glower at Draco's shortcuts as Ron looked on from his corner of the room.

"I haven't been underage since June. Aside from the fact that it's a 'reasonable restriction of underage sorcery.' Using magic to do menial tasks such as packing isn't *unreasonable*. It's not like I'm blowing up my Aunt." Draco smirked.

"How did you..." Harry started; he'd thought the Aunt-balloon incident had been covered up. The fact that he'd missed Draco's birthday flew over his head.

Ron shook his head. "No, it's not unreasonable, it's just lazy."

Undaunted, Draco continued to flick his wand, moving his clothing and other personal items into his trunk, shrinking many of his newer belongings to fit them into the trunk. "I'm not lazy; I just have better things to do. In any case, Harry, you're old enough to use magic now. Why pack like a Muggle?"

Ron hated packing just as much as Draco did and was glad to pull his wand. "Point."

Harry gave them both stern looks but then shrugged and pulled his wand. "Well, I guess it's legal for me to do it now, too. May as well." He chuckled as he watched Draco's expression of disapproval at his parade of oversized clothing from the Dursleys, but squeaked in surprise when he banished a particularly ugly shirt. "I might've needed that."

"No one needs chequered shirts, Harry. You're lucky I'm leaving the plaid." Draco turned his attention back to his own trunk and sealed it shut. The wild pattern of dragons writhed around until they were secure, clenching their jaws together to lock it. He looked up at the clock and sighed. "They'll be here soon, you two need to hurry."

"These Auror escorts to the platform make me edgy," Harry admitted. "I wish Remus was going to be there."

Draco sneered at the invocation of Remus's name, although mostly because of his niggling feelings of guilt over where he was and why he had to be there.

"Do you really think he'll be able to keep Snape from... you know... going dark again?" asked Ron.

Both boys looked at Draco as if he were the authority on Snape. He shrugged and averted his

eyes, not wanting to think about the situation.

"I'm sure if anyone can it would be Remus. They seemed to get on all right third year." Turning his focus from Draco, Harry slammed his trunk shut and locked it manually.

"Right up until Snape made us do that assignment to goad us into figuring out what he was," Ron pointed out. He looked between Harry and Draco again before turning around to finish up his packing.

Draco sat on the bed and folded his arms, disinterested in speculating on Snape, and looking quite put out that they were still on about it.

Taking the hint, Harry sat next to Draco and kissed his temple as he wrapped his arms around him. "Do you feel too weak to carry your trunk?" He smirked, knowing the answer even before he felt the nod.

"Oh yes, I don't think I could manage it on my own," whispered Draco.

Ron rolled his eyes. Some things never changed, but he was relieved to see that the two were close again. He was about to say something when Hermione poked her head in the door, followed by Ginny. "They're here."

"Need help with your trunk?" Ron offered to his girlfriend.

Hermione grinned, but shook her head. "I have it. Thank you, Ron." Seeing Harry and Draco get up and that Harry was working at grabbing Malfoy's trunk along with his own, she shot the Slytherin a disapproving look.

Draco sneered at her and kissed Harry's cheek. "Thank you, lover."

Ginny rolled her eyes. "Do you need help with those, Harry?"

"I have them, thanks." Harry turned around and charmed the luggage together and then tugged, pleased with his own cleverness.

Glaring at Ginny, Draco took Harry's free hand and interlaced their fingers.

She shook her head and led the way down the hall, followed by Ron and Hermione.

Draco stopped Harry before they continued and looked at him seriously. "I'm scared," he whispered. "This... year is going to be hard. We won't be in the same room anymore and the final battle..."

Harry cut him off with a kiss and smoothed his fingers through Draco's hair. "I'll protect you, Draco. I know this summer was... but we... I think we learned some things. And don't forget that

I have an Invisibility Cloak and I'm not afraid to use it."

Beaming, Draco wrapped his arms around Harry and squeezed him close. "I'm going to make sure you do. I expect I'll need you around a lot."

"I'll be there, Draco. If it's within my control, I'll never let you down again."

"I won't let you," Draco vowed.

"I love you. No matter what happens, remember that."

Draco smiled softly and brushed his lips over Harry's scar, making him shiver. "I love you, too."

Giving each other one last, lingering kiss to sustain them for their adventure to King's Cross, Harry took the handle of their baggage and the boys headed for the door. Whatever the final year demanded, they knew they would face it together. They left Grimmauld Place hand in hand, stronger and more determined. This time, it really was *forever*.