Storyid: 2795394
FanFiction.net
Name: Chrysalis
Author: ElfFlame
Chapter 1 to 23

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Chapter: 1

A/N: So, here's the first chapter of Chrysalis, my NaNo project that was written last November. I've been tinkering with it for a few months now, and I'm pretty pleased with it. I hope you will all enjoy it.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

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Chrysalis
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Draco had made a lot of bad choices in his life, but he'd never really considered what they might mean until it was too late. Now he knew more than anything, that following in his father's footsteps was the worst choice he had ever made. At the time, it had seemed the only choice. Malfoys protected Malfoys, and if Lucius was in danger, Draco would do whatever it took to restore his father's status to the Dark Lord. How was he to know that in trying to regain his father's honour, he would loose everything?

In giving himself he had lost his honour, his dignity, and eventually, his freedom.

He'd wondered that whole summer before sixth year, just how his father felt, sitting in Azkaban, alone, abandoned, and friendless. And now he knew. Intimately.

Draco watched as the birds outside his window dove down into the still-icy Northern water to catch their lunch. It felt odd that outside his cell, life went on as always. That there were children somewhere, running, playing…flying. He might have been here only a few months, but it had felt like years. He missed his broom. Missed playing Quidditch. Hell, he missed the challenge of trying to beat Potter to the snitch. Now he wished he hadn't blown off everything sixth year. It would have been nice to have had at least one normal thing that year, when he thought back on it.

He jumped when the cell door shrieked as someone opened it, and turned to see who had entered. The Dementors were gone, but that didn't make Azkaban a happy place. One of the guards stood in the doorway, her wand pointed at Draco.

"What is it?" he asked tonelessly.

"You're to come with me," she said sharply.

Draco nodded. It was probably just another Auror who wanted information about the Manor, or the Dark Lord, or any number of other subjects he'd covered with other Aurors too many times before. It never really changed. Just the faces were different.

The guard waved him in front of her, and he began to move down the passageway, every now and then passing a door, some of which he knew held friends, and even a few family members. Not that he ever saw them. The only people he ever saw were the guards who came to collect him, and the Aurors, who came to interrogate him. Which was why he was so astonished when the guard opened the door to a room that contained two very familiar people. Pansy Parkinson and Blaise Zabini.

Before the door had even closed behind him, he found himself with an armful of sobbing, skinnier-than-normal girl, a dark head buried in his chest. He smoothed a hand down her back to calm her. It felt extraordinarily good to touch someone—anyone—again. He nodded to Blaise. "Did we somehow earn a reprieve?" he asked the other young man.

Blaise shrugged. "Don't know. All I know is that they told me to wait here, then brought Pansy, and now you."

"Maybe someone arranged a Slytherin reunion," Draco said wryly. He examined the other young man closely. His usually dark golden skin was pale and grey looking, and his hair, once a long silken flow of black, looked as though it had not been brushed in months. Draco knew how much it must pain him. It was one of the things they had shared as boys, their impeccable grooming and love of haute couture. "You're looking…"

"Miserable?" Blaise chuckled wryly. "I feel about as bad as you look," he added, eyeing Draco's grey and tattered prison smock.

Draco sniffed. "Yes, these prisons really know nothing about proper fabrics, do they?"

Blaise grinned, and Draco felt a warmth grow in his chest. He'd missed this. The banter between them as Pansy cuddled with him. How could he have been so stupid as to risk it in the first place?

Pansy was still trembling in his arms when a door opened on the opposite side of the room, and a well-dressed gentleman with lank hair and pale eyes entered. "Ah, good, you're all here," he smiled blandly.

"Are we?" Draco asked. "What about Theo, or Vince or Greg? Are they not included in this little reunion?"

The man's smile never wavered. "I'm afraid not, Mister Malfoy, but if all goes well, they could very well be in the next batch to leave," he said, setting his briefcase on a small table near the door he'd entered by and opening it to retrieve a sheaf of papers.

"If what goes well?" Draco asked, his eyes narrowing at the officious man who was now ignoring him entirely in favour of his papers.

The man still had a bland smile when he looked once more at Draco. "The Ministry has decided to try a little experiment, Mister Malfoy. You three were the first candidates chosen."

"Chosen for what?" Blaise's usually calm voice was wavering, and Draco knew he was quite upset to let any of it show at all.

"We have decided that what you Death-Eaters need is simply—retraining. Many of you were highly intelligent in school, and your parents were productive members of society before You-Know-Who's return while you were attending Hogwarts. We felt that if you could be made to see the error of your ways, you could become so as well."

"Retraining?" Draco repeated through clenched teeth.

The man was smiling broadly now. "Of course, Mister Malfoy."

"And how, exactly, will this be accomplished?" Draco asked.

"Each of you, if you agree, of course, will be given a serum, which will de-age you to about eight years of age. You will then be "adopted" by someone of muggleborn or half-blood status, who will re-teach you about Muggles, and hopefully cure you of your hatred of them. If you can prove, by the time you have regained your proper age, that your views on Muggles and the Muggle world have changed, you will be cleared of all charges against you."

Draco looked at the man in horror. "We're to spend ten years with Muggles?"

The man shook his head, that same stupid smile on his face. "Oh, no, Mister Malfoy. You will be

aging quite quickly. In fact, I have been assured that for someone of your age, the entire process will take less than a year. I believe the potion-maker assured me that you would age about one year per month."

Well, that wasn't quite as bad, Draco admitted to himself. But still, even a year with a Muggle wasn't something he was going to look forward to. "Will the three of us be together?"

"Oh, I'm afraid not, Mister Malfoy. In fact, until you have proven that your views are at the very least improving, you won't be allowed the company of anyone but the person who is raising you."

"Do we at least get to choose those who will be raising us?" Draco managed, though his temper was close to breaking.

"Actually, each of you has already had someone claim you. It is why you three were the first to be chosen for the Chrysalis Project."

"Chrysalis?" The man opened his mouth to explain, but Draco shook his head. "No, I get it. So, may we at least ask who?"

"I have been told you are required to sign the consent papers first. They want you to be completely aware of the conditions, and agree to this without the distraction of liking or hating the person you have been chosen by. This is about you, not how you feel about them, therefore it is imperative you choose because you wish to participate in the project, and not because of how you feel about, or because you wish to spite them. Understand?"

Draco scowled, but nodded.

"Good. Now…" The man flipped through the papers. "Miss Parkinson, if you will?"

Pansy snuffled for a moment, then pulled away from Draco. "But what if I don't like them?" she wailed.

Draco pulled her chin up. If he could do nothing else for her, at least he could give her a pep talk. "You are a Parkinson," he told her softly. "There is nothing they can do to change that. I promise, Pansy, that you will be fine, no matter what."

She nodded, then snuffled again and wiped at her eyes with her ragged sleeves, then turned and moved towards the man. She read through the papers, stopping every now and then to read one passage or another more intently, then looked up at the man. "And if we refuse?" she asked.

"You will not be punished more, if that is what you are asking," the man replied. "But the offer will not come again. If you have turned it down once, we have no reason to believe you will wish to participate later. We would rather try to reform those who are left."

Pansy nodded, then sighed and asked for the quill, quickly signing the papers where the man indicated. The man opened the door behind him and waved Pansy through, but she hesitated, looking back at Draco.

"Go on," he said, nodding. "I'm sure it'll be fine," he tried to reassure her.

Taking a deep breath, Pansy stepped through the door, and was gone.

"Mister Zabini, if you will?" the man then said to Blaise.

Blaise frowned, but stepped forward. He, too, took a great deal of time in reading his papers before reluctantly asking for the quill and signing them. He did not look back at Draco when the man waved him through the door.

"And now you, Mister Malfoy, please?" the man said, as though bored now, and wanting to get on with his day.

Draco moved to his side and began to read through the papers. There was a lot of legal mumbo-jumbo about how he would be recognized legally as a minor until the potion had fully worn off, even if his body was physically over the age of maturity, and how all legal decisions would be placed in the hands of the person who adopted him. It also stated that failure of the official tests he would be forced to take each month would mean that he would be sent back to Azkaban once more, and that he would be given this one chance only. There were also several rules he would be expected to live by until he had been restored to his full age, including full restriction of his magic until such time as he was once more allowed his wand, which would be given him by his keeper when they felt he had earned the right.

Draco grimaced, but really, what choice did he have? It was this or Azkaban for life, just for being a Death Eater. He took the quill from the man, and signed.

The man smiled. "This way, Mister Malfoy," and waved him through the door his friends had used before him.

Draco stepped through the door, wondering exactly who would be waiting on the other side.

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Chapter: 2

A/N: So, here's chapter two. Draco finds out who will be taking care of him, and what the rules

of his new life are.

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Chrysalis

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The next room had been set up like a small infirmary. There were four small beds, two of which had their curtains pulled closed to hide their occupants from view, and two figures watching him silently standing near a third bed. It took only a few seconds to recognize the shorter of the two. Messy black hair, heavy, black-rimmed glasses, green eyes and a jagged scar on his forehead: Harry Potter.

"Oh, no," Draco spat out. "No bloody way! I refuse." He tried to turn back into the other room to tell the man there that he'd changed his mind, but the door had closed behind him, and he was unable to open it again. "Let me out!" he shouted through the door. "I've changed my mind! Please…"

Draco growled to himself and leaned his head on the door when no one answered. If this wasn't a fate worse than Azkaban, he didn't know what was. That sanctimonious prick teaching him how to love Muggles? He wouldn't stand for it. He turned back to glower at Potter. "I've changed my mind. Call the guards; I'm going back to my cell."

The other figure, who Draco had easily recognized as Kingsley Shacklebolt, turned to Potter. "I told you, didn't I? He's not worth your time, Harry. Choose someone else if you must, but don't bother with this one. He's a lost cause." Shacklebolt had been the one to bring him and his father in, earning him almost as much loathing as he held for Potter. How was he supposed to deal with two people who hated him as much as Potter and Shacklebolt?

Draco was surprised when Potter ignored Shacklebolt, instead, he looked at Draco appraisingly for a moment before speaking. "You can't back out now, Malfoy. You signed the papers, right?" Draco nodded grudgingly. Harry shrugged. "Binding magical contract. The only way out is to

fail your first test spectacularly. Right, Kingsley?" The man next to him scowled, but nodded. "See, Malfoy? You're stuck. You'll just have to put up with me."

But Draco wasn't about to just accept this. "So you can make my life hell, just like I've done to you in the past?"

Shacklebolt snarled, but instead of attacking him directly, spoke to Harry. "He's a coward and a sneak, Harry. I don't know why you're even bothering. If his family has somehow goaded you into this…"

"Kingsley, we've already gone over this. He was just a kid, all right? If I'd been allowed to hide, I probably would have jumped at the chance, too."

Shacklebolt sighed. "I just don't understand, Harry. Why him?"

"Because he deserves a second chance." Draco found himself watching his old rival, surprised. Potter was sticking up for him? Had the world just gone mad? Well, Potter might have changed from the last time Draco had seen him, but just because he said he wanted to give Draco a chance, didn't mean he didn't have other reasons up his sleeve. Draco crossed his arms in front of him and watched as the two continued to argue.

Harry had turned to Shacklebolt. "Look. If you can't understand my reasons, well—maybe you should just leave, okay? Because nothing you say is going to change my mind."

Shacklebolt scowled at Draco like this was all his fault. Draco scowled back at him, but he wasn't about to draw further fire from the man if he was angry at Potter. Let Potter deal with it. "I don't know about that, Harry…" Shacklebolt said slowly.

"Kingsley, please. I know where everyone stands on this, all right? My position's not going to change. I'll talk to you later, okay?"

Shacklebolt grimaced. "Fine. Just—watch your back, okay?" He shot one last glare in Draco's direction before turning and striding from the room.

Potter closed his eyes, and rubbed the back of his right hand unconsciously, obviously trying to calm himself a bit. Finally, he looked at Draco again. "Look, Malfoy. I realize you don't like this idea, but it's the only chance you've got. And don't think it's not causing me any grief. Not only is Kingsley opposed, but Ron's furious with me, and Hermione thinks I've lost it. I want you to know this isn't a whim. I really want to help you. It's up to you whether you take that help or not, though. You deserve a chance just like everyone else."

Draco couldn't believe it. Potter thought he was 'saving' him? He didn't know whether to laugh in his face or snort in disgust. The prat was so far gone now that the Dark Lord was vanquished, he felt he had to move on to his followers? It was ludicrous.

Potter didn't see or pretended not to notice Draco's less than warm reaction to what he was saying, and continued. "When I heard about this program, I realized it was my chance to do something positive after the war, and so I asked if I could help. After leaving the Auror program, it's not like I've had anything else to do." He laughed sourly. "The people running the program were thrilled to have me. Well, not me, but 'The Chosen One.' They even asked me to be part of their test program, though even they were a bit horrified when I asked specifically for you."

"What a lovely fairy-tale, Potter. Too bad I don't want your 'guidance.'" Draco growled. "Perhaps you've forgotten, but we weren't exactly friends in school, and I certainly don't intend to change that fact now. Your reasons for choosing me don't make a bit of difference," he hissed.

Potter looked at him, and Draco could see the temper simmering just beneath the surface before he managed to rein it in. "I know you don't like me, Malfoy, but I thought that maybe you'd be able to see past that by now. I thought you'd like the chance of a clean start. Maybe I was overly optimistic? I thought that was what you Slytherins did—utilized whatever chance came your way. But maybe that's only the great ones?" His eyes met Draco's challengingly.

Draco sneered. "And if I'd rather stay here than spend even a moment with you?" he asked.

"No skin off my nose, really. But I'd say you obviously didn't. Seeing as you must have signed the papers. They wouldn't have let you in here otherwise."

Draco took a deep breath and shot Potter a sour look. "Fine. What do I do, then?" he asked.

Potter relaxed, and motioned him closer. Draco went guardedly, but without hesitation. Once he was at Potter's side, he was handed a small vial. "Drink this. It'll knock you out, and then the change will happen. Once the change is done, you'll wake, and then we can go to my place."

"How do I know this will do what you say?" Draco asked, examining the liquid in the vial. It was silvery—almost like quicksilver, though far more liquid.

"Snape made it. Tested it on himself."

Draco looked up, surprised at the mention of his old Professor. He had heard that his old mentor had been cleared of all charges when it had been discovered that he had been acting as a spy under Dumbledore's orders all along. Draco hadn't seen him since the final battle. Now he knew why. He'd been working to save those he still considered his charges—his Slytherins. "Severus made it?"

Potter nodded. "He says he looks forward to seeing you as soon as he's allowed."

"I'll be allowed to see him?" Draco said, astonished.

"Probably not unsupervised, but yes, he'll be allowed to come see you at my place."

Draco looked back down at the vial in his hand. If this was what it took to regain his life… "Fine." He raised the vial to drink it, but Potter restrained his arm.

"You should probably lie down first. More comfortable that way."

Draco glared at him, but settled onto the bed in a sitting position before raising the vial once more. "Well, here goes nothing…" He gulped down the liquid, and felt it coat his mouth, then slide down his throat like a slick of oil. He gagged, and a feeling of creeping coldness made him curl into a ball, and the world went black.

When Draco recovered consciousness, at first he thought that the potion had failed. After all, he remembered everything that had happened up to the taking of the potion. That couldn't be right if he'd de-aged to eight years of age, could it? But then he opened his eyes. Potter was sitting next to the bed, reading a piece of parchment, and Draco was surprised how large he looked. Draco had forgotten what adults had looked like when he'd been young. He'd been small for his age until he'd hit puberty, then he had shot up like a weed. Somehow, in the process, the memory of others towering over him had been lost.

"Potter?" he said, and was horrified to hear how high his voice had been as a child. Potter looked up from whatever it was he was reading.

"How are you feeling?" Potter he asked as he stood and moved to Draco's side.

"Strange." Draco winced at the lisping of the word, then swallowed, remembering the strange, slick feel of the potion sliding down his throat. "I think something's wrong, Potter."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I…I remember everything. I thought that I'd have my memories to the age of eight, but I can even remember drinking that sludge of a potion."

"Nothing's wrong, Draco. Snape made sure the potion wouldn't interfere with memory at all."

"So then how, exactly, will this help?" Draco managed to drawl, even in his high, childish voice.

"We don't want to change who you are. Just your opinions about the Muggle world, Draco. This way, you know you're more vulnerable, and that makes you more open to what we're trying to teach you."

Draco scowled, sitting up slowly as he digested what Potter had said. "So now what?"

Potter smiled. "Back to my place," he told him.

Draco hopped off the bed, and looked rather horrified when he discovered he only came up to somewhere between Potter's elbow and his shoulder. "How are we getting there?"

"The Ministry has provided everyone with Portkeys." He showed Draco a large coin on the table next to his bed. "Shall we?"

Draco shrugged. "No time like the present."

Potter picked it up. "It's word-activated." He held it out to Draco. "Hold on tight." Draco grasped the coin Potter was holding, and shut his eyes. He'd always hated portkeys, preferring side-along apparition if it were offered. But no one was able to apparate from Azkaban, so this was the only option, unless he wanted to go the long way… Potter said, "Home," and Draco felt the world spin around him.

When the world stopped spinning, Draco found himself on the floor in a heap, his now over-large robe a huge puddle around him. He looked up to see that Potter looked ruffled, but had still managed to stay on his feet, and not wanting to be outdone, child or not, Draco stumbled to his feet as well.

"I don't suppose you have any size-appropriate clothing for me, Potter?" he asked.

Potter sighed. "Yes, we should get that out of the way, and then a tour and some ground rules, I think. Come on. I have your room all prepared." He exited the room they were in and began leading the way down a hallway lined with pictures. Mostly pictures of Potter and his friends at Hogwarts, but a few of a couple Draco recognized as Potter's parents, and more of four boys, one of whom looked a great deal like Potter himself.

At the end of the hall, Potter opened the door to a small but well-furnished room, and waved Draco in. There was a small double bed in one corner, a side-table next to it, and a desk and chair on the opposite wall, with a bookcase next to that.

Potter moved to a wardrobe which sat at the foot of the bed. "I got things in a range of sizes, as you'll be growing much quicker than a normal child, so there ought be something in there that should fit you."

Potter left the room, and Draco turned to look at the clothing in the wardrobe. It wasn't luxurious clothing, by any means, but it was a damned sight better than prison robes. He pulled off the robes, and pulled out a pair of black pants and a blue jumper, sighing in relief at the feel of good, clean material against his skin once more. Properly dressed, he opened the door to the room, where Potter stood waiting.

Potter looked at him appraisingly for a moment, then nodded. "Looks like the shopkeeper did a pretty good job. Comfortable?"

Draco nodded.

"Tour then, I suppose," Potter said. He pointed at the door at the end of the hall. "This is the

bathroom. We share, so keep that in mind, all right?" Draco shrugged. Potter pointed at the door across from Draco's room. "This is my room. You're not to go in there unless I specifically invite you, got it?" Draco nodded to indicate he understood, and Potter moved down the hall. "The other two rooms are guest rooms. Sometimes Ron and Hermione come to stay for the weekend. And I like having space." Draco snorted at the idea that two small guest rooms equaled space. Malfoy Manor had over ten guest bedrooms, not including the rooms reserved for visiting family.

Potter led the way back to the room they had arrived in. "This is the living room. Feel free to relax in here, but you're to clean up any mess you make. You are more than welcome to read any of the books, but please be careful with them. Some of them are very special to me. They were my parents', and my godfather's. I'd like to keep them in one piece if I can. There are games and puzzles in that closet, if you feel like something other than reading."

He was obviously waiting for Draco's acknowledgement, so Draco snorted and rolled his eyes. "Please, Potter. It's not like I spend all my time tearing pages from books…" Potter glowered at him, and he sighed. "Fine. Whatever. Can we get on with this?"

Harry sighed, then continued into the next room.

"This is the kitchen. We'll eat here, except on special occasions, and you'll be helping with all the meals…"

"What?"

Potter turned to look at him. "You were one of the best students in potions, Draco. Surely a little cooking won't worry you…"

"Potions are not cooking, Potter. I'm no house-elf."

Potter frowned, and Draco was sure he was about to be chastised for refusing to cook. But Potter had something else on his mind. "About this 'Potter' stuff…"

"What about it? It's your name, isn't it?"

Potter sighed. "True. But I highly doubt you're going to let your guard down to someone you insist on calling by their last names. From now on, rule number one is no last names. You're Draco, I'm Harry. And if you forget, you'll be sent to your room for time out. If you purposefully refuse, you get an extra chore for the day."

Draco was going to remark that no, that was something more along the lines of rule six or seven when he realized what Harry had just said. "I have chores?" Draco exclaimed.

"There are only two of us living in this house, Draco. No house-elves to clean up after you or serve you steak tartare, or whatever it is you like to eat. If we make a mess, we clean it. If we want to eat, we cook. Simple as that. Understand?"

Draco glowered at him. "I suppose."

"It's not that big a deal, Draco. I just expect you to help me cook, and to clean up after yourself. Surely one chore beyond that won't be too taxing."

Draco grumbled to himself, "Not if you're a house-elf…" And Potter pretended to not hear him, leading the way from the room. Draco followed him down a short hall, and into another room filled with Muggle equipment. "What is all this?

"I call it my den. It's not really a study. It's where I keep all my electronics."

"Elec-what?"

"Muggle technology." He pointed at a large glassy box. "That's my Telly, and I have a VCR and a DVD player." He turned and pointed to the other end of the room where a set of boxes stood on a desk. "And that's my computer."

"All right…" Draco said. "So what are they?"

Potter grinned. "Watch this." He moved to the 'Telly,' and picked up a smaller box, then pressed a few buttons, at which the 'Telly' sprang to life. Draco watched in amazement as a story began playing across the box. Two men were in a pub talking about some Muggle sport, and complaining about the price of their drinks. Another came by and knocked one of the talkers off his stool, and punches began to be thrown until the whole pub was involved. Wide-eyed, Draco turned to Potter. "How long does the picture go on? And how did they capture the voices?"

Potter smiled. "I'm not really sure how they make them, but they're all sorts of different lengths, from just a few minutes, to hours."

Draco shook his head in amazement, enraptured by the scene playing out on the box until Potter shut it off once more. He put his hand on Draco's shoulder to get his attention, as Draco was still gazing dazedly at the screen. Draco blinked, recalling where he was, and pulled quickly away from Potter. Potter didn't seem to mind, though. He smiled. "Come on, let's go whip something up for dinner, then we can watch a movie when we're done, all right?"

"Movie? What's that?"

"A really long story. At least a couple of hours worth."

Draco thought that sounded quite appealing, but he was hardly going to tell Potter that. "That should be interesting."

Potter suppressed a chuckle. "I can't wait to show you the computer…"

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Chapter: 3

A/N: So, here's chapter three. Draco and Harry try to deal with life in the same house.

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Chrysalis

-3

Dinner had gone surprisingly well. Potter had insisted they make spaghetti and meatballs, and he had put Draco in charge of the meat. He'd been a touch squeamish about getting his hands dirty, but once he'd gotten into it, it had been kind of fun, really. Once he'd finished them, Potter had given him the task of making garlic bread, and Draco had found that even easier. Maybe this cooking for yourself thing wasn't so bad.

Potter had also insisted he set the table, and after a short argument, which had been mostly on Draco's side, he had handed him plates and cups, showed him where the silverware was, and left him to it. Draco had not had a problem with the placement of the dishes, but when he'd gone to retrieve the cutlery, he'd run into a slight difficulty.

"P—um, Harry…"

Potter had turned from the pot of sauce he'd been stirring "Yes?"

Draco looked down at the silverware in the drawer. "Which ones am I supposed to use?"

Potter shrugged. "Just the usual. It's not a fancy meal or anything…"

As though that was supposed to help. "I'm not sure what that means, really," Draco finally said in exasperation, looking at all of the different pieces there were. "How many of these do we need each?"

Potter turned to him, incredulous. "Draco, we're just having spaghetti. A knife and a fork would be enough, though a big spoon might be helpful."

Draco raised his eyebrows. "That's all?" Draco was used to even family meals requiring several pieces of silverware. He couldn't imagine a meal with less than five.

Potter laughed. "How much silverware do you usually use, Draco?"

Draco scowled at him. Like he'd paid attention to details like that. That was servant's work. "I never really paid much attention, beyond using the right piece for the right dish. If I needed it, it was there."

"How many pieces did you tend to have?"

Draco thought about it, and began to count them off on his fingers as he spoke. "At the very least, there was the salad fork, the dinner fork, a soup spoon, a dessert spoon, and a butter knife. And, if we were having meat, a steak knife."

"So what you're telling me is you're used to having meals where you have at least five pieces of silverware?" Potter asked, incredulous.

"I guess."

Potter snorted. "Well, I live a much simpler life, Draco. So do you, now."

Draco scowled. As though he'd wanted to be here. "And if I didn't want to?" he asked, annoyed.

Potter turned back to him. "Draco, this isn't the time. If, some day, you feel the need to turn the tables on me and show me how much I don't know about your life, then you'll have to earn the right to do that first, won't you?"

Draco looked at him a long moment before he responded. "Fine." Annoyed, but at least slightly aware that Potter was right, he pulled out two of each piece of the silverware Potter had mentioned, and finished setting the table.

Draco was surprised just how wonderful the food tasted once he began to eat. He wondered if all food made by human hands tasted this good, of if it might not have something to do with the fact that he'd helped make it. Whatever the reason, food had never tasted more delicious.

They settled down to watch a movie that night. Potter had told him it was called *Stand By Me*. The title hadn't made much sense to Draco, but he hadn't cared. He was more interested in seeing the 'Telly' work again.

He was surprised at how much he felt pulled into the story. He even found himself identifying with one of the boys, despite the fact that the boy was almost nothing like him.

When the movie was over, Potter pressed a few buttons on his little box, and the Telly went off. He turned to Draco. "So, what did you think?"

Draco blinked for a moment, a bit stunned by the experience. He'd almost forgotten where he was, and it took time to settle himself back to reality. It was also rather difficult to put into words exactly how the movie had made him feel once he'd realized that Potter had asked him a question. "It was interesting." He thought for a moment, then asked, "Do all Muggle boys do that kind of thing?"

Potter smiled. "Which part?"

Draco shrugged. "Well, not the going to look for a body, but all of the paling around like that. Spending all your time together that way."

Potter shrugged. "Well, my cousin did."

Draco looked at him. "But you didn't?"

Potter's face closed off at the question, and he fiddled with the box in his hand a minute before responding. "I wasn't allowed out until I'd done my chores, and I never really had anyone to spend time with, anyway. Most of the time, I avoided Dudley and his gang if I could, to be honest."

Draco digested that for a moment. "Did your cousin do his chores fast?"

Potter snorted. "That would have been the day. No." He sighed. "I'd rather not talk about it, really. So, what did you like best in the movie?"

Draco thought about it for a moment. "Chris's relationship with his brother." It had been very familiar, to be honest. Wanting someone to approve of you who never seemed to have time for you—it was something Draco had accepted as normal.

Potter was looking at him oddly. "Really? His brother's such a creep. Why not Gordy and his brother?"

Draco shrugged. "I…I don't know. Gordy's so—straight-laced. Boring. Chris was the interesting one. He seemed pretty important, even though Gordy was the one telling the story."

Potter smiled. "That tells me a lot about you right there, Draco."

Draco's guard went up at that. He hadn't really thought about the fact that Potter might see why he was so interested in the character. "Oh, please. Just because I don't like the main character, you think that means something?"

"Draco…"

"No, I think we're done, Potter."

Potter's face clouded. "Apparently." He closed his eyes. "We need to deal with a few things tomorrow, though. And then we need to start working on a little cooperation on your part." His eyes opened again, and he looked at Draco for a moment. When he got no response, he glowered. "Go to bed, Draco. I'll talk to you about all this in the morning."

The next morning didn't go much better. Sure, Potter had provided a home, but he seemed to disapprove of everything Draco did. Draco was sick of Potter judging him all the time. And making him work like a servant? That was just uncalled for.

Things got worse over the next few days. Potter had sent him to his room for using his last name more times than he could count. And though they were still watching movies, Draco had refused to discuss any of them, for fear of being analyzed by Potter after.

Finally, after a particularly difficult day, Potter had blown up at him. "What do you want from me, Draco? I'm trying to help you, can't you see that?"

"Why should I care?" Draco had responded, annoyed to find tears springing to his eyes. It wasn't like they'd never fought before. They'd fought all the time at school, but Draco had never felt the emotions quite this strong then. Of course, now he was in an eight-year-old body, and while he'd stopped crying somewhere around the age of six, his body was obviously still more prone to those sorts of emotions than not.

"Do you honestly want to end up being sent back to Azkaban?" Potter had asked, incredulous.

Draco had stared at him blankly. He wasn't sure what he wanted any more. He swallowed, hugging himself, then left the room. He just needed to get away. He spent most of the rest of that afternoon in his bedroom, the only place he could really go to get away from Potter.

Sometime around dinner, he got up and started down the hallway, but stopped just outside the living room when he heard Potter's voice. "I just don't know what to do to get through to him," he was saying.

A voice he only vaguely recognized responded. "It will take time, Harry. Slytherins don't trust easily. Severus never believed any of us in the Order accepted him."

"There were plenty who didn't. But this is different. Draco's not Severus. He's in a very different position. If I don't find a way to get through…" Draco heard him sigh. "I have to do this. I want to do this. He deserves it, even if I never see him after." Potter sounded entirely miserable, which surprised Draco. Why would he care if Draco never talked to him again?

"You're probably pushing too hard, Harry. The more you push, the more he'll pull away. He'll just think you want something." There was a long silence after that, and Draco wondered why.

Finally Potter responded with another sigh. "I know, Remus. And I know I can't…" The clock in the living room interrupted him, chiming five times, and when it finished, Potter's voice seemed calmer. "I should probably go see what he's up to, if he's willing to help with dinner, at least. Thanks for listening, Remus."

Draco didn't bother to wait for more. He hurried down to the bathroom and slipped inside, flushing the toilet when he heard Potter knock on his bedroom door. He ran water and put his hands through it. It wouldn't do to have Potter think he had been listening after all. He opened the door to find Potter waiting for him.

He nodded. "Did you need something?" he asked.

"It's almost time for dinner. You up to helping?"

Draco raised an eyebrow. "You mean I have a choice?"

Potter sighed. "Draco, I know you're upset. I know this is different and difficult. But won't your freedom be worth the effort when all this is over?" Draco shrugged, but Potter continued, obviously trying hard to find a way to get through to him this time. "I know we were never friends, but I thought that maybe, somewhere deep inside, we weren't that different, really. That somehow, I'd be able to reach you. If you'd just let me."

Draco was ready to snarl at him, until he remembered what he'd overheard. He knew Harry was trying. What he didn't know was why. His voice was still cold when he spoke. "How did you figure that, Po—" Realizing what he'd been about to do, Draco tried to calm himself. He took a deep breath, and tried again. "Harry. What made you think we were anything alike? We hated each other all through school."

"I know that you approached me to be friends twice." Draco rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I know I turned you down. And I had good reason to at the time."

"Please! You didn't even know me!"

"I'd already heard you rant on about the evils of Muggleborns, and at the time, was I really that different from a Muggleborn myself? How would you have reacted that day in the shop if I had told you my name?"

Draco shrugged. "I don't know." When Potter stayed silent, Draco sighed. "I suppose I would have been a bit more friendly," he said.

"And if I'd been alone on the train…"

"I would have done everything I could to befriend you. Father would have been thrilled." Potter winced at that, and Draco screwed up his face. "Yeah, okay, maybe that wouldn't have been so good…"

Potter chuckled at that. "That's rather an understatement, don't you think?"

Draco managed a sheepish smile. If he had managed to befriend Harry Potter, his father would have had a ball finding ways to control him, or worse, destroy him… "Okay, so what should I have done?" Draco asked.

Potter shook his head. "I don't think there was anything you could have done, short of being sorted into another house, really."

Draco looked at him, appalled. "That's not funny," he scowled. He tried to imagine himself in Ravenclaw, or god forbid, Gryffindor. What would his life have been like?

"I've only told a couple of people this, but I was almost sorted into Slytherin, you know…"

Draco looked up at him, wide-eyed. "You're kidding, right?" Potter shook his head. "You? In Slytherin? They would have eaten you alive!"

Potter nodded. "I know. I would have been miserable. But it's still true."

Draco shook his head. "I don't know why that matters anyway, Harry. You're a Gryffindor hero, and you think that you have to save everyone. I just happen to be a convenient target." He crossed his arms, and waited to see what Potter would have to say to that.

"Yeah, Ron and Hermione are always telling me I have a 'saving people' thing. But you're a Slytherin. Shouldn't you be trying to take advantage of that fact, instead of fighting it?"

Draco pursed his lips. "Point." He took a deep breath, then nodded. "Alright. So I try harder. Any chance that you'll try at least a little to understand where I'm coming from?"

Harry let out a snort. "Draco, what do you think I've been doing? It's why I want to talk to you about these movies we've been watching. It's not a bad thing for you to identify with the characters in some way. Most people do."

Draco still didn't like the idea, but if it would get Potter to lay off even a little, it would be worth giving it a shot. Maybe he'd overreacted just a bit? "Fine. So, if we talk after the movies, and I don't want to talk about something?"

Potter looked thoughtful for a moment. "Well, I suppose you need to deal with some things yourself before you're willing to be open about them with me. Will you at least promise me you'll think about talking things over with me once you've thought about them a bit? I can't help you if I don't know when you're struggling with something. "

"I suppose I could do that."

Potter smiled. "Thank you, Draco. I know this isn't exactly comfortable for you, but I really want this to work." He stood up from the chair he'd relaxed into, and moved to where Draco was standing. "Why don't we play a game after dinner? You seemed to like the speeder-bike game when we played that…"

Draco grinned. "Fine. I get Irons!" he shouted as he sprinted down the hall towards the kitchen.

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Chapter: 4

A/N: So, here's chapter four. New character appears, and Harry finally loses it.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, though I'm not 100 percent sure of the chapters, yet. There are 46 sections, but I may combine some of the smaller sections with the ones around them. This was originally two shorter sections, but has been combined into one.

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Dedication: To Foodie, who still betas me despite my predilection for slash, and for FionaFawkes, who read and reviewed every single chapter, and gave me such excellent feedback. Also, for everyone who's read and loved my Harry/Draco. This one's for you.

Chrysalis

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Unfortunately, things improved only slightly after that. Draco was still rather annoyed at Harry's insistence on his little rules. He wasn't allowed to be alone except while in the bathroom or his own bedroom. Bedtime was earlier than Draco had ever had—nine o'clock, which prompted quite a few fights that left both of them unwilling to speak to each other for days. And as for

cleaning, well, Draco swore to himself that he'd never get used to that. It was just appalling, expecting him to pick up after himself, let alone expecting him to sweep the floor.

After a week of this, Draco was about ready to do anything to get away from Harry. He had even taken to calling him Potter to his face again, thrilling to the angry flush it brought to Harry's face.

Finally, Harry had had enough. "Just stop already!" he growled. "I've been trying to deal with you like the adult I thought you were, but you seem insistent to act your physical age. So maybe it's time I started treating you that way."

Draco snorted. "You've hardly been treating me like an equal, Potter."

"I never said that, *Draco*. I said I was trying to treat you like an adult. Who just *might* understand why I've given you the rules I have. But you don't seem to even be bothering to meet me even halfway. You just want things your way and no other."

Draco was annoyed. He'd been doing Harry's chores, hadn't he? What was so wrong with being upset at being treated like a kid? "Oh? Give me an example, Potter. How were you treating me like an adult? With the early bedtime? With the chores? Or maybe it was dictating what I do every day?"

"How about the fact that I talk to you about why I do these things, Draco? That you know they're not just arbitrary rules. Or the fact that I follow most of them myself. I'm not expecting much. But I suppose I should know better, shouldn't I? You never did get other people. It was always about you. Get out of here. Go to your room. If I look at you right now, I might do something I regret."

Draco laughed. "Like what, Potter? You going to hit me?" He stuck his chin out, smirking. "Do your worst."

Harry glowered at him for a moment, breathing heavily through his nose, then advanced on Draco. Draco backed up a step before he realized what he was doing, and held his ground, sure Harry was about to hit him. Maybe then he could ask to be re-situated. Surely there would be someone else who could take him. Severus, perhaps… He was startled when Harry's hands grabbed him by the waist and pulled him over his shoulder.

"What are you doing, Potter?" Draco managed with a squeak. Harry ignored him, and began moving down the hallway towards their rooms. Draco tried everything to get free—kicking, biting, shrieking his head off—but nothing worked. He soon found himself dumped rather heavily onto his own bed, and before he could scramble off it and move to the door, Harry was out of the room, the door closed behind him. When Draco managed to reach the door, he found it had been locked, and nothing he threw at it made a bit of difference. He screamed himself hoarse, telling Harry exactly what he thought of him, and exactly what he would do when he got free. Finally, he slumped down against the door. How dare he? How could he do something like this? Draco would make sure he paid, if it was the last thing he did.

It was a long wait until dinner. He hadn't been too sure that Harry wouldn't just leave him here without. He'd seemed pretty pissed. So when the door had opened of its own accord, Draco had breathed a sigh of relief, and headed down the hall to see what Harry'd come up with for dinner. But upon arriving in the kitchen he stopped short. Harry wasn't there.

Instead, standing in front of a steaming pot, gray-haired and wearing his usual shabby clothing, was Remus Lupin. Sure, he was older than the last time Draco had seen him, shortly before he'd left Hogwarts in disgrace, but he hadn't truly changed that much.

Draco glowered at him. "What are you doing here?" he asked coldly. "I thought that Harry was the only person allowed to spend time with me until my first test."

Lupin continued to face away from Draco, as though he thought he were no threat at all, stirring at the pot. "The only restriction is that you are not allowed to spend any time with family, friends or past associates until the Ministry decides you are reformed enough. The rules say nothing about who Harry can bring into the house, Mister Malfoy."

Draco sneered, but internally he felt rather like he was back in third year, and Lupin had just caught him laughing in the middle of a particularly important lesson. "Where is he?"

"Do you really care?" Lupin asked.

Draco thought about it for a long moment. What would it mean if Harry didn't come back, or worse, if he decided that he wanted to send Draco back to the Ministry? He didn't particularly want to answer, so he moved towards the cupboard where the plates were to set the table.

"Let me get those for you, Mister Malfoy," Lupin said, reaching over him and pulling down mugs and bowls. "We'll only need spoons or forks. Up to you." Then he turned back to his pot. Draco retrieved the silverware, and set up the table, even going and retrieving the milk from the fridge, and a loaf of bread. It had been a long time since lunch, so he nibbled on a slice while he waited for Lupin to serve them.

Once they were both served and eating, Lupin looked at him and asked his question again. "Do you care if Harry comes back or not, Mister Malfoy?"

Draco took a big bite of the rather delicious stew that Lupin had made in an effort to try to avoid the question. Lupin gave him a lingering look before speaking again. "Harry's rather at loose ends right now. He's a very easy-going person, particularly when he wants to be, Mister Malfoy. You are one of the few who can upset him quite this badly. Does that mean anything to you?"

Draco shrugged, taking a gulp of milk rather than responding vocally.

"If you don't want to try, I suppose that is your prerogative, but you have to understand that a lot of people were against Harry taking you in the first place. Ron Weasley in particular."

Draco snorted. "I bet. Why'd he bother, then?"

"Why do you think he did, Malfoy?" Lupin asked him sharply, as if he'd asked a question that he should have already known the answer to.

"I have no idea. We've always hated each other. He had no reason to believe that it would be any different now…" But he couldn't help but remember the very first day they'd met. Draco had even gone out of his way to be friendly to the other boy that day. It had been Harry who hadn't wanted to be friendly. Then or later. Why was it Draco's fault that they were at each other's throats now?

Lupin took a particularly long time mopping up some of the stew in his bowl before responding. "It's who he is. He has problems with trust, but it doesn't stop him from wanting to help others. He's wanted to help you for a while, now. Is that so wrong of him?" Golden-brown eyes met Draco's, and he found he couldn't look away. He wondered if this was some special werewolf power he hadn't known about before.

"The things he's expecting from me…"

"Let me guess. He has you doing back-breaking labour every day, and then expects you to make all the meals? And clean up after?" Lupin asked, amused.

Draco scowled at him. "Look, it might not seem like much to you, *mutt*, but to me…" Lupin stood up before he could continue and picked up the dishes, carrying them to the sink, ignoring him as though he hadn't even spoken.

"Did you know that I was best friends with your mother's cousin while we were at Hogwarts?"

Draco gaped at him. What the hell did his mother's cousin have to do with all this? "So?"

"You remind me of him. A lot. I made friends with someone our sixth year at Hogwarts, and he felt threatened by the friendship. He hated the other boy. Had since they'd first met. So he sent him to visit me one night. On a full moon. Because he couldn't have his way." Lupin turned around and looked at Draco for a long time. "You are so busy trying to show Harry why you're better than his rules that you refuse to see what he's trying to do for you. Maybe it's time you thought about it."

Draco frowned at him for a moment. "Will he be back?"

Lupin sighed. "Yes, Draco. He will. But I wouldn't push him again."

Draco nodded. "I think I'll go off to bed. It's been a long day."

"Good night, Draco. I hope you'll think about what I said."

Sleep didn't come easily that night.

Draco woke early the next morning, and though he tossed and turned for at least another hour he was unable to fall back asleep. What if Harry had decided not to return, or worse, what if he had decided to send Draco back to Azkaban? He was the only one who seemed to have any faith in Draco right now. Lupin certainly hadn't seemed to think he was worth Harry's time. And he knew that Harry's friends hated him with a passion. Not that he could blame them…

He got up and dressed quietly, moving to his door, and wondering if it would even open. The knob turned easily in his hand, though, and Draco made his way down the hall. There had to be a way to apologize, didn't there? Lupin was not in the living room or the kitchen, which made the knot of anxiety in his stomach lessen a bit, and Draco decided that maybe the best way to apologize was to make Harry breakfast.

He knew how to use many of the Muggle appliances now, though Harry insisted upon being the one to use the stove. Still, Draco was sure he could whip something up. Eggs, perhaps. And some toast. Maybe even bacon?

Draco pulled out four eggs, and the packet of bacon, and the bread. He set the pan on the stovetop and began to separate several slices of the bacon while it heated. As soon as it was hot enough, he threw the slices into the pan, jumping back suddenly when it began to spit and pop upon contact with the hot surface. The bacon took almost no time at all, and soon he had scrambled eggs well under way, and six hot slices of bacon cooling on a paper towel. He popped several slices of bread into the toaster, and turned back to the eggs, not noticing when the door opened behind him.

"What on earth are you doing, Draco?" Harry's bemused voice came from the doorway.

Draco whirled around, nearly knocking the pan to the floor in his surprise. "Making breakfast?"

Harry raised an eyebrow. "I can see that. But why?"

Draco shrugged and turned back to pull the eggs off the burner. They were finished anyway. "'Cause I felt like it."

Harry moved forward and picked up a slice of bacon, nibbling on it as he looked down at Draco, who was staring at the floor. "Draco." When Draco didn't look up at this, Harry pulled his chin up. "Go sit down, okay?" he smiled. "I'll deal with setting the table. And serving. It's the least I can do. You did a good job."

Draco looked at him, shocked, then turned and moved to the table, watching as Harry dished up two plates for them, dividing everything equally between the plates. Once the food, along with jam and juice was settled onto the table, the two sat for a moment, looking at each other.

Draco wasn't sure he wanted to hear what Harry had to say, but he knew he needed this chance. Needed Harry to give him this chance. Draco found it hard to meet those green eyes. He knew Harry saw through him. He always had. "I…"

"Draco, we can't keep doing this. Just when I think I'm reaching you, you back off and lash out. You know I want to help, right?" Draco nodded. "So what should I do, then?" he asked quietly.

Draco fiddled with his fork. He'd rather hoped that Harry would accept the food as an apology. He hadn't wanted a long, drawn-out conversation about things. But he owed Harry something. For believing in him, if nothing else.

"I don't know." He sighed. "I know you're trying to help me. I just…"

"Tell me, Draco. What can I do? You need the guidance. I know it's got to be hard to deal with being eighteen in an eight-year-old body, but it's not going to last long. We're halfway through the month already. Have I really made it that hard for you?"

Draco shook his head. "It's not that. It's just…you." Harry's eyes flashed hurt for a moment, then the emotion disappeared. "I'm sorry, but we've never gotten along, H-Harry. It feels strange…to spend all this time with you. To have to listen to what you tell me. It's wrong, somewhere in my head. Besides, what you're telling me is so different from what I know. I—"

Harry cut him off. "That's the point, Draco. You have to understand. The world you grew up knowing—that's the wrong one." Harry grew thoughtful for a moment, before speaking again with a rueful smile. "I think we all have images the people who raised us create. It's hard to escape them. But part of growing up is figuring out our own feelings on that sort of thing. That's why you're here. To see if you really believe it. If you do…" Harry looked at him, worried.

Draco laughed sourly. "All I know is that following my father's path turned out to be a pretty stupid thing. I don't know what I believe any more, to be honest."

"So you'll let me try?"

Draco shrugged. "I've been watching your movies, haven't I?"

Harry nodded. "True. But you still fight me on so much, Draco. We have to get past this. Is that even possible?"

Draco bit his lip for a long moment, before saying simply, "I'll try."

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Chapter: 5

A/N: So, here's chapter five. Draco's first test and a reappearance.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

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Things went better after that. Not that there weren't occasional blowouts, but Draco tried much harder to see why Harry was insisting on whatever it was they were fighting about. He was really enjoying the movies Harry was showing him. They'd watched some Shakespeare, during which Draco had delighted in telling Harry that Shakespeare had been a squib, and Harry had not believed it until he'd owled Hermione who had confirmed that that was why there was so little information about the man. It was all because the new Wizarding secrecy laws at the time had covered up large sections of his early life, and much of his dealings outside of his playhouse.

They had also watched a very strange video about two boys who traveled in time and met different Muggle (and a few less-than-Muggle, Draco had informed Harry again) figures from history. That one had been confusing for Draco. He'd wanted to know how the two boys' machine worked without magic, and they'd gotten into a long conversation about Muggle technology. When Harry had explained that, in fact, the machine the boys used in the story did not even exist, Draco became even more confused.

"Why does it exist in the movie, then?"

Harry had grinned. "Muggles like to imagine how far they can stretch their technology. They write all sorts of stories about what could happen in their future. Time travel's only one of their favourite themes. They like to imagine what space travel would be like, as well."

"Space travel? Why on earth would they do that?" Draco had asked.

"They worry a lot about using up this planet. It's their way of reassuring themselves that even if they do, someday they'll be able to leave the planet, and find another."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Muggles…" But the ridiculousness of some of the Muggle ideas didn't stop him from enjoying the movies.

Draco got so caught up in the day-to-day life that he and Harry had worked out that when he woke one morning feeling strange, he grew concerned. He ran from his own bed to Harry's door and knocked. He was often the first up, now that Harry was used to having him in the house, and sometimes even started breakfast before Harry managed to get out of bed. But he was too concerned with the odd feeling he'd woken to, to worry about letting Harry sleep in.

Harry opened the door to his room, rumpled and half-awake. "Draco? What's wrong?"

That was when Draco realized that Harry looked different. Smaller. He looked down at the cuffs of his night-shirt, and sure enough, they looked several inches too small for him. He looked back up at Harry. "I've grown," he managed, a grin settling onto his face.

Harry snorted with laughter at this. "Yeah, it sure looks like it." He sobered after a moment, though. "Guess that means a trip to the Ministry's in order today. Go put on something, and I'll treat you to breakfast before we go in."

"Can we do that?" Draco asked, surprised. He hadn't left the house since he'd arrived.

Harry shrugged. "If you don't cause any problems, the Muggles certainly won't tell, and I won't tell…" he grinned.

Draco grinned back. "I'll be ready in a second!" and hurried back to his room, just missing Harry's mumbled "That will be a first…"

The meal was heavenly. After a month of at least helping to cook every meal, it was wonderful to have something that he had had no part in making. He was beginning to enjoy cooking, but even so, it was nice to have food made just for him with no effort on his part. And nothing to clean up.

The Ministry looked much as it had the last time he had been there, though then it had been at the trial that had sentenced him to life in Azkaban. He couldn't help but remember the day, and the memories left a pall to his enjoyment of the outing.

Harry took him up several floors, and the two ended up at the MLE offices before Draco even realized where they were. Harry placed a hand on his shoulder before they went inside. "You've changed a lot this month, Draco. I want you to know that I believe in you. And I think you'll do great."

The words left a warm glow in Draco's chest, until he realized what Harry was implying. "You're not coming with me?" he asked, a little panicked at the thought that he'd have to do the test without Harry's guidance. He hadn't realized how much he'd come to rely on Harry's opinions over the last month. Even if he did fight against them all the time.

"I can't, Draco. But you'll do fine. I promise. And as soon as you're done, well, maybe we can go to Diagon Alley and get you something to celebrate with."

Just the thought that Harry thought he'd do well enough to be allowed to visit the Wizarding World again buoyed him through the door. There was a woman in the room who looked at him for a moment before asking his name. When Draco told her who he was, she nodded, and led him to a small, windowless room, where she gave him a piece of parchment with a series of questions on it, and a quill, then left the room.

Draco looked it over before starting, rather alarmed at the simplicity of the test. Surely it should be tougher than this. It was a simple series of ten questions, all multiple choice, asking what he would do in different situations. He filled it out quickly, but, worried that he'd somehow misunderstood the meaning of some of the questions, went back and looked through it a second time before setting down his quill.

He was about to take the test out to the woman when the door opened and she reappeared. She took the test from him, instructing him to remain in the room, and closed the door behind her once more.

Nervous and edgy, Draco paced the room. What if he'd totally failed? He'd never be allowed a second chance. He'd never get to see Severus at all. And Harry…How could he live with himself knowing he'd failed him?

When the door opened what felt like a great deal later, it was not the woman who returned, but a familiar figure. "Auror Shacklebolt," he said, nodding cautiously. The last time he'd seen the man hadn't gone well, but he wanted to show that he'd at least been trying to change.

Shacklebolt nodded back stiffly. "Malfoy. I thought I'd come see the results of your test."

"I don't know how I did. They haven't told me yet," he said quietly.

Shacklebolt smiled slightly. "I do. I'm here to tell you your results, actually."

Draco swallowed. If they'd sent an Auror to tell him, that couldn't be good, could it?

Those dark eyes watched him for a long time, but Draco was determined not to crack under the pressure. Finally the man sighed. "You got an 'Acceptable.'" Draco looked at him in shock. He'd passed? He'd really passed?

"I'm rather surprised, myself," the man said. "Obviously Harry's a good influence on you, Malfoy. Or maybe it's the absence of your father?" By the time he'd finished speaking, he was smirking broadly.

Draco tamped down the anger that rose in him at the slur on his father and shrugged.

Shacklebolt watched him for another long minute before opening the door, his face blanking as he did so, looking more bored than anything else. "Come on, Malfoy. Let's go give Harry the good news, shall we?"

Harry looked worried when Draco stepped out of the office with Shacklebolt directly behind him. "Kingsley? What are you doing here? There's no problem, is there?"

Draco moved quickly to Harry's side. He still wasn't overly fond of Harry, but Shacklebolt gave him the chills. Shacklebolt had been the one to capture both Malfoys, and Draco remembered how calm the man had seemed in the face of his father's threats. It was unnatural for anyone to be that calm.

"Nothing's wrong, Harry. Just taking an interest in the case, seeing as how I was the one responsible for this one's capture. And having been there when you picked him up, I thought I'd keep an eye in, anyway."

Harry nodded, still looking worried, and a bit wary. "So, how long until we know the results?" he asked.

Shacklebolt smiled, showing all his teeth, and Draco had to restrain the urge to hide behind Harry. "He passed. Marginally, but he passed. He's yours for another month, as long as you still want to deal with him. You seem to be doing a pretty good job, actually. He got an Acceptable first time out. We weren't expecting that from any of them just yet."

Harry scowled. "They're not trained krups, Kingsley…"

Shacklebolt snorted. "Could have fooled me." Harry sighed. Draco recalled their argument at the prison. It sounded like this was an argument Harry'd had with Kingsley before. Possibly many times.

"Have the others shown yet?"

Shacklebolt nodded. "Parkinson passed—just barely. Andromeda was quite put out with her. Zabini did well, though. Malfoy's answers were only a few marks off of his, actually."

"So he got an Acceptable as well?" Draco asked.

Shacklebolt grinned down at Draco, obviously looking forward to his reaction. "Actually, he got an Excellent."

Draco smiled at him blandly. "Blaise always was good at assimilating new knowledge fast. I think he has his mother to thank for that."

Shacklebolt looked shocked by Draco's mild reaction, but finally turned back to Harry. "Well, Harry, good luck with him. I see you've got your hands full."

Harry smirked. "Actually, I've been pleasantly surprised at how well we've been getting on. Maybe it was others' expectations of us that kept us from being friends before. Will we be seeing you again next time, Kingsley?" he asked, as though he hadn't just disagreed with the man, and was just asking when they'd next see each other. Draco had to admit even his father would have been impressed with Harry's composure.

Shacklebolt took a deep breath, his eyes narrowed, but he nodded. "As I said—my case. I want to make sure I'm aware of everything going on. You will let me know if you allow the boy visitors, I hope?"

"If you want. I'm hardly going to be inviting his father to my house, now, am I? Aside from Lucius, no one else is particularly dangerous."

"I still consider anyone who got one of those blasted marks on their arm dangerous, and I expect to be informed if any of them go near this brat," Shacklebolt ground out.

"Well, then I guess I should let you know that Snape will be having supper with us tomorrow night." Draco looked at Harry, shocked. Why was he being so nice to him? And when had he invited Severus for a meal? And even more, why was he antagonizing Shacklebolt that way? Didn't he know that Shacklebolt could fail him just because he felt like it?

Shacklebolt grimaced. "Snape? I thought you didn't get on with that snake."

Harry shrugged. "I don't. But I can hardly keep him from coming to visit his godson, can I?"

They were down the hall, with a speechless Shacklebolt behind them before Draco hissed at Harry, "Severus isn't my godfather, P—Harry. What was that all about?"

"Kingsley has some ideas that I tend to disagree with, that's all," Harry said blandly. "After the war, he wanted me to enter the Auror training program. He was going to mentor me. But I decided it wasn't for me. Not after everything I'd gone through in the final battle. I'd had enough of fighting and killing. When he found out, he wasn't too pleased with me. And he was even less so when he found out I'd gotten involved in this program.

"If he knew Snape had no relation to you, he'd probably try to deny the visit. But Snape's been owling me quite frequently about you, so I assured him he'd be invited over for dinner as soon as I could arrange it. You don't mind, do you?" he grinned sideways at Draco as they stopped to wait for the elevator to arrive.

"No." Draco was silent while they waited, but once they'd gotten on the nearly empty elevator, he smiled up at Harry. "Thanks."

Harry grinned back. "Not a problem, Draco."

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Chapter: 6

A/N: So, here's chapter six. Snape comes for dinner, as do two other familiar characters..

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, though I'm not 100 percent sure of the chapters, yet. There are 46 sections, but I may combine some of the smaller sections with the ones around them.

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-6

They were both a little quiet that afternoon, and though they spent several hours wandering through the shops in Diagon Alley, neither of them bought anything. Draco was both emotionally and physically exhausted when they returned home, so they made up some sandwiches then settled down for the night.

The next day, Harry set out a roast from the freezer to thaw after breakfast, then insisted they clean the house from top to bottom, because he wasn't going to, "Let that Greasy Git have an excuse to criticize the way I keep house."

Draco shrugged at this, not willing to argue, seeing as how Harry'd stood up for him with Shacklebolt just the day before.

By two, they were both exhausted again, so they both went to have a nap before Severus arrived.

To be honest, Draco was a bit nervous about his former mentor's visit. The last time he had seen the man, they had been preparing for the Dark Lord's final assault on Hogwarts, and had had little time to talk. Snape had never been anything less than civilized to him throughout the time they had spent in the Death Eaters' camp after, but now Draco knew that Snape had been wearing a mask at the time that no one had known about. Had he ever even liked Draco at all, or had it all been an act so that Snape could stay close to him?

Draco tossed and turned for nearly an hour before deciding he'd get no sleep this way and

stumbling into the bathroom to take a quick shower.

Clean and dressed in the most comfortable and fashionable clothing he could fit into, Draco went to the kitchen and set the roast and potatoes into the oven so that it would be ready by suppertime, then went into the living room to wait for Harry to wake up.

Once Harry reappeared, the two of them chatted in the living room until Snape arrived. When they heard the knock, Draco turned to look at Harry for permission to answer the door. Harry nodded, following Draco into the foyer to watch Draco greet their guest. They weren't allowed to be alone, but Draco could see that Harry seemed willing to fade into the background as long as he wasn't needed.

When the front door was opened, the sight of their former professor made Draco feel almost as though everything was as it should be. He smiled. "Hello, sir."

Snape looked down at him, examining him carefully. "You're looking as well as can be expected, Draco."

"Harry's been taking good care of me," he replied his smile growing just a bit.

"Has he now?" Snape looked up, and his eyes met Harry's. Draco could practically feel the clash of wills between the two men. He suppressed a grin. Some things never really changed.

"Can I take your cloak, sir?" he asked, distracting the man from staring down his host.

Snape nodded, and handed him the cloak, which Draco hung in the closet next to the door. The two settled onto the couch, and suddenly Draco felt uneasy. It had been wonderful to see him, but what were they supposed to talk about? All of the Death Eaters who had died or gone to Azkaban? How Snape had nearly given up his own life in protection of Draco's?

"I am pleased to see you looking so well, Draco," Snape said, and Draco looked up to see the man studiously watching him. "It upset me greatly that I was unable to do more for you during our time with the Dark Lord. I had always hoped I would be able to convince you to try another road. I hope you will accept my apologies that I was unable to do so."

"Sir?" Draco was startled. Snape blamed himself for the fact that Draco had joined the Death Eaters? "I'm sure there was little you could have done, to be honest. Quite frankly, I'm surprised you bothered with me as much as you did. As Harry has frequently pointed out to me in the last month, I was rather a spoiled brat when I was in school. You would have been well within your rights to abandon me to my fate."

Snape shot a glowering look at Harry, then turned back to Draco. "I would never have abandoned any of my Slytherins, Draco. Albus often chided me on how I stood up for you all, that I was the one spoiling you. But how could I abandon those so like myself? You were all my charges, and I would still do whatever I could for you."

"Is that why you created this potion?" Draco asked. He had wondered what, exactly had possessed the man to think of such a thing.

Snape inclined his head once. "I found an old article in a tome about experimental potions, and the effects such a thing would have on a person. By regaining temporary youth, the person in the article had managed to learn things much easier—such as new languages, as well as new habits. I approached the Ministry with the idea, and with the help of a few colleagues, I was able to convince them that all of you might not be such lost causes as they believe." He scowled. "Many of them still believe that you are all lost causes, but there is little I can do to change their mind. All of you will have to do that for me," he said, looking pointedly at Draco.

Draco smiled. "We'll do you proud, sir. We all passed this time around. That's something, right?"

Snape sniffed. "I suppose. Shacklebolt owled me your results. He seemed to think I would find them enlightening."

That didn't sound encouraging. "Did you?"

"I thought it fascinating that you felt it was all right to leave a Muggle child to its own devices in a park," he said, directing another glare at Harry.

"And what was I to have answered?"

"No child should ever be left unattended, Draco," Snape responded. "Surely even you, only child though you might have been, must have been around children younger than yourself once. I know your father has many relations who have young children."

Draco stiffened at the chastisement. "Father felt my best example was him. And that children should be cared for by their nannies. I was never expected to watch other children," he responded grudgingly.

Snape's lips thinned. "This might be something you and Potter should address, then."

Draco saw Harry's eyes glint in response, but before Harry could say anything scathing in return, the oven alarm went off.

Draco stood with a pleased sigh, grateful that further criticism had been postponed. "Dinner's ready. Shall we?"

Snape nodded and followed the two into the kitchen, standing out of the way as Draco and Harry arranged the table to their satisfaction.

Snape and Draco talked on a number of different topics, most of which were a great deal less uncomfortable for Draco for much of the meal. Harry contributed little to the conversation

beyond snorts and glares, but Draco was pleased to have the chance to talk to their former professor.

By the time Snape departed, Draco was quite sad to see him go, but Snape assured him that he would be back as soon as Harry and the Ministry allowed it.

Though Draco had been thrilled that Harry had invited Severus over for a visit, he was far less pleased when Harry's friends came for a visit several days later. Draco still hated Weasley with a passion, and while he could admit to himself that Granger might not be as bad as he'd thought during their school years, her over-eagerness to prove she knew everything still drove him up the wall.

Unfortunately, Draco still had to be in the same room as Harry, unless he wanted to go to his bedroom for the evening, so he had to try to suffer the visit in silence.

It had started out well enough. He'd taken a page from Harry's book and decided that he wouldn't say a thing, no matter how Weasley provoked him. But deciding something and pulling it off were two very different things.

The second Weasley stepped through the door, he started on Draco immediately. "How's it hanging, Ferret?" he'd smirked.

"Ron," Harry'd said, rolling his eyes. "How can you possibly expect him to react in any way but negative to that?"

Granger's lips had pursed, but Draco couldn't tell if she was annoyed more at Weasley, Harry, or himself. Instead of responding, he had retreated to the far side of the room, a book in his lap, hoping that Harry wouldn't expect him to do any socializing with their visitors.

The three friends seemed to quite forget Draco was even there after a few minutes, and Draco found himself listening in on their conversation as they caught up. After all, Harry had been with him all month, so they could hardly have gotten together very often, though Draco did discover that Harry and Weasley had gone out drinking the night Lupin had come over for the evening. Apparently Granger hadn't been too pleased with either of them, and Draco smirked to hear that Harry had had to go home half drunk and half hung over because Hermione had refused to supply him with a hangover potion.

"Served you both right," she said in a particularly sanctimonious tone, and Draco was hard-pressed to contain his snicker.

Unfortunately, while he could fade into the background in the living room, when it came to dinner, he found himself front and centre, and Weasley's favorite topic for debate.

"I don't understand how you can possibly still have him around, Harry, I mean, why even bother with the git? I saw how upset he made you that day. He doesn't deserve all the work you're

putting into this. Besides, who's going to want him out on the streets, reformed or not? Why'd you even bother?"

Draco was rather startled by Harry's reaction to this. "Ron, Draco is hardly deaf, you know," he growled.

"So? Why should I care what he hears?"

"Let's just say that I have an intimate acquaintance with how it feels to be treated like I'm not even there, and I'd rather you didn't treat my guest the same way. Got it?" Draco had to wonder what that meant. Surely no one who knew Harry would have been able to ignore him, would they?

"Guest?" Weasley asked incredulously, but Harry's green eyes were so narrowed that there was almost no hint of colour left. The redhead mumbled, "Sorry," but he didn't sound sorry at all, and Draco noticed that Granger had held her tongue through the entire exchange. It was obvious to Draco that both of them were rather annoyed with Harry for even bothering with him. Rather like Shacklebolt, really. It didn't make him too happy. He'd always thought that being able to separate Harry from his friends would be the best thing in the world. Instead, it just made him feel miserable.

Harry seemed to be thinking about their dislike of the situation as well. "Have all the former Order members been meeting behind my back to try to figure out why I'm bothering with Draco, or something?" he asked snidely.

"What is that supposed to mean, Harry?" Granger asked.

Draco watched as Harry stabbed into his food particularly viciously before responding. "Just that Kingsley nearly bit my head off when I went to pick Draco up from Azkaban, and again when I took him in for his first test earlier this week. Felt like I'd suddenly become the enemy, or something."

Weasley shrugged. "Shacklebolt always scared me. I don't know how you handle him, Harry. He's so grim. I'm glad Bill got me a job at Gringott's. Frankly, if I'd had to train under Shacklebolt, I wouldn't have lasted a day."

Granger sighed. "You know he never quite got over the fact that you changed your mind at the last minute and didn't become an Auror, Harry. He'd made sure to put your name forward personally. That's got to hurt. Particularly after the way he'd been guiding Tonks before. I think he sort of felt like you would be her replacement, really…"

Harry scowled. "I'm no one's replacement, Hermione. I don't want to be. If he can't get that, well…"

Granger leaned forward, and Draco watched as she tried to catch Harry's lowered gaze. "He

means well. We all just want you to be happy, Harry. You know that, right?"

Draco had to clench his teeth to keep from ranting at them for being so insensitive to someone who was their friend. If they wanted him to be happy, why didn't they let him do what he wanted? Interfering morons. Draco took a big bite of his casserole to keep himself busy rather than lay into the good-for-nothing know-it-all.

"Just drop it, okay?" Harry'd said sourly.

"But Harry…" Granger said, only to be cut off by Harry.

"Look, I knew no one was behind me on this, but I can't help feeling it's the right thing to do. I'm not working right now, and until I figure out what I want to do, it seems like a good way to spend my time. I mean, the rest of you all have jobs to do, so that leaves me with a lot of free time."

Draco was about to say something biting about being Harry's pet project, when Weasley spluttered at Harry. "You took him in cause we can't spend as much time together as before? Why didn't you say so? We could have figured something out." Draco decided that if the Weasel didn't like it, maybe it wasn't as bad as he'd thought, and smirked slightly, turning back to his plate and taking another bite.

Harry sighed. "It's not because I'm lonely. I just needed something to do. And sixth year…" He looked up and caught Draco's eyes before continuing. "I saw something in him that I hadn't seen before. He deserves the right to at least try." He looked at Granger. "Look at Snape. We were all so sure he was evil—"

"Yeah, cause he killed Dumbledore!" Weasley snarled. "I'm still not sure the portrait didn't lie for him…"

Harry sighed. "I remember exactly how he proved himself Ron. Without him, you'd be on your knees to Voldemort right now. Is that what you want?"

Weasley glowered, but shook his head. Draco's smirk grew. Take that, Weasley, he thought.

Granger sighed. "I understand you want to help, Harry, but did you really think we'd be able to understand your choice?" She glanced in Draco's direction, and he made a show of picking a particularly large chunk of potato from his plate and chewing it very slowly, before she finally looked away. "I know how you feel, Harry," she said, her voice low, as though Draco wouldn't be able to hear her. "But maybe he's not who you think. Maybe he's doing this to trick you. Have you ever considered that?"

There was a clink as Harry's fork dropped to his plate. "You know, I think we'd better call it a night. I don't want to hear this, I highly doubt Draco wants to hear this, and I don't think I'd be able to listen much longer and contain my temper. I think it's time you guys left." Granger looked as though she were about to protest, but Harry held up his hand. "I'm not saying I don't want to

spend time with you guys, but I don't think it's wise to do so with Draco around, obviously. I'll come to your place when I have a chance, okay?"

Weasley and Granger looked at each other for a long moment, obviously doing the couple-mental-communication thing Draco hated in others so much. He stood up. "Are you finished, Harry?"

Harry looked surprised. Draco never cleared the table, if he could help it. Harry always had to force the issue. "Um, yeah." He handed his plate to Draco, who turned to the now-astounded couple looking at him. "Would you like me to pack your supper in a doggy bag?" he asked sweetly.

Granger blinked at him for a long moment, but Weasley scowled. "Like I'd eat anything you touched, Ferret."

Draco grinned. "You already have, Weasley. I helped Harry make the casserole."

Weasley turned a bit green at that, then red in anger. "Look, you ferret-faced…"

"Ron!" Harry cut across him. "That's it. I want you to leave. Now."

"But Harry—" Weasley said, turning to his friend.

"No, I'm sick of it. You're not even trying. You need to leave, before this becomes something neither of us wants."

Granger had been silent through the whole exchange, but now she tugged on Weasley's sleeve. "Harry's right, Ron. It's time to go. I'm sorry about all this, Harry." Then she turned to Draco. "You, too. I…"
Draco sneered. "Don't bother, Granger. I know exactly what you think of me."

Her cheeks reddened. "Yes, but…" She sighed. "Dinner was lovely. Both of you. Maybe next time…"

But Draco was already walking away. He didn't want to hear her platitudes any more.

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Chapter: 7

A/N: Here's chapter seven. Harry and Draco have another talk, and watch a movie.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

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-7

Harry let Draco choose the game to play that night. He'd been slowly teaching Draco about computer games, and with them, Muggle technology, and Draco couldn't help but be fascinated. There was just something about the visceral experience of manipulating things that felt wonderful to him.

They frequently played a lot of Jet Moto together, which was a racing game played on bikes that Harry had had to explain didn't exist yet, much like the Muggle time machines from the movie they'd seen. Draco liked that game, because it almost felt like playing Quidditch again. That was something he wouldn't be allowed to do until he finished this retraining program of the Ministry's—if he did at all. And even better, they could play together, racing each other to the finish line. The first time Draco'd won, he'd been so excited, he'd nearly hugged Harry before remembering who he was.

There was also a strange game that Harry had been teaching him on his computer called the Sims. That was lots of fun as well. Draco had taken great pride in creating a model of two levels of Malfoy Manor, while loudly complaining that that was all that was allowed. Harry's response was amusement. After all, even Draco knew that he could hardly change the limits the game had set. He had then created Sims of his parents and Snape, and set them loose in the Manor. The Snape Sim hadn't gotten along with either of his parents, which had made both of them snicker, and Harry had been even more amused when Draco had forced his parents into the gaudy purple and red love bed so that his Sim-self could be born.

"Not really so different from reality, actually," he'd told Harry.

His parents had been fond of each other by the time he was old enough to notice, but the choice to marry each other had never been theirs. Both sets of parents had wanted to ensure the continuance of their prestigious lines, and wanted someone of high standing for their children. The two had barely spent any time together at school, Lucius being older than Narcissa by several years, and both had had other love interests when the match had been arranged. They had

been discreet about their other partners over the years, but Draco knew that they hadn't slept together since he had been conceived. There had been no need. And once he'd been born, and an heir assured, both had gone on to pursue their separate interests.

Draco's favourite game, though, was a little game on Harry's computer called Civilizations. It was actually an empire-building game, and Draco would play it for hours when Harry let him. He'd started with a small map, and had been thrilled when he'd managed to conquer the three other nations around him, so Harry had allowed him to start on a much larger map and see how long it would take him. He often got so engrossed in the game that Harry would have to tap him on the shoulder before Draco would realize he was even saying anything.

Tonight, though, he needed the visceral experience of the racing game. He'd managed to keep himself from even responding verbally to Weasley's jabs, and needed to work off some of the anger that had built up because of the sod. They agreed upon a set of races to play off, then proceeded to race, losing themselves in the game, and before Draco knew it, it was time for bed.

This was one of the few rules that Draco truly resented. The other rules had begun to mean less as time went on, but he still hated being treated as though he were his actual physical age, rather than his mental age.

When Harry mentioned it was bedtime, Draco set down his controller and glowered at him. "So?"

Harry sighed. "Can we not do this tonight, Draco? I know it bugs you, but I have a good reason for insisting."

Draco snorted. "And what would that be, exactly? Do you like treating me like I'm half your age, Potter?"

"I'm going to let that little slip go, because I know you've had a trying evening, Draco… The bedtime is something Snape suggested, actually. He said that the potion would cause your body to tire out easier. It's not like I'm making you go to bed at six or something. And I even changed it this week."

"So? I feel like a child. I hate it. I hated it when I *was* a child." Never mind that his bedtime had never been earlier than eleven. He'd still hated the constraints.

Harry's mouth thinned. "I know you're upset from what happened tonight, Draco, but this is something I won't change. I realize it's hardly endearing me to you, but, well, if all this works, you'll be a free man, and you won't have to see me again," he said with a sour look.

"Exactly what you want, hm? Me out of your hair?" Draco asked snidely.

Harry, closed his eyes, looking pained. "No, Draco. That's not true. I haven't wanted that for a while, actually."

Shocked, Draco was unable to respond to this revelation. What did Harry mean by that? That he didn't hate Draco any more?

"Come on, Draco. I can clean up in here before I go to bed myself." He stood up, and Draco followed, so lost in thought that he didn't even bother to argue any further. Harry liked him? Maybe cared about him? Or maybe this was his way of showing Snape that he was sorry he hadn't believed in him. Draco dismissed that idea completely. The day Harry tried to impress Snape was the day Dumbledore came back from the dead.

So why, then? Draco pulled on his pajamas quickly, then scrambled into bed. Harry pulled the covers around him, and settled on the bed. "I just want to thank you, Draco. You were amazing tonight. You didn't react to Ron once. I appreciate how hard that was for you. So…thank you." Draco shrugged.

It had at least been worth it to see the Weasel so annoyed by the fact that he'd never responded, and Harry defending him had been quite good as well. He just wished he understood why he'd done it. Harry moved to stand, but Draco caught his hand before he could rise, the question slipping from him before he could stop it. "Why?"

Harry looked at him, astonished. "Why am I thanking you?"

Draco shook his head. "No. Why me?" Draco could see the moment Harry's defenses came up, and he wished he could perform legilimency on him. Whatever he was hiding had to be something big.

Harry turned away. "You know how it is. Everyone knows who Harry Potter is. If I was going to do this right, I needed a big name. They wanted to start with the Death Eaters' kids, and since you're about as high-profile as I am, it just made sense, okay?"

It wasn't okay. Whatever Harry was hiding, it wasn't something he was ready to tell Draco. Draco wondered if he ever would. "Okay. Night, then."

Harry seemed to relax a bit when Draco didn't push for more. He smiled. "Night." Draco watched as he moved across the room, turned out the light, and shut the door behind him.

He stayed awake quite a while that night, trying to puzzle out the mystery that was Harry Potter.

Days passed quickly after that. Most days were spent talking about the Muggle world, and Harry even took Draco on a few jaunts into Muggle London now that he was allowed out of the house. He'd shown Draco what public transportation was like, and Draco had sworn that he would never use it again, thoroughly disgusted by some of the people who had been in the Underground with them.

The trip had not been a total loss, though. Harry had taken him to Buckingham Palace, and the

two had had a long discussion about when the English Crown had separated from the Wizarding World.

Draco had been amused by Harry's surprise at the fact that the Crown had, indeed once known of the existence of the Wizarding World, and his astonishment that several Wizarding Families had blood connections to the Royals. Distant connections, of course, but even so. In fact, Draco had informed him, there had been rumours that Prince William might have had Wizarding talent that had been suppressed by the Queen because she had wanted him to have a Muggle upbringing.

Draco had laughed at the look on Harry's face. "Just imagine, Harry. We might have gone to school with Prince William. You might have actually had someone who could give you a true run for your money."

Harry had looked down at him, smiling slightly. "Oh, I had that, Draco."

Draco'd felt his cheeks heat at that, though he was rather pleased that Harry had seen him that way, even in school.

Harry had also taken Draco to the Zoo. Draco had been to a Wizarding Zoo once. It had been filled with all sorts of bizarre creatures that had been penned behind thick sheets of glass to keep them from escaping. It had been an exciting experience. It had been his first real glimpse of a dragon, though the dragon had been in the middle of its field, several yards from the glass, and half-hidden in the shrubs.

Upon entering the Muggle zoo, he'd been so sure that the creatures there would be a let-down. Harry had proven him wrong. They'd gone from cage to cage, and Draco had been astounded at the variety of non-magical creatures there were in the world. Sure, there weren't dragons here, but those crocodiles looked pretty fearsome, and the bears were huge.

He'd had to drag a Harry protesting into the snake-house, but once inside, he'd become almost as fascinated with the lizards and snakes there as Draco. Halfway through the exhibit, Harry stopped in front of a large glass-enclosed cage. Draco moved forward to see a dull-green and brown snake, roughly the size of the Dark Lord's pet snake, Nagini, coiled in the bottom of the cage. He was so distracted by the monster's size that he jumped when a hissing sound came from just behind his shoulder.

Draco watched, astonished, as the snake's head rose up to look out at them. He could faintly hear the snake hiss back, and listened to Harry respond. He could feel the hiss of air over his shoulder, almost feeling as though it were sliding down his back. It was an odd feeling, but he didn't hate it.

Harry laughed, and Draco turned to look at him. "What?" he asked.

"Nothing, really. Come on, let's go get some lunch."

It was only later, after Harry had told him an amusing story about how he had set that very same snake on his cousin, that Draco found out that the snake had been asking Harry if he needed help scaring this boy as well. Harry had assured Draco he'd told the snake that they were friends, and that there was no need to scare him. Draco had thanked him for that, though, he'd said, it wouldn't have been too bad to meet such a large snake up close and personal…

A week before Draco's next test was scheduled, Remus Lupin reappeared. He came for a visit one afternoon, and Draco promised Harry that he would be on his best behaviour.

Lupin had been nice enough to him the last time, so it hadn't been a difficult promise to make, but he found he'd missed a few things when the man had visited before. Lupin hadn't sniped at him, but he also hadn't taken to Draco, apparently. He spent much of the visit talking quietly with Harry, and when Draco had tried to join into the conversation, Lupin's gold eyes had looked up at him, and he'd felt himself quail at the other man's stare. After the third rebuff, Draco withdrew to the far side of the room to read.

Unlike with Weasley and Granger, Lupin spoke in such an undertone that Draco was unable to hear a word that he said to Harry. Harry's voice was equally quiet, and despite himself, Draco found himself straining for any recognizable word.

It felt miserable to be hated as much as Harry's friends hated him, but he was finding it was even worse to be completely ignored, as though he were just a piece of furniture. He was pleased when dinner arrived and Lupin begged off, saying he had a few tasks to deal with, and had left. Harry hadn't said anything, just led Draco to the kitchen, where they prepared a meal that they could take into the den so they could watch a movie while they ate.

After coming home from London, Draco and Harry had watched several movies on the British Royalty, some fairly true-to-life, and others far less so, though Draco had assured Harry that the huge chunks of Wizarding history about the Royals in the movies were always completely missing.

Tonight they were watching one that was not so much about any of the Royals, but rather had one as a character in the story. Harry'd asked him to keep an open mind, and Draco had snorted. He surely had a far more open mind than any silly Muggle movie-maker.

They settled onto the couch with their supper—leftovers—and Harry started up the movie. At first there seemed to be nothing unusual about the story, about a young nobleman who caught the attention of Queen Elizabeth shortly before her death, but then the first strange thing happened. The young man fell asleep awaking only days later, completely unchanged. This repeated throughout the beginning of the movie, and led Draco to wonder if the man weren't being poisoned with sleeping draughts by someone.

But this was not the strangeness Harry had apparently been speaking of, for, about halfway through the movie, the man woke from one of these sudden bouts of long sleep to discover that he was no longer a man, but a woman instead. Surprised, Draco pushed down all his questions,

though he desperately wanted to ask why Harry had felt he needed to see something like this.

It was an odd story, but by the end, Draco couldn't exactly pretend the story itself had not moved him.

Harry turned to him as soon as the credits began to roll. "So, what did you think?"

"It…It was about magic," Draco managed.

Harry shook his head. "Not really. The woman who wrote the story, Virginia Woolf, was a Muggle writer. It was an allegory for her life, and more for some of the things she wanted to say."

"She felt like a man who'd suddenly woken up one day as a woman?" Draco asked incredulously.

"No. But she obviously felt that women got the short end of the stick, didn't she? That they deserved more rights than they were given. That they were really no different from men, if they were given the chance."

Draco sniffed. "My mother never had a problem with the fact that she was my father's wife. Why would this woman feel that was such a horrible fate?"

Harry snorted. "You told me yourself that they only slept together enough to ensure your father an heir, Draco. Didn't you ever wonder if that was really what she wanted?"

"It was expected," Draco said with a shrug. "Just like I would have been expected to father a son on Pansy or one of the other girls near my age in the families in our circle."

"Even if you didn't want to?" Draco shrugged again. "That doesn't bug you at all?"

"Well, it was sort of a nebulous someday, and it's rather disappeared, hasn't it? What with my family name in ruins…" He sighed. "It was just the way things were, Harry."

"So what you're telling me is you were just going to do whatever your father told you?" Harry asked angrily. Then he snorted, waving off Draco's response before he could even open his mouth. "Never mind. I forgot why you're in this position in the first place. Haven't you ever wondered if there might be other ways, Draco?"

Draco repressed the urge to shrug again, instead really thinking about what Harry had just asked. Had he ever thought to fight against what his father had told him was the only proper way to live? He could honestly say no to that. But hadn't he frequently wished his father would at least give him a choice in some things? He'd frequently railed at what his father had said were just 'the way things were meant to be.' Usually away from his father's sight, of course. He couldn't afford to have Lucius angry at him. Lucius's punishments were—creative. In a very dangerous way. Oh, he'd never hit Draco. Never hurt him physically. But that didn't stop him from ordering the elves

to do things, or to keep things from him. And when the elves were ordered to do things, they always followed through—to the letter. Draco loved his father, but he wasn't blind to the fact that Lucius's temper was dangerous—deadly, even. It was simply better not to rouse it, if he could.

Draco looked up to see Harry looking at him, frowning. "It was the way things were, Harry. Fighting against it wouldn't have gotten me anywhere. Surely you have some idea of what that's like."

Harry's eyes closed at that. He hadn't really talked about his past with his Muggle family, but Draco had heard the rumours, and Harry had let a few things slip in the past two months that he begun to realize perhaps they weren't just rumours after all. "All she's trying to say, Draco, is that it's always good to question the norm. That just because we are who we are, we can never understand someone else's point of view, but that it's always good to try. Does that make sense?"

Draco cocked his head. "Where'd you get that from, Harry?"

"Orlando found himself more and more out of step with his own time, so he began to question everything, and when he realized he couldn't learn anything any more as a man, he became a woman."

Draco opened his mouth to disagree, but realized he couldn't particularly find a fault in that summation of the movie. "All right, then. So because of that, I'm supposed to go against everything I've been taught?" he asked, annoyed.

"No, Draco," Harry sighed. "It means that maybe you need to find a way to put yourself in others' shoes. In a way, that's kind of what the Ministry's done to you, by making you younger."

Draco grimaced. "Maybe they should have made me female instead…"

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Chapter: 8

A/N: Here's chapter eight. A surprise appearance, Harry worries a bit, and a visit with a friend.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, and am posting one a week. There will be 23 chapters total. All that's left is the editing.

Disclaimer: Not mine.

Dedication: To Foodie, who still betas me despite my predilection for slash, and for FionaFawkes, who read and reviewed every single chapter, and gave me such excellent feedback. Also, for everyone who's read and loved my Harry/Draco. This one's for you.

-8

The second test came, and they went once more to the Ministry. What Harry had said about seeing things from other's points of view stayed with Draco when he took the test. It even helped him in improving his score. The test was the same questions again. Some of the questions had seemed so obvious the first time, but now Draco found himself questioning each of them. Draco could recall his answers to many of the questions the first time around, but he was rather surprised by how his talk with Harry had changed his view of what the correct answer might be.

Shacklebolt had brought his score again, and had again loomed over both he and Harry, though Harry had shrugged it off easily. The real surprise had come when they had left the Ministry that day.

He and Harry had been discussing the fact that Draco's scores had improved, and Draco had been telling him exactly why, when he heard a familiar voice at the far side of the Atrium. He looked across the room and was stunned to see his father, well-clothed, but in chains, in the company of two Aurors and a man Draco recognized as the Malfoy solicitor. He stood stock-still in the middle of the room, shocked, watching as his father and the men around him approached the spot where he stood, none of them even aware of Draco's presence.

Draco recognized the moment when Lucius's eyes scanned right past him and alighted on Harry, who had followed Draco's gaze, and was now glowering at the blond crossing the room. A sneering smile curled Lucius's lips as he stopped in front of Harry. "Mister Potter. Fancy meeting you here. And what task brings you here today?"

Part of Draco was offended that Lucius hadn't even recognized him, but another bit was grateful for the very same fact. How *would* Lucius react to his now-even-more-youthful son? Draco felt pleased he could hide in the anonymity of youth, and had to restrain himself from physically hiding behind Harry.

"Nothing that concerns you, Malfoy. Just here for a visit. We'll be leaving now."

Draco knew this was a mistake as soon as Harry said it, for the moment he'd said "we," Lucius's eyes landed upon Draco, and widened for a moment. Draco raised his chin, determined not to let his father see his fear but finding his vocal cords paralyzed, and therefore unable to speak.

"Draco…?" Lucius asked, cautiously.

Harry's hand landed on Draco's shoulder. "I'll ask you not to speak to my charge, Malfoy. He's not allowed to spend any time with Death Eaters," he said stiffly

Lucius's eyes shot back to Harry, and his sneer turned to a snarl. "What have you done to him, Potter? You'll pay. I promise you that."

Harry snorted. "Like you have any power left, Malfoy. I haven't done anything to Draco that he wasn't fully aware of and completely accepting of. Now, if you'll excuse us…" He pulled Draco ahead of him and moved to the lift to the street, leaving a horrified silence behind him.

Their return to Harry's house was utterly silent, both of them lost in thought.

Draco couldn't believe how different seeing his father again had been. The man had been his major influence in life, but he hadn't seen him in months. Not since the final battle. It was surprising how quickly his hold had loosened. But was that due to being separated from his influence, or was that because of Harry's more constant influence in the last few months?

He turned to Harry several times during the trip home, wanting to talk to him, but Harry obviously wasn't up to talking, so Draco sat, wondering how this might affect everything.

Harry allowed Draco to play on the computer in the den when they got home. He said he had a few things to deal with, and then they could think about what to have for dinner, then for the first time ever, he left Draco alone in the room.

Draco tried to lose himself in a game of Civilizations, but it didn't seem to help, so he switched over to Sims, where he'd just made a new house. Harry had showed him something he told Draco was called the internet, where there were all sorts of things to do. Information of just about any sort could be found there. Rather like Wizarding books, though the content on the sites he showed Draco were stranger than anything he'd found in the Malfoy library, or even at Hogwarts. And there were things Harry had shown him that he'd called "downloads," which were all sorts of different things—games, movies, sounds, and best of all, additions to the Sims.

Harry had showed Draco how people liked to make downloads for the game, so that you could have different outfits, furniture, or even floors and walls in your houses. They'd spent an amazing afternoon together, finding all sorts of things, even managing to find a site that had wizarding world objects. "I guess I'm not the only wizard out there who has a computer," Harry had chuckled as Draco had downloaded Hogwarts Sims of all of their teachers, even Hagrid and Dumbledore, and new uniforms for the kids to wear to school so that it at least looked like they actually attended Hogwarts.

When he'd played the game next, the two of them had done their best to recreate something not too dissimilar to Hogwarts, though, again, they were only allowed two levels, which annoyed Draco no end, because he desperately wanted to make the Astronomy tower, so that he could take his Draco and Pansy Sims there.

Now he loaded the Hogwarts household, and found himself wanting to lose himself in it. Hogwarts had been home almost as much as the Manor, even though being there had had its

problems. He wondered how it might have been different if he and Harry had managed to become friends, and even managed to stay friends throughout their time there, despite the fact that they were in opposing houses. He enjoyed most of the conversations they had now, even when they did argue. It was surprising how well Harry seemed to understand him, and how hard he tried to empathize with Draco. It was good to have someone trying that hard to help him. It was something he'd never really had before.

Growing bored with Hogwarts, Draco decided it was time for another house. He made himself and Harry, though this time he made himself an adult. He was sick of being a kid, both in game and out, and wanted to see himself as an adult. Even if it was only in simulated form. Harry was easy. They'd found him the perfect head last time they'd downloaded, and Draco wasted no time putting him together before moving on to his own Sim.

This was harder, as Draco had downloaded many blond heads, but few of them were the right colour of blond, and none of them had hair quite as long as he would have liked. He finally decided on a head that had pale blond hair pulled back in a pony-tail, then moved on to the outfit. For Harry, he'd chosen a red jumper and jeans, but for himself he found he couldn't decide between a black suit with a deep green shirt and a more exotic outfit with silver slacks and a pale blue shirt. He was scanning back and forth between the two outfits when Harry's voice spoke from over his shoulder. "I like the blue."

Draco looked up, startled. "Harry. How long have you been standing there?"

"Just a few minutes." He had a slight smile on his face. "Draco Potter?"

Draco shrugged, though he could feel his cheeks heat. "Well, I couldn't change his last name. You know the game won't let me…"

"I know, Draco. I just couldn't resist teasing you. Anyway, if you could finish up, we should start thinking about dinner."

"Sure." Draco clicked over to the outfit that Harry had chosen, then exited out of the game. He couldn't wait to make their house. Maybe Harry'd help him with that tonight…

Now that Draco's grade had improved, Severus had an open invitation to visit when he wished, though Harry was still not allowed to leave the two former Death Eaters alone. The first visit after the second test a bit tense, though, because Harry felt that he needed to discuss Draco's father with Severus.

Draco had expected Severus to dismiss Harry's worries. After all, he had been friends with Draco's father for a very long time, even if Severus had ended up becoming a spy. To Draco's surprise, though, he and Harry talked very intently about the surprise meeting that day. He wanted to know every detail they could remember, and Draco could see how concerned he was by the fact that he did not snipe at Harry once.

"You say he had the family solicitor with him, Draco?"

Draco nodded. "Shay Venal. He and father were talking, it's how I even realized father was there. You know how his voice carries."

Snape sneered. "Yes. Lucius always was fond of his own voice," he mused. He turned to look at Harry. "I'll look into it, Potter. Who knows what he's up to now. If he should manage to secure his own release…"

"Surely that's impossible, Snape! Kingsley and I saw him at the final battle personally. He can hardly claim he wasn't a Death Eater, and it's been conclusively proven, thanks to that lovely spell Hermione discovered, that he has never been under the control of the Imperious curse. How could he possibly get them to release him now?"

"This is Lucius Malfoy we're talking about, Potter," he growled in response. "The man had his hands in more pockets than anyone, including myself and his family, could possibly be aware of. If he's found some sort of loophole, and this solicitor of his is competent—"

"He is," Draco said.

"There is no reason not to think that he might be freed. And should he manage that…"

Harry sighed. "I know. The remaining Death Eaters in hiding would rally around him. So what do we do?"

Snape glowered. "*You* will do nothing, Potter. You've done your bit. I'll talk to my contacts and see what they know. And make sure that the Ministry is aware of just who it is they might free. They'd be far more likely to listen to a former friend of the man than someone who never liked him."

But whatever Snape discovered, he did not share it with either of them the next time he returned. Draco took malicious pleasure in showing him his Sim-self, and was highly amused as Severus found himself fascinated by the game.

The visits themselves were wonderful, but each time Snape left, Draco felt the hole not having his friends around him left. Severus and his father had been the only people from before he'd seen aside from Harry's friends since all this had begun. He was desperate to see one of his own friends. Any of them, really. Even Theo, who'd always gone out of his way to make Draco feel as though he was an imbecile.

When he brought up the idea of seeing the others, though, Harry shook his head. "It's in the rules, Draco. You're not allowed to see any of them, at least until both you and they make an O on both your tests."

"How do I know what they've made on their tests?" Draco grumbled. "For all I know,

Shacklebolt and his cronies have been changing the official records. Could you at least try to find out? I'd really like to see either of them, Harry. It's been so long."

Harry sighed. "I'll have Snape or Hermione look into it, okay?" Draco nodded, and that had been it. Until a few days later, when Harry promised him a surprise.

When Blaise had stepped through the floo, it had been all Draco could do not to hug the other boy. Seamus Finnegan had followed closely behind, and glanced at Draco warily.

"Afternoon, Harry," he said, moving to where Harry stood.

Harry grinned. "Hey Seamus, how's it going?"

Seamus shrugged. "As well as can be expected, with a stubborn Slytherin git like him," he said, indicating Blaise over his shoulder.

Draco drew the other boy away across the room, and they settled onto a loveseat together. "How are things going?" he asked the dark-skinned boy.

Blaise's mouth twisted into a familiar sneer. "As well as can be expected, really. I get along with him well enough, I suppose." He glanced back at where the two Gryffindors stood talking, then turned back, an evil smile stretching across his face. "Got to be better than the Boy Who Lived, though. How's that going?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "Don't, Blaise. He's…" He glanced up, and noticed that Harry was watching him. He looked away quickly, and back at Blaise. "He's been good to me. Severus has come to visit several times."

Blaise's eyes grew wide. "He allowed that?"

Draco nodded. "Heard from Pansy?"

Blaise shook his head. "No. I wasn't even aware I was going to see you today, to be honest. Guess Seamus and Potter arranged this without the Ministry's okay…"

"Probably. That would be like Harry. He's not as bad as I thought, you know."

Blaise snickered. "Oh, Draco? I seem to recall you asking me to put you out of your misery if you ever suggested that Potter was okay…"

"Yeah, well, I guess I had to grow up some time, hm?"

"You, grow up?"

"Oh, shut it, Blaise," Draco replied with a grin. The two were silent for a bit. It was good to see

Blaise, but now that he was here to visit, Draco had no idea what to talk about. He felt almost like a completely different person than the last time they had seen each other.

Apparently Blaise was feeling a bit awkward as well. "You'll never guess who 'adopted' Pansy," he said with a smirk.

"Who?" Draco asked. He hadn't even known who Blaise was with, never mind Pansy.

"Your auntie," Blaise grinned.

"Aunt Bella?" That wasn't possible, was it? Surely she was locked even deeper in Azkaban than Lucius had been.

"No, not her. The one your grandparents disowned?"

Draco frowned. "Andromeda?" He'd forgotten about her, to be honest. His mother hadn't spoken of her other sister if she could help it. The shame of her disgrace had always been too much for Narcissa to deal with. "But she's a pureblood. I thought we all had to be taken care of by Muggleborns or halfbloods."

"Yes, but she married a Muggleborn, didn't she?"

"Ah, of course." A vague memory of something his mother had said once came to him. "Didn't she have a daughter…?"

"Who was killed in the last battle, yeah. I heard that too," Blaise said. "I suppose she's trying to make up for her daughter's death by raising one of us 'properly' or something."

"Well," Draco managed with a slight laugh, "I'm sure she'll have her hands full with Pansy…"

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Chapter: 9

A/N: Here's chapter nine. The third test, and a big surprise.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

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-9

They heard nothing more about Lucius before Draco's next test, and Harry seemed to be worrying about whatever Draco's father might be up to enough to bother Snape again the night before they went to the Ministry again. Snape's visit helped not at all, though. He'd learned nothing about what Lucius was currently up to.

"He has appealed his sentence, but the Wizengamot turned his plea down flat." Harry had relaxed a bit at that, but Severus had scowled at him. "Don't think that will be the end of it," Snape told them. Harry hadn't at all been pleased with the idea that Lucius might try something else, but Snape had refused to tell him anything more. "If you don't mind, I'd rather visit with my 'godson,' Potter," he'd smirked. Snape had been quite amused by the idea that the Ministry believed he was Draco's godfather, and brought it up often, usually to Harry's displeasure.

Snape had ignored Harry for the rest of the evening, and Draco, feeling a bit guilty at the treatment Harry was getting from Snape, decided he would make it up to Harry later that night.

After Snape left, he hurried into the kitchen, and began pulling out food for dinner.

"Draco?" Draco turned to look at Harry, who stood at the door, looking at him oddly. "What are you doing?"

"Making dinner, of course," he smiled, turning back to the vegetables he'd pulled out. He was proficient enough in cooking now that he was able to make a passable enough meal for the two of them himself. In fact, he took a great of pride in his new talents. It wasn't really much like Potions, but it wasn't so far from it as to be utterly foreign to him either. He actually found the process rather calming, to be honest.

Harry sat at the table that night while Draco prepared dinner, even setting the table himself, now that he could reach the cabinets on his own. It felt wonderful to be so self-sufficient. And Harry seemed pleased with the results as well. It ended up being a very nice evening, and when Draco settled to sleep that night, he was sure that he couldn't imagine things being too much better than they were right at that moment.

Waking up after a growth spurt was something Draco was becoming accustomed to, though it was never a particularly comfortable thing. It always left his muscles feeling rather like what he expected taffy felt like—wobbly and weak. Not to mention achy.

When he stretched out that morning, trying to relieve some of the pain, he found that

remembering the night before helped take away some of the ache from the sudden growth. Harry appearing in the door with a breakfast tray made things even better.

"Morning, Draco," he grinned, setting the tray in front of him. There was a mild pain potion on the tray along with his breakfast, and Draco couldn't help but be pleased at Harry's thoughtfulness. Really, Harry wasn't such a bad bloke, once you got to know him. Sure, they hadn't gotten along well as kids, but even so, they seemed to have gotten over that little hurdle.

"Thank you," he said to Harry after downing the potion, and sighing with relief. "That really does help."

"Snape said it would. I'm glad he was right. You ready for this today?"

Draco nodded. "Can't be any worse than the last time, can it?"

Harry looked a bit worried though. "Actually, Draco…"

"What? What's wrong?" A spike of fear went through him. Had Harry figured out what his father was up to? Or had the Ministry decided to discontinue the experiment?

"It's okay, Draco. I didn't mean to upset you. It's just that, well, if you all pass today, the program's going to start full-force. They've already chosen a new set of candidates. So the reporters will probably be out en masse."

Draco groaned. Great, just what he'd wanted. The entire wizarding world seeing him de-aged. At least he wasn't eight any longer, but really, eleven wasn't much better. He'd just be much happier when this was all over. "So, should I dress up?"

Harry snickered. "You're such a ponce, Draco…"

"I'm a ponce because I care how I look to the public?"

"No. You're a ponce because you spend three hours getting ready to appear in public," Harry snorted.

Draco scowled at him. Just because he didn't want to look like a ragamuffin… He polished off his waffle, then shoved the tray aside, and went over to the closet. "Yes, well, you did provide me with all these lovely clothes, Harry. I do have to take advantage of that fact. Did you have a 'ponce' with you when you chose them? You seem to have done a pretty good job for someone whose favourite clothes always look like you pulled them off the floor."

Harry sighed and stood up. "Just get dressed, Draco. And be quick about it." He took the tray and left the room just as Draco's nightshirt hit the floor.

He made sure that he only took an hour and a half to get ready that morning, just to prove to

Harry he could.

The Atrium was packed when they arrived, and Draco was pleased to see that Blaise and Pansy had not yet gone into the examination room that morning. Pansy hurried to his side and settled under his arm as the three of them chatted for a bit before Shacklebolt appeared.

"Welcome back, all of you," he said, eyeing Draco just a fraction of a second longer than the other two. Draco squirmed under his inspection. "As all of you know, or at least should know, this program has gone particularly well, so we will be increasing the number of participants. They are on their way here as we speak, so we can have a proper press conference with all of you in attendance. You are not to speak to any of the reporters independently, and not without specific permission from the Ministry or one of its employees, are we understood?"

The trio nodded, and he led them each into separate rooms to take their tests, quickly grading them once they were done, then leading them once more to the Atrium, where Harry, Andromeda and Seamus were waiting for them.

Harry looked a bit strained, though. At first Draco thought it might be from the media circus setting up shop only yards away. But then he had a shock even nastier than the one he'd had only a month before. There, standing in between Remus Lupin and Pansy Parkinson's mother, was Lucius.

An eight-year-old Lucius.

Draco felt all the blood drain from his face. His father had been chosen as a candidate? How had that happened? He turned to Harry, who hushed him. "We'll talk about it with Snape later, Draco. Let's just get through this, all right?"

Draco nodded, but he couldn't help noticing how Lupin seemed to be unusually attentive to Pansy's mother. Pansy didn't seem much better pleased. Her father had died in the war, but her mother had never taken the Mark. Had she really chosen to spend her time with a Werewolf? Even if he was a hero of the war, it seemed quite odd to Draco.

Lucius didn't look much younger than Draco, now that he looked at him. The two of them could almost be mistaken for twins. Lucius's chin was broader, and his nose less turned up, and of course, his long hair, lank from Azkaban, had been pulled back from his face, while Draco's was still quite short. He supposed there must be other differences as well. He wondered, slightly amused, how much taller he was than Lucius now. After years of having the man tower over him, that idea at least was rather pleasant.

Another thought occurred to him while they waited for the reporters to settle down and the Minister to appear to answer and direct their questions. He was now officially older than his father. And he would be for quite a while. A year per month? And his father was forty-seven… He did some quick calculations in his head. More than three years. Oh, this would be priceless…

The reporters' reactions told Draco that Minister Scrimgeour had arrived before he saw him. Draco glowered at the man. If Fudge had been an incompetent boob, at least he'd been someone who could be negotiated with. Scrimgeour seemed to take offence at anything he couldn't personally understand or control. He heard Harry snort as the man welcomed the press. Apparently Harry didn't like him much better. Draco sighed. Politicians. Sometimes he wondered if the world wouldn't be better off without them.

As soon as the Minister finished his remarks to the crowd, the questions began coming fast and furious. "Are you really going to let both Malfoys go free, Minister?"

Scrimgeour chuckled. "I don't know about free, but if they prove they have been rehabilitated by the end of their program, they will be allowed to become part of Wizarding society once more."

Draco glowered at the back of his head.

"Mister Potter!" another reporter called out.

Harry stepped forward. "Yes?"

"Has it been difficult dealing with the younger Malfoy being in your home on a daily basis?"

Draco narrowed his eyes, but Harry answered calmly, "Actually, Draco and I have been getting on quite well since he arrived to stay in my home. We still have disagreements, but I think everyone has those with the people they live with, don't they?"

Another reporter was quick to jump on this. "Mister Potter, I heard that you and young Mister Malfoy did not get on particularly well when you attended Hogwarts together, isn't that so?"

"It's true enough. But I like to think that was more because of the roles we'd been forced into because of the war. The war is over, and we've both put it behind us."

Several more reporters tried to catch his attention, but Harry purposely ignored them, draping an arm over Draco's shoulders. Draco couldn't help but look to see what his father made of that. Lucius was pointedly ignoring him. Draco felt a pang at that, and leaned further into Harry's embrace.

Naturally, once the reporters determined that Harry would no longer answer their questions, they turned to Lupin. "Mister Lupin, why have you, one of the greatest heroes of the war, decided to take in Voldemort's right hand?"

Lupin blinked for a moment before responding. "Lucius Malfoy, like all of us, deserves a chance to redeem himself. I know how difficult that can be, so after seeing how well his son was doing in Harry Potter's care, and knowing that he was on the list of those to be reformed, I applied to help him." His voice was slightly sullen, as though he were a child who was being scolded for being out of bounds.

The reporters then moved on to the others who had chosen to take in Death Eaters, and Draco was startled to realize that Hermione Granger now stood beside Greg Goyle. He hadn't even noticed them, so caught up in his horror that his father had managed to get into the program.

He was also rather surprised to see Theo Nott standing with a woman who looked about his father's age, with long brown hair and a bit too much makeup. She seemed familiar, and he was startled when the reporters called her Madame Brown, and asked her why she had taken in one of the Death Eaters when her daughter had died at their hands during the war. What had that girl's name been, he tried to remember now? Periwinkle or something? He remembered it was a colour. Pansy had hated her in school, so he'd heard about her endlessly.

Daphne Greengrass (who he knew had been directly under the wing of his ever-lovable aunt, Bella) was there as well, with a couple he didn't particularly recognize, as was Ernie McMillan. He'd heard about how McMillan had spied for their side, but he was startled that Justin Finch-Fletchley, one of the more prominent Muggleborns in their year, had actually been willing to take him in.

Finally, the Minister called out that they should all be allowed to settle into their new homes, and thanked all the reporters for coming in. Draco was so relieved it was all over, that he hadn't even noticed his father approaching with Lupin.

"Draco," Lucius said with a smirk that didn't quite fit on his far-too-young face. Harry turned to look at him, then turned to Lupin.

"Remus, what—"

Lupin scowled. "Did you think you were the only one allowed to take a Malfoy in, Harry?"

Harry's brow furrowed. "Remus…"

"No. Lucius deserves as much of a chance as Draco, Harry." He turned to Pansy's mother. "I think it's time we left, Camilla."

She nodded, putting an arm around Lupin, and leading Lucius away by the hand. The last image Draco had of his father was of his now-young form glancing back at him, eyes narrowed, a wide smirk on his face.

When Draco turned to Harry, he was horrified at the look on Harry's face—it was almost as though Harry were looking at Voldemort himself. Even worse, he was shaking. "Harry?"

"Come on," Harry managed through clenched teeth. "I need fresh air."

They walked along the Muggle streets outside the Ministry for a long time before Harry turned to Draco. "Do you mind side-along apparition?" Draco shook his head, and Harry's arm wrapped

around his shoulder. "Hold on." And then they were home.

Harry turned to the fireplace, and floo-called to Severus. Draco supposed it made sense that this was what his father had been up to, but why Lupin? That part made no sense. Why not Severus? After all, he was a half-blood…

Severus appeared in the room a moment later, dusting his clothes off from the quick trip in the floo. "Whatever was so vital that I had to leave several of my potions mid-process, Potter?"

"Lucius is free."

Draco would have laughed at the shock on Severus's face, if the circumstances hadn't been so worrying. "How?" Severus asked.

"Remus. I'm not sure how, but he convinced him to 'adopt' him."

"Worse," Draco chimed in. "Pansy's mother is in on it as well. I think they're together. Lupin and her, I mean. And you know her feelings about half-bloods, Severus. Even more, about *him* when she found out what he was—father's orchestrating this. I'm sure of it."

Severus scowled. "And, what, exactly, am I supposed to do about this?"

Harry sighed. "Snape, we've never gotten on, but I know we're both on the same side. Do you honestly want to see Lucius get away with this?"

"How do we know that he is 'getting away' with anything? Surely he deserves as much chance as Draco when it comes to a chance to change, Potter."

"And how much do you think father will even be listening to Lupin, Severus? You know he's probably orchestrated this so that he has as little contact with Lupin as possible."

"Then it would show in his test scores, Draco. I see nothing to be concerned about."

"You don't think, if he can pull this much off, that he'd stop now, do you? I'm quite certain he's got a way to trick the examiners as well. Please, Severus."

Severus sniffed. "Very well. I will see what I can discover." And he was gone.

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Chapter: 10

A/N: Here's chapter ten. Lucius's entering the program causes tension between Harry and Draco.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, and am posting one a week. There will be 23 chapters total. All that's left is the editing.

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Dedication: To Foodie, who still betas me despite my predilection for slash, and for FionaFawkes, who read and reviewed every single chapter, and gave me such excellent feedback. Also, for everyone who's read and loved my Harry/Draco. This one's for you.

-10

Harry and Draco both waited rather impatiently for Snape to return, but he did not return that night, nor the next. Draco wasn't dealing well with the idea that his father was loose, even in an eight-year-old body, and Harry wasn't handling things much better. By the third day, he began writing letters to anyone he thought might help. Most responded that they didn't see what was so different from him taking in "Malfoy," and it was all Draco could do to calm him down.

Movies went by the wayside as Draco tried to keep Harry distracted. Boardgames, talking about Quidditch, asking him questions about the Muggle world—nothing seemed to help. Harry was angry. And under that anger, Draco could see a thick thread of fear. By the end of the first week, Harry wrote to Severus, exceedingly polite, requesting information on what he might have learned.

The note he got back was terse at best. He told Harry that he had learned nothing of use, but that he was still investigating precisely what it was Lucius was up to, and he would thank Harry to allow him time to do so.

The storm of anger that note set off destroyed most of the furniture and knickknacks in the living room. Draco had had to retreat to his bedroom to keep from being hit accidentally by ricocheting pieces of broken pottery or furniture. It hadn't muffled the sound much, but it had given him a lot of time to think.

He could remember a time when he would have been gleeful at his father's escape, but now all he could feel was worry. For Harry, mostly, because he was so upset, but also for Lupin. The man hadn't liked him, but he'd been quite civil despite that. The idea that his father might be hurting the man, possibly even poisoning him, so that he could escape what even Draco had to admit was a justifiable sentence, did not sit well with him.

Once the noise of things crashing had ceased, Draco made his way from his bedroom to find Harry sitting in the middle of a pile of rubble that had once been his living room. He managed to

convince Harry to go to bed, then had done what he could to tidy the room, piling all the broken fragments onto the now-legless coffee table before stumbling to bed himself.

Despite his own exhaustion, Draco got little sleep that night. Maybe they were wrong? Maybe his father and Lupin really might be able to come to some understanding, and that was why Lupin had agreed to help him? But he knew that was unlikely at best. He didn't know what his father was up to, but there was really little chance that he didn't have something up his sleeve. All Draco knew was that they had to do something about it, before anyone was hurt by whatever his father was planning. Whether he liked Lupin or not, Draco knew that no one deserved what Lucius was probably doing to keep him under his control.

The next morning, Draco was prepared to do just about anything to calm Harry down. He hurried to the kitchen and whipped up scrambled eggs, bacon and toast, and two large glasses of orange juice, then moved back down the hall to Harry's room. He carefully balanced the tray between his left hand and hip while he knocked on the door, and waited for a response. Harry opened the door, his rumpled hair and the dark circles under his eyes showing just how little he'd slept the night before.

"Breakfast?" Draco asked in the cheeriest voice he could manage.

Harry looked at him, bleary-eyed. After a moment, he held open the door, and Draco carefully repositioned the tray and moved into the room. It was the first time he'd ever been in Harry's room. He'd seen glimpses of it. Knew how tidy Harry kept it. Knew it was Harry's sanctuary. He tried not to stare around as he moved towards the bed, then placed the tray down and looked back at Harry. "I just thought maybe a change of pace…"

Harry managed a smile, and settled onto his still-rumpled bed. "Thank you, Draco. Sorry about the fit last night…"

Draco shook his head. "Don't worry about it. I understand."

Harry smiled mirthlessly. "I'm the one that should be doing all this. It's why you're here. So I can take care of you, and instead…"

"Stop. You forget I know my father much better than you do, Harry. You have every right to be worried. I completely understand."

Harry sighed. "What if…"

Draco shushed him. "Look, Severus will tell us when he's found something out. You've talked to everyone you can. Now we just have to wait. I know it's difficult, but maybe…"

Harry smiled. "You're right." He pulled one of the plates toward him and took a large bite, sighing in pleasure. "You've become quite the cook, Draco." He looked up and realized that Draco was still standing. "You going to join me?"

Draco felt his cheeks warm. "I wasn't sure if I should."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Sit down and relax. We can talk about what to do once we've both eaten and taken a shower. Who knows, maybe I am just blowing everything out of proportion."

They spent the day talking and watching movies, Draco hoping to distract Harry from the worry about his friend. He didn't like Lupin himself, but anyone who was hoodwinked by his father deserved all the sympathy he could spare. After a second movie and lunch, they both set about recreating Harry's home in the Sims. It was lots of fun to try and figure out where certain rooms would be located, and choosing wallpaper, flooring, and the perfect furniture for each room. It was scary how easy it was to find some pieces of furniture, while for others there seemed to be nothing even close to what they were looking for.

They managed to finish the house just in time to start dinner, and were in the midst of making a stew when someone knocked on the front door. They both looked at each other for a moment, but when the knock came again, Harry hurried to the front door, Draco trailing slowly behind. Surely Severus would have owled, or even flooed. And no one else was really interested in helping Lupin escape his father's interest…

When Harry opened the door, and Shacklebolt stepped in, neither of them knew quite how to react.

"Kingsley," Harry said cautiously.

"Harry." He glanced at Draco, and Draco wondered if Harry would send him from the room.

"We were just about to sit down for supper. Stew. Would you like to join us?"

"I can't stay. I thought you should be informed, though. Lucius and Remus have vanished, along with Camilla Parkinson."

Draco felt his jaw drop in horror. "You have no idea where they are?" he asked, not even noticing the squeak in his voice.

Shacklebolt turned to him, his eyes flat. "No. Actually, it was part of the reason I came here tonight. Do you have any idea where your father might go to hide out, Malfoy?"

Draco blinked. Did he know of any places his father might hide? "I…I suppose he might hide out at one of our estates…"

Shacklebolt scowled. "We could have figured that out on our own, Malfoy. Am I going to have to take you down to the Ministry to interrogate you there?"

Harry scowled and stepped between them. "He was hardly being argumentative, Kingsley.

Believe it or not, Draco's grown a lot in the past few months. Maybe you haven't noticed, but I have. Now, if you want our help, you know we'll help. But don't treat us like we're the enemy. Got it?"

Shacklebolt examined Harry for a long minute, and for a bit, Draco thought that they were both going to be dragged down to the Ministry. Then Shacklebolt nodded. "Fair enough, Harry." His lips twisted into something that almost resembled a smile. "I guess I'm just a bit on edge, what with all these Death Eaters loose."

Harry crossed his arms and glowered at Shacklebolt. "Just so long as you remember that there are Death Eaters, and there are leaders. Most of the people that have been released so far were kids, Kingsley. Like me. Kids who never had a chance to be anything besides Death Eaters because of who they were. I know all about that kind of thing. I still don't get why all of you feel that I have no idea what I'm doing. I probably know better than the rest of you."

Shacklebolt nodded. "Suppose you would at that, Harry. Remus's disappearance, though… Anything you could think of that might be helpful—if you could just send it my way, I'd be grateful."

"We'll do that, Kingsley." He took a step closer to the man, and put a hand on his shoulder, his voice softer when he spoke again. "He'll be okay, Kingsley. He's been through a lot. There's very little Malfoy could throw at him that he wouldn't be able to find his way out of eventually." Draco couldn't help but wonder what that meant. He assumed that Harry was referring to Remus, but he hadn't known that Kingsley and the other man were that friendly.

Shacklebolt's lips thinned. "Right. I'll keep you updated, then." And he apparated away.

The two were silent for a long time after that, but finally Harry led the way into the kitchen, and they began to eat. Harry stood up to pull the milk jug from the fridge when Draco finally broke the silence. "So, do you think they'll find them?"

Harry looked up. He'd obviously been lost in his own thoughts. "Oh, I'm sure they will. I mean, how far can they get, really? Remus is a werewolf…" Harry trailed off obviously worrying over his friend.

"I'm sure he's fine, Harry," Draco said, trying to reassure him.

Harry shrugged. "I don't know what your father's done to him, Malfoy, but if he has hurt him…"

Draco looked at him in surprise. Harry hadn't called him that since the day at Azkaban. "I know you're worried, Harry…"

Harry plunked the jug onto the table a bit harder than necessary, and milk sloshed out. He sank into his chair, his head in his hands. "He's the only one I have left. If I lose him…"

"What about your friends? You still have them."

"Remus isn't a friend. He's family. He and I have fought about it a few times. He won't let me take care of him. But even now, after he's been declared a hero, he still can't find a job, and he won't accept my help. Well, no more. I'm sick of it. It's not charity, wanting to be sure that my family is okay. He's coming here. And that's it." With that, Harry picked up his fork and began eating with gusto.

"And…Lucius?"

Harry looked up, a disgusted look on his face. "What about him?"

Draco swallowed. "Have you read those papers I had to sign, Harry?" Harry shook his head. "The only way an 'adoptee' can be sent back is if they fail their tests, or are arrested again. What if this turns out to be a false alarm?"

Harry snorted. "You don't honestly think they went missing three days after Lucius took the bloody potion just on a whim, do you?"

"Honestly? No. But you never know, Harry."

Harry looked sourly into his plate. "Well, we'll see, won't we?"

Draco sighed. "I guess so."

It was a bad evening for both of them. Harry paced the living room, glancing at intervals at either the fireplace or the front door before continuing in the track he seemed determined to wear into the floor. Draco had pulled out a puzzle to work on. He would have liked to read, but his worry and Harry's pacing were too distracting for him to concentrate on a book long. It was well past midnight before Draco insisted Harry go to bed, and Harry rounded on him.

"You really don't care, do you? All my friends are right. You couldn't give a damn. Your father is on the loose, and he's going to destroy everything I tried to save. And in doing so, he's going to hurt and possibly kill someone I love!" Harry's eyes were wide in outrage, and Draco knew that he was just out of his mind with worry, so he tried to soothe Harry, which only made Harry's fury worse.

"Harry…"

"No! Damn you! I thought you'd changed, Malfoy. I thought I was making a difference, but if this is how I'm repaid…"

Draco, unable to contain his own worry any longer, broke. "Fuck you, Potter! Do you think I'm enjoying this? Do you honestly think I give a toss as to what Lucius is doing? It's you that's got me worried. I've never seen you so upset. I don't give a damn about Lupin. It's the effect on you

that's scaring me. Do you know what'll happen to me if you give up on me? Do you?"

Harry stopped, stock still in the middle of the room, breathing heavily. He eyed Draco for a moment, then turned away. "I—I didn't mean it that way, Draco, it's just…"

"Just that you've been pulling away from me ever since we saw Lucius with him at the Ministry."

Harry turned and looked at him again. "Remus…he's the only family I have left, Draco. I can't lose him."

Draco laughed harshly. "And look at my family, Harry. Do you honestly think I'm in any better shape?"

"Your father isn't being held against his will!"

"How do you know that Lupin is?"

"Because," came a dark voice from the fireplace, "he was given a potion, Draco. Through his Wolfsbane."

Both Harry and Draco whirled to look at Snape, who was dusting himself off, carefully avoiding both sets of eyes.

"How do you know that?" Draco asked.

Snape glowered at him. "They were found just moments ago. I was able to detect the effects immediately."

Harry stepped forward. "Where are they? Is Remus all right? What's going to happen now?"

"Mister Potter, please calm yourself. Lupin is fine, as always. If your godfather couldn't get him killed, nothing will harm that mutt."

"Snape—" Harry growled.

Draco cut Harry off before he could say something they'd probably both end up regretting. "Can we see them?"

"The Aurors have taken Mrs. Parkinson into custody, but they are still trying to determine Lucius's part in all this. Shacklebolt asked me to relay the message that both of you should remain here for the moment. He will contact you with more information when he has it." He looked at their rumpled clothes, and of the still broken objects littering the coffee table. "Perhaps both of you would do well with some sleep?" Harry opened his mouth to protest, but Snape cut him off with a wave. "Potter, you will do him no good in this state. I tell you again, he is fine. You can go see him in the morning if Shacklebolt hasn't sent word, I assure you."

Harry sighed, and seemed to deflate. "All right. Thank you, Professor. I appreciate your coming here to let us know. Would you like to use one of the guest rooms? It's a long way to Hogwarts."

Snape grimaced. "Thank you, but no. I think I've had my fill of strange places tonight. I will be far better served to return to my own rooms. Good night, gentlemen." And with that, he stepped back into the floo, and was gone in a burst of green flame.

Draco swallowed, then snuck a look at Harry. "Are you going to be okay?" he asked.

Harry nodded. "Snape's right. We should have been in bed a long time ago. You especially. We'll both pay for this tomorrow."

It was a long trek down the hall to their rooms. How did one apologize for the things one said when one was worried, Draco wondered to himself. Harry didn't seem to be much happier. When they reached their doors, Draco struggled to find the words, but finally simply bid him good night, and quickly closed the door behind himself.

Tomorrow would be soon enough, surely.

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Chapter: 11

A/N: Here's chapter eleven. Harry goes to deal with the Lucius and Remus situation, and Draco spends the day with Hermione.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

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-11

Draco woke to Harry opening the door to his room early the next morning. "You don't need to

get up yet," he said before Draco could ask what time it was. "I'm going down to the Ministry. I need to convince Remus to come live here with me. It's time he stopped trying to make do."

"What about my father?"

Harry's eyes narrowed slightly. "I don't know," he said. "I won't be surprised it they send him back, Draco. And you shouldn't either."

Draco sighed. He knew Harry was right. His father deserved it, even. But it didn't make it any easier to swallow. "I know. But what if they decide that Lupin's still got custody of him? There are rules against us even being in the same room, let alone living in the same house…"

"We'll see, okay?"

Draco nodded, and was about to settle back down when he thought of something. "Harry?"

Harry nearly closed the door behind him, but turned back so he could face Draco. "Yes?"

"You can't leave me here alone, can you? I mean, you're not allowed, are you?"

"You won't be alone, Draco. Hermione's out in the living room. Be nice, okay? I'll be back as soon as everything's been dealt with." He turned again, and shut the door behind him.

Draco rolled over and tried to go back to sleep, but after tossing and turning for several minutes, gave up and got dressed. There was obviously no way he was going to be able to get back to sleep, now that he knew his father might come to stay. Besides, he could at least find out how Greg was doing from Granger. He hoped Weasley wasn't giving him too hard a time.

Granger was sitting on the sofa, her feet tucked under her, reading what looked like an encyclopedia. Draco watched her for several minutes with her none the wiser before he finally cleared his throat. She let out a squeak, and jumped, twisting around on the couch so she could see where Draco stood. "Don't do that!" she huffed.

"Sorry. Should I have tapped you on the shoulder instead? I'll remember that next time…"

Her eyes narrowed. "That's not what I meant, and you know it."

"If you say so, Granger," Draco said, sitting down across the couch from her.

"Doesn't Harry have a rule about first names?" she asked, an eyebrow raised.

"So far that's only referred to myself and him. Not our visitors," Draco replied. "He still calls Severus 'Snape.' Why should I call you anything other than what I've always called you? I mean, I'm hardly using that other word. I'm being polite. Surely that's not something I should be getting into trouble over."

"You seem to have examined the matter thoroughly, anyway," Granger said, turning back to her book and trying unsuccessfully to hide a smile.

"What is that thing you're reading, Granger? It looks as though it could contain the history of the world, from the size of it."

She looked up again. "Just some research."

"On what? Maybe I can help."

She looked confused for a moment. "You'd do that? Even though it has nothing to do with you?"

Draco shrugged. "I'm bored." And he needed to find a way to keep from thinking about what was going on with Harry and his father. Not that he wanted to tell her that.

Granger nodded. "Fair enough." She shifted so that Draco could see the book which lay on her lap.

"Psychology?" Draco asked, amused.

"I've been having trouble figuring out how to approach Greg. I figured I'd do some studying up, and see if I could find anything that would help me decide how to approach him."

It took Draco only a moment to think of an answer for her. "Teach him to cook," he said with a grin.

"What?"

"Teach him to cook. Greg loves to eat. Anything about food would get his attention. And once he's started talking to you, teach him the history of what you're making. Take him to Muggle restaurants. The way to Greg and Vince is through their stomachs."

She looked at him warily. "Is that how you got them as your bodyguards?"

Draco glared at her. That had been totally uncalled for. Draco had been trying to be helpful, and Granger had to go and intimate something like that? "They weren't my bodyguards. They're my friends. Just because of how they look…"

Granger snorted. "Please, Malfoy. You can't honestly expect me to believe you enjoyed spending time with them, do you?"

"What would you know about it, Granger?" he growled. "If Harry and Weasley hadn't decided to adopt i you /i in first year, you probably would have gone all seven with your nose permanently stuck in a book!"

She flushed angrily at that. "Look, Malfoy, if you don't…"

"No, you look, Granger. Greg's been a friend of mine since I was about four. I know him. Better than you ever will. So, you can either take my advice, or you can ignore it. Makes no difference to me. But if you want to begin to understand him, you might want to listen to what I have to say." He stood up, and moved to the kitchen. Stubborn freak. Just because she thought she was better than them… He pulled bread from the breadbox and popped it into the toaster. He could only imagine how Weasley was treating Greg, if that was what Granger thought of him.

"Malfoy?" Draco turned to see her standing in the doorway, and glowered at her. She took a deep breath. "I'm sorry. I only meant…"

"You only meant that you thought the only way I would have friends is if I bought them, right?"

"No… It's just that they're—"

"So stupid?"

Granger sighed. "This isn't going well. I want to help him, Ma—Draco. Help me? Please?"

The toast popped, and he turned back to slather the bread with butter and jam before answering. "If you want to understand him, all you have to do is exactly what I said. He's a good guy. He's just uncomfortable around people he doesn't know. Just talk to him a lot. Tell him what you want to show him. He'll love it."

She nodded. "I'll try that." There was a long pause before she added, "Thank you."

"No, thank you for believing in him enough to take him in," Draco said, pausing for a moment before he added, "Hermione."

She smiled in response.

Harry didn't return until very late in the afternoon. Draco had been showing Hermione several recipes that he thought Greg might enjoy learning when they heard the door open. Draco jumped to his feet and hurried to the living room. "Harry!" He skidded to a halt when he saw Lupin standing behind Harry, his hand on Lucius's shoulder. Draco swallowed.

Hermione came into the room and greeted Harry and Lupin warmly. "You okay now, or will you be leaving again?" she asked Harry.

"Nope, we're here to stay. Thanks, Hermione. Hope things went okay," he said, looking between the two of them.

She grinned. "Actually, we got along great. I think I know how to get through to Greg, now, too.

Draco was a lot of help."

Draco avoided looking at Lucius as Hermione said this, but even so, he could feel the heated glare coming from him. He shrugged. "I want Greg to be happy, so I'll help out however I can," he said with a slight smile.

Harry blinked for a moment before smiling himself. "I'm glad to hear it. I think I'll need your help with someone else in the next few weeks…" He shot a pointed glance over his shoulder to where Lupin and Lucius were standing in the front hall before turning back to Hermione. "Tell Ron I said hi, okay? And I'll come and visit sometime soon."

"Of course, Harry." She gave him a quick hug, then left, moving carefully past Lucius, and smiling pleasantly to Lupin before closing the front door behind herself.

Draco looked at Harry, uncertain if he should ask, or even if he really wanted to know. "What happened?"

Harry turned to Lupin and Lucius. "Remus and Lucius will be staying here with us, now."

"Really?"

"Yes." Harry glanced at Lupin. "Remus, you've stayed before. The front two rooms are free. I figure you and Lucius can have those. We'll have to figure out how to deal with the bathroom, though. If Draco learned his habits from Lucius…"

"What would you know about it, Potter?" Lucius snarled.

"I've been living with your son for three months now, Lucius. And rule number one. Everyone in this household goes by their first names only. No last names. Got that?"

Lucius glowered at him. He folded his arms, but otherwise remained silent.

It was Lupin who spoke. "Lucius. I realize this isn't what you had in mind, but seeing as you wanted into this program…"

Lucius whirled on the werewolf. "I didn't want into the program, you simpleton. I wanted out of Azkaban. I thought—"

"That you'd be able to control Remus?" Harry asked.

Lucius turned to glower at him again, but otherwise refused to answer.

Lupin answered for the both of them. "Thank you, Harry. I'll get him settled in, then we can discuss rules, I think." He grabbed Lucius's shoulder, and Lucius, caught off guard, stumbled under the weight of his grip. "Come along, Lucius." He guided a grumbling Lucius from the

room.

Draco turned to Harry. "They actually allowed you to have Lucius in this house with me?"

"Let's just say I made them an offer they couldn't refuse," Harry said, still glaring after the other pair. "Come on; let's start pulling out something for dinner."

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Chapter: 12

A/N: Here's chapter twelve. Harry and Draco have to get used to two more people living with them, and Draco learns something new.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, and am posting one a week. There will be 23 chapters total. All that's left is the editing.

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-12

The next few weeks were difficult.

Lupin's first full moon had been just over a week after he and Lucius had arrived at Harry's home. Severus had offered Lupin the Wolfsbane Potion again, more for Draco and Lucius's sake than the werewolf's, but Draco was grateful. However, even with Lupin locked in his own room, and doped with the potion, Draco still felt tense until the moon had passed.

Harry had insisted that Lucius stay in his own room while Lupin was incapacitated. Lucius hadn't liked that at all, but he'd had little choice. Harry had brought him a supper tray that evening, and another in the morning, and by lunch, Lupin had been able to take over watching him again.

Lucius refused to speak to any of them, though he was particularly furious with Draco, and would often get up and leave the room if Draco entered. He refused to do his chores, and no

amount of cajoling on Lupin's part or threats on Harry's seemed to make a difference. He also utterly snubbed the movies Harry suggested he might want to watch. Draco had tried to explain that they really weren't so different from Wizarding portraits, but Lucius had turned his back as soon as Draco had started to talk to him.

Lupin hadn't started out particularly pleased with Lucius when they'd first arrived. It was no surprise, really, given what Lucius had tried to do to him. As the moon approached, though, his temper with Lucius had shortened. At least, it had appeared that way to Draco. It looked as though Lupin was rapidly approaching his breaking point.

After one particularly bad argument between his father and Lupin, Draco had actually asked Harry if he'd been so annoying when he'd first arrived. Harry had shaken his head. "No, just for a day or two. Most of the time, you weren't too bad, really."

"Well, I apologize for anything that even approaches what He's doing," Draco had responded.

Harry had smiled at that.

Draco spent much of his free time in the den. Since Lucius refused to even enter the room because of all the Muggle technology in, it had become the least stressful room in the house, aside from Draco's own room. Harry would come in occasionally and watch as he played whatever game he had going. In the Sims, Draco had deleted the house with the two of them, not feeling up to updating it with Lucius and Lupin. He was still quite uncomfortable with Lupin, and hated being alone with him if he could help it. So, the thought of adding him to the Sims house he'd been putting together was a bit more than he was up to.

All in all, having Lupin and Lucius living with them was an awkward mess.

Draco had found out what Harry had had to do to get the Ministry to allow both Malfoys to live in the same house. He was going to press-shoots with the Minister. Draco wondered how he stood it. Scrimgeour wasn't as bad as Fudge, but he wasn't too much better, either. Harry would come home after one of these shoots, miserable, snappish, and uncommunicative. Draco and Lupin would work on starting dinner while Lucius sulked at the table, and the four of them would eat utterly silently, with Lupin clearing the table when they were done. Draco always escaped as soon as Harry allowed it.

Things between Lucius and Lupin were getting worse each day. Harry had a strict hands-off policy, in which he only intervened between Lucius and Lupin if things got thoroughly out of hand, if Draco was somehow involved, or if Lucius was breaking one of the house rules. This left a lot of room for argument between Lucius and Lupin. Lupin had gone through any number of attempts to get through to Lucius, but none of them seemed to be working. Leaving him alone didn't seem to be helping, because Lucius thoroughly refused to have anything whatsoever to do with Muggles, and every attempt Lupin made to try to reason with him ended in an argument.

The chores Harry had originally assigned Lucius had been given up the second week in as a lost

cause, since both Lupin and Harry had had no luck in convincing him to do them, and once the change had happened, neither of them had had any energy to force him to do them. Finally, Lupin had just given up with Lucius, and allowed him to do what he wished, so long as he wasn't causing a problem. It wasn't a solution, but at the moment, Draco knew it was the best they'd be able to accomplish.

Lucius wasn't allowed to leave the room Lupin was in, or Draco was sure he would have spent most of his time in the bedroom Harry had assigned him. Harry and Lupin had found a simple portal-blocking spell, and when Lupin entered the room with Lucius, he would cast the spells at all the doors to prevent Lucius's departure. The first few times, Lucius had fumed at them, and proceeded to break everything in the room he could get his hands on. The second time, Lupin had obviously been fed up enough to show his displeasure. He had grabbed the last knickknack from Lucius's hand, pulled him to the couch, and settled him over his knee, swatting him several times before letting him go.

Draco had been astonished. He'd seen people angry at his father before. He'd even seen women slap at him, and men throw hexes at him. But no one had ever *dared* to spank Lucius Malfoy. It was beyond unheard of, it was mortifying.

Lucius had been furious. He'd lunged at Lupin, and Lupin had retaliated, grabbing Lucius's hands as he'd gone for Lupin's neck. He'd drawn Lucius's hands down to his sides as though he were no more than a rag doll, wrapping his arms around Lucius's body, then held him until Lucius had stopped struggling. Once he had, Lupin spoke. "If I can't get through with words, Lucius, I'll have to try something else. I'm twice your size, and at least three times as strong. If I have to spank that attitude out of you, I will. Got it?"

Lucius had flushed with anger and embarrassment. "Yes," he'd said sullenly.

Draco hadn't seen it happen again after that, though he had heard it one night after Lupin, infuriated with the language he had heard Lucius use that evening, had dragged him into his room. Lucius hadn't managed to stay quiet that time, though his grunts of pain weren't too particularly loud. Rather, it was the swats that Draco could hear. Each and every slap made him wince. Lucius had stood a lot the next day, that was for sure.

They didn't seem to have made any further headway with Lucius by the time they were due to take their next test, and Draco couldn't help but wonder if his father would even bother to try at all.

Kingsley Shacklebolt arrived to escort them all to the Ministry personally, using one of the Ministry's cars. He and Lupin sat in the front seat, talking quietly as Shacklebolt drove, and Draco asked Harry if they were friends. Harry had smiled.

"You could say that. Remus and Kingsley were close before Sirius died, and I think they actually got closer after. The last year of the war, though, they were both so busy that they weren't able to spend much time together… I think they decided it would be best if they went their separate

ways. Especially once Tonks staked her claim…"

"Tonks?"

"Yeah. Your cousin?"

"The Metamorphmagus?"

Harry nodded. "She and Remus were seeing each other when she died. I don't think he's quite recovered from that, to be honest."

"Wait. I thought you said Lupin and Shacklebolt were friends. Why would Lupin dating my cousin make a difference to whether they were friends or not?"

Harry raised an eyebrow smiling slightly, but Lucius snorted. "Draco, did you pay attention to nothing while you were a child? Perhaps you failed to notice how things work in the real world?"

They were the first words Lucius had spoken to him in nearly the entire time he and Lupin had been living in Harry's home. "And what is that supposed to mean?"

"Did you fail to notice who I tended to prefer company with?" Lucius asked sardonically.

"You spend a lot of time with your male friends. And mother with her female friends. I see nothing unusual about that, father."

Lucius's sneer widened into a smirk. "You always were a rather dense child. One would have thought you might have noticed how often my 'friends' spent the night…"

"Lucius…" Harry said in a warning tone.

Lucius rolled his eyes. "Please, Potter. It's not like you can punish me here. Besides, the boy obviously needs things spelled out for him."

Draco wondered what on earth they could mean by that. He glanced at Harry, who seemed a bit flushed, though he was still scowling at Lucius. "Just drop it. If you couldn't have been bothered to teach him that when you had the chance, you definitely don't have the right now," he growled.

"And who'll teach him, then, Potter? You?"

And Harry's flush definitely deepened then. What on earth were they going on about? "Would someone please tell me what this is all about? Before I climb over the front seat and ask them myself?" Not that he would, but perhaps the threat would be enough.

Harry sighed, and closed his eyes. "We'll discuss it when we get back home, okay, Draco?"

Draco scowled. "Fine. But if you think I'm going to forget…"

The rest of the trip was quiet, though Draco found himself watching Shacklebolt and Lupin carefully, trying to find hints of what it was that Lucius and Harry were intimating about the two men. They seemed perfectly friendly, if a bit subdued.

The test went well for Draco, though Lucius's scores had been unsurprisingly dismal. He seemed quite alarmed about it, and when they returned home, again in the Ministry car, Lucius seemed quite upset. Perhaps this would convince him this wasn't something he could manipulate, Draco thought.

Back at Harry's, Draco watched as Lupin led Lucius to his room so that they could talk, and once they were gone, Harry suggested they might want to go into the den to talk, so that they wouldn't be interrupted. Draco nodded.

They settled on the couch, and Harry looked a bit lost for words. He tried to begin several times, before sighing and closing his eyes. He took a deep breath, and Draco could see he was actually gathering a bit of his Gryffindor courage to himself. When those green eyes opened, there was a seriousness he hadn't seen in them in quite some time.

"I'm going to ask you questions that might sound stupid, Draco, but I want honest answers, okay?" Draco nodded. "You know about…I mean, how some people prefer their own sex, right?" By the time Harry was finished with the question, his face was crimson with embarrassment.

Draco smirked. "Yes, Harry. I know about homosexuality. Who doesn't?"

Harry took a breath, looking slightly relieved. "Well, sometimes people have relationships with both men and women…"

Draco wrinkled his nose at that. "Why? I thought it was a simple matter of you're either straight or you're gay."

"Well, some people—like your father, feel they have to have normal lives, and so they have a wife, and a child, but they still prefer their own sex."

Draco scowled. "Are you saying that my father's gay, Potter?" he couldn't control his outrage at the idea. "My father was a perfect husband—"

Harry laughed. "You said yourself that he and your mother only slept together because your father needed an heir."

"That hardly makes him gay, Potter. I'd be careful if I were you. That's slander," Draco growled.

"Draco, what do you *think* he was suggesting on the way to the Ministry?"

"What do I care?" Draco mumbled. He realized what Harry was trying to tell him, but that didn't make him receptive to it…

"Fine. He's your dad. I get that that would be hard to deal with. As for Remus, I think he just goes where he can find comfort. I didn't get it myself until after Sirius died. Remus…" He sighed. "I don't think he believes he deserves anyone…"

"Wait. Are you telling me that Lupin and Shacklebolt…"

"Were lovers, yes."

"You're kidding, right? Shacklebolt's queer?"

"Draco, don't…It's not like that. He's just…"

"Queer." He laughed. "All right. And Lupin as well, apparently. Well, as long as he keeps his hands off me, I suppose I can handle that. It's certainly more tolerable than the fact that he's a werewolf. Anything else?"

Harry's cheeks flamed. "No," he mumbled.

"You don't sound too sure of that, Harry," Draco prodded.

He shook his head. "Don't worry about it, okay? It's nothing important." He sighed and stood up. "I have to go to the Minister's office. Some meeting-or-other he wants me at. I should be back by six. You be ok here?"

Draco nodded, and watched as Harry exited the room with long strides, almost like he were running away. But that didn't make sense, did it?

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Chapter: 13

A/N: Chapter thirteen: a visit from the Ministry.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, and am posting one a week. There will be 23 chapters total. All that's left is the editing.

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-13

About halfway through the month, shortly after the full moon, a visitor from the Ministry came for the day. Because Lucius had failed his first test, he was now on probation by the Ministry, and given how he had tried to manipulate their new program, it was unlikely that even a single misstep would be ignored.

Harry had warned Draco they would be receiving a Ministry employee who would evaluate whether Lucius would be allowed to continue in the program. Still, even knowing it would happen didn't make it any easier to deal with her when she arrived. Lucius had been sulking in a corner when she'd knocked on the front door, so Draco had gone to answer the door, leaving Lupin and Harry to deal with Lucius.

When he saw the woman, his heart dropped. He'd known that they would send her at some random time, so as to catch them unawares, but Lucius hadn't been too horrific of late. If only she'd come just a day earlier. Lucius had spent the entire day before reading, and had caused almost no problems whatsoever. Why couldn't she have seen him that way?

The woman was dressed in a Muggle skirt-suit, and had silvering brown hair that she'd drawn back into a bun. Her face was pinched, and Draco could tell that she'd heard the shouting going on in the living room already. "Hello," he said, sticking out his hand.

She nodded to him. "You are which Malfoy?" she asked imperiously, ignoring his hand.

"Draco," he replied, scowling. No, this was definitely not going to be good.

"And the other—Lucius, I believe? Is inside with your guardians?" Draco nodded. Like she didn't know who they were. Like Lucius Malfoy wasn't the most well-known Death Eater left alive. He stood aside and let her enter, wincing as Lucius's voice rose in volume.

"I refuse, Lupin, and that should be that! I don't care what you think!" his high voice squeaked from the living room.

The woman's lips thinned, and Draco watched as she wrote something in a notebook she was carrying. She entered the living room, and Draco followed quickly after, horrified at the scene that met them.

Lucius was now standing in the centre of the room, glowering at both Harry and Lupin. Harry was glaring back, but Lupin had on his usual calm mask. "And I don't particularly care how you

feel about it, Lucius. If you can't cooperate…"

The woman cleared her throat, and all three of them jumped at the sound, turning to look at her. "Mister Potter and Mister Lupin?" They both nodded, and she turned to Lucius. "And you must be Lucius Malfoy." She looked back towards the two grown men. "I've been sent to see how your household is…" she looked around the room, which, while not the war zone it had been before, was still far from clean, made a sniffing sound, and turned back to them, "…getting on. You don't seem to be faring too well, though, do you?"

Lucius narrowed his eyes at the woman. "And what is it to you?" he asked snidely.

The smile she gave him chilled Draco, and when she spoke, her voice was like shards of ice. "It is my job to make sure that you and your son are at least trying to conform to the rules, since Mister Potter insisted that he be allowed an exception. Particularly since you do not seem to be doing quite as well as your son when it comes to the tests the Ministry is giving you." She stepped closer to where Lucius stood, his jaw clenched in what Draco recognized as helpless rage. "You, Mister Malfoy, are on a one-track road, and it will be my pleasure to see you sent back to Azkaban to live out the remainder of your natural life there. All one hundred years of it," she smiled.

Harry was quick to interrupt her smug statement. "I hope you realize that adjustment takes a while, Miss…?" His voice was tight, and Draco knew that he wasn't really any more pleased with Lucius than he was with the woman, but it made him feel better, knowing that at least he was willing to stick up for Lucius.

"My name is Dianna Hughes, and I have been given supreme authority in this matter, Mister Potter. Should I feel that neither you nor Mister Lupin are making any progress with Mister Malfoy here, I can send him back. After all, the Ministry does not wish to waste any more time on the failures than necessary. I've already visited one household this week, and will be on my way to a third before the week is up. Whether or not you feel they deserve another chance is irrelevant, after all. In the eyes of the public, they're already being given a second chance simply by being allowed back into the real world."

Lucius scowled at this, and Draco worried that he would say something to make things even worse, so he quickly spoke before Lucius could get a chance to. "Please, ma'am. I know this all looks bad…"

The woman turned to look at Draco, her face calculating. "Mister Malfoy, I am aware that you might feel it your duty to protect your father, but let me tell you right now—things do not look good for him, and you all would do better to cut your losses, lest he drag you down with him."

"No, you don't understand," he said, hoping Lucius would go along with what he was about to say. "Lucius was just upset because L—Re…Remus didn't want him joining me in the den this afternoon, because he hadn't finished his chores yet, that's all. Really."

The woman scrutinized him for a moment, but Lucius and the others remained utterly silent. "The den? And what is the den, may I ask?"

"Harry's got his Telly in there, and his computer. We watch movies or play games in there, but it's kind of a privilege, and Lucius hasn't gotten to go in there recently."

"Really?" the woman asked, a gleam in her eye as she turned back towards Lucius. "Is this true, Mister Malfoy?"

Draco tried to catch Lucius's eye over her shoulder, but Lucius was ignoring him, his chin in the air as he glared at the woman. "It is," he said, with all the dignity he could possibly muster in a nine-year-old body.

"And what games do you play on these Muggle machines, Mister Malfoy?" she asked in a condescending tone.

"Well, there is a game that allows us to play god, another that allows us to conquer the world, and there is a racing game," Lucius stated, his eyebrow raised.

The woman frowned. She'd obviously been hoping that Lucius's answer would allow her to catch the lie Draco had told her. She jotted down something in her notes, then turned to Harry. "And you approve of this, Mister Potter?"

Harry nodded sharply. "It worked for Draco. The games taught him a great deal about the Muggle world, in fact."

She turned back to Lucius. "And which is your favourite, Lucius?"

He held her gaze. "The one where I conquer the world, of course," he said with a smirk.

The woman smiled. "You should show me." Draco's heart, which had been rising steadily with his father's responses, sank.

"He doesn't…" The woman held up her hand to stop him.

"He says he enjoys the game. I wish to see how well he plays it," she said with a satisfied smile.

"As long as we can be there as well, Miss Hughes," Lupin said with a smile.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "I should watch him as he would usually be playing."

"Oh, well, then you should have Draco helping him. He still doesn't understand how the machine works yet. He just enjoys the game itself," Lupin replied.

She made a sour face. "Very well. But if I see any coaching…"

"Of course not," Draco assured her with his sweetest smile, then turned and led the way to the den.

As Draco turned on the computer, he worried about whether Lucius would be able to pull this little charade off. He might be good at intrigue, and getting things to go his way, but with Muggle technology, he was entirely out of his league.

He clicked on the Civilizations 2 icon, and turned to see Lucius staring at the screen intently.

"Well, Mister Malfoy?" Miss Hughes asked.

"If you don't mind, woman, I am trying to decide which country to play. Is it too much to ask that I be allowed time to decide?" he asked in a snide tone that went poorly with the highness of his voice.

"Which do you usually play?"

"The Romans. But it gets so boring, doing the same thing time and again. Perhaps I should make a new tribe," he smiled. "The Wizards." He looked at Draco, who looked at him, astonished, but felt a smile slowly spread across his face.

"That could be interesting. Shall we?"

Lucius nodded, and Draco moved forward to begin the process, but felt a hand on his shoulder, and looked up to see her holding him back. "Let him do it. I want to see how much he has learned."

Lucius didn't even bother glowering at her, just narrowed his eyes and moved forward. He glanced at the keyboard, and Draco knew he was trying to figure out what he was supposed to do. When Lucius reached for the mouse, Draco sighed mentally in relief, and watched as his father dragged the curser across the screen with the mouse a few times before moving it to the button he needed click on to change the tribe name. However, when he clicked, nothing happened. He scowled at it. "Ridiculous machine," Draco heard him mutter under his breath.

"The other button, Lucius," Draco said quietly. He felt the hand squeeze his shoulder in warning, but ignored it.

Lucius clicked again, and this time it brought up the screen to change the names. He glanced out of the corner of his eye at Draco, then moved his hand to the keyboard, and began to painstakingly pick out the letters on the keys. Draco could hear him mumbling under his breath about the idiocy of Muggles, but he continued typing until he'd finished the name. He clicked back to the main screen, and started up the game.

As the game screen loaded, Draco took a breath. This was make-or-break time. The load screens

were simple enough, but now the game was much more complicated. He was sure this was where Lucius would trip up. But that hand on his shoulder wasn't going anywhere, and there was no way he was going to give the game away from his own nervousness.

Lucius looked at the piece blinking at the screen for several minutes, then clicked on it, and Draco was relieved to see that he seemed to at least be intently reading the pop-up messages as they appeared. It took several minutes for him to get into the game, but once he had, he seemed to be quite good at it. The hand disappeared from Draco's shoulder, and if it wouldn't have given anything away, Draco might have sagged in relief.

"Very well, Mister Malfoy. You can shut off the game. I do not wish to stand here too much longer," she said sourly.

"Of course," Lucius smiled.

Draco joined Harry in the kitchen to make some sort of meal for the five of them while Lucius and Lupin took the woman into Lucius's room so that she could see his living arrangements. The meal itself was relatively quiet, with Miss Hughes doing all the talking; asking as many questions as she could come up with in an increasingly dull tone as Lupin or Harry provided answers that she obviously did not want to hear. Draco was thrilled to see the back of her when she left, that he flopped down on the couch in relief once the four of them had seen her out the door..

Lucius scowled at him. "Malfoys do not flop, Draco."

Draco bit his tongue. To be honest, it was still difficult not to listen when Lucius chastised him, but somewhere inside, he no longer felt that it was Lucius he should be listening to—particularly when he currently looked younger than Draco—and Harry hadn't said a word. But it would hardly do to start arguing with him the moment the woman had left, so Draco found a way to change the subject. "You did pretty good with that game. I'm rather surprised, actually."

"You and Potter talk about it all the time. One would think you were obsessed with the thing," Lucius sneered.

"The fact that the game helped you out a lot with that woman didn't hurt either, did it?" Draco smirked in response.

Lucius scowled. "It was an—experience," he finally responded.

"One that you will be repeating, I hope," Lupin said.

"Why on earth would I do that, Lupin?" Lucius sneered.

"Because, Lucius, you don't want to go back to Azkaban. And to prevent that from happening, you're actually going to have to start cooperating with us," Harry responded. "That means

following the rules, even though you think they're beneath you, and joining us for the movies we watch, and spending time playing those games. You seemed to do well enough with it." Harry's voice was utterly calm and reasonable, and Draco wondered how his father would respond to that. Lupin annoyed him, but Harry infuriated him.

"I may not want to go back, Potter, but I still fail to see how your little 'Muggles are great' campaign will help me. I have good reason for how I feel about them, and I doubt that anything you could show me would change that."

Harry smiled what Draco recognized as a very dangerous smile. "Really? Should we make a wager on that, Lucius? If you don't improve on your next test after watching movies and playing these games, I'll lay off, and I won't insist you watch them again. But, if they work, you start paying attention to the other rules in this house. Deal?"

Lucius narrowed his eyes, snorted, then held out his hand. "Very well, I accept."

Harry shook his hand. "I'm going to enjoy this," he grinned.

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Chapter: 14

A/N: Chapter fourteen: another test, and more clues about Harry's secret.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

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-14

Lucius's first forays into movies were those Draco insisted upon watching again—Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure, about which Lucius postulated proved that Death Eaters had obviously had the right idea, if this was the sort of garbage Muggles came up with; Stand by Me, which he sneered at; Elizabeth, which he seemed mildly interested in; and Gladiator, which was the one

that actually managed to draw him in. Personally, Draco was unsurprised. Intrigue and Romans. What more could Lucius ask for?

The conversations after were a bit stilted, though Lucius seemed full of information about the days of the Roman gladiators, about which he knew more than Draco had expected.

Unfortunately, outside their "happy family," things were going less well for Greg. He, too, had failed the test, and Hermione was at her wit's end trying to find ways to reach him. He had taken to cooking, but it hadn't seemed to help when it had come to his testing score.

Draco felt so helpless, really. He and Greg and Vince had always been there for each other, and it was killing him not being able to do more than coach Hermione in ways to help him.

By the last week before the next test, she was visiting, owling, or flooing every day, in hopes of finding ways to help Greg pass the test. It got so Draco was more worked up about the test than he had been for any of the previous ones. Surely by now, he should be getting used to them, shouldn't he? Harry assured him that Hermione's pre-test anxieties were probably just rubbing off on him. But it didn't help that he had the worry of three tests on his shoulders—Greg's, Lucius's, and his own. The night before the test, he was so nervous, he didn't sleep at all.

Kingsley came to drive them to the Ministry again, and Draco was relieved to see that Lucius felt the need to sit up front with Lupin this time, sitting in between the two men there. He desperately needed the break. Now that he didn't have Harry's exclusive attentions any longer, he kind of missed the time he'd spent alone with him before. And wasn't that a strange thing to miss, he chuckled to himself.

He leaned against Harry's side, and felt Harry's arm wrap around him and pull him just a little closer. That was nice—Lucius had never done anything like that when he was a kid. It was always, "Sit up straight, Malfoys don't slouch." Sometimes he wished that things could have been different between him and Lucius. And sometimes, late at night, when he couldn't sleep, he wished that Harry could have been the one to care for him from the beginning. He knew it was silly, but Harry was so…nice.

The car's engine buzzing in his ears soon lulled him to sleep, and he awoke to Harry shaking him lightly. "We're here. You okay?"

Draco nodded, and sat up as quickly as he could without making his head spin, straightening his hair where it had become a bit mussed. He stumbled a bit trying to get out of the car, and when he stood up straight, Lucius was glowering at him. Draco was surprised at how little impact Lucius's de-aging had had in his ability to make Draco feel as though he had royally screwed up. He looked away, and followed Harry into the Ministry.

The test itself seemed even easier this time, and when Kingsley arrived with their results, he was extremely pleased to hear that he had managed an O this time.

"Really?" he asked with a grin.

Kingsley nodded. "I would have hated to admit this even two months ago, Draco, but you've changed a lot since you first went to live with Harry. Keep this up, and I'll be glad to sign your papers myself," he said with a slight smile.

"Thank you," Draco grinned. He turned to Harry, who was beaming at the praise Kingsley had given him.

Kingsley turned to Lucius. "You've improved, Malfoy," he said. "Not sure what it was, but you managed an A. Keep it up."

Lucius scowled at him. "Like I care what you think, you…" Lupin put a hand over Lucius's mouth, and Draco had to stifle a giggle at the outraged look on his father's face.

"Thank you, Kingsley. We'll see that he keeps up the good work," Lupin said with a slight smile.

Kingsley nodded, grinning a bit at Lucius's furious struggle for freedom. "Come on. Let's get you all home," he said, avoiding mentioning the futility of Lucius's struggle against Lupin's grip on him.

When they exited the lift at the Atrium level, Draco was pleased to see Pansy and Andromeda approaching them. "Pansy!" he called out with a grin.

She turned, and seeing him, hurried to his side, giving him a huge hug. "How are you holding up, Draco? It's not too bad, is it?" she asked.

"Nah, Harry's a softie. Even Lupin there's not as bad as I thought."

Pansy wrinkled her nose and leaned in. "Don't tell me you're actually enjoying this, Draco," she said.

He shrugged. "It's not so bad, really. Even with Lucius's attitude," he grinned.

She looked at him oddly, and would have said something more, but at that moment Andromeda interrupted. "Come along, Pansy. We should get up there before it gets too late." He saw her eyes flick to him before she grabbed Pansy's hand, and they moved towards a just-opening lift.

Draco and Pansy had always gotten on well, but now that he'd seen her again—been able to talk to her, something didn't feel quite right. He just wished he knew what it was.

The drive back home wasn't nearly as comfortable as the drive to the Ministry. Harry seemed rather put out about something, and Draco couldn't help but feel hurt that he wasn't more excited because of the test results he'd gotten. After all, he'd passed. He'd gotten the highest score possible. What more could Harry want from him?

Harry stormed into the house, not even bothering to check behind him, and Lupin ushered Lucius inside, with Draco feeling rather neglected. It had been so long since he'd been left alone to do whatever he wished. And now that he was allowed more privileges, it seemed like no one particularly cared any more.

Lupin was talking quietly to Lucius when Draco finally entered the house, but Harry was nowhere to be found. He stood in the door, uncertain as to what he should do for several minutes before Lupin stood up and glanced in his direction. "Well done, Draco."

Draco nodded abstractedly, and Lupin, seeing his discomfort, came towards him. "Are you all right?" he asked. Draco shrugged. "What's wrong?"

"Harry—he just…" Draco swallowed. He hated this. He'd never allowed anyone to affect him this way before, and he certainly didn't like the way it made him feel. "I—I think he's angry at me. But I don't know why," he quickly assured Lupin. "I thought he'd be happy I'd done so well. What did I do wrong?"

Lupin sighed. "It's not you, Draco. I'm sure he's thrilled about your score. He's just—dealing with something. That's all. It's not your fault."

"Then what is it? Maybe I could help?"

Lupin's hand came down on his shoulder in a trying-to-be-comforting way. "I don't think anyone could help him right now, to be honest. Just give him some time, okay?"

Draco nodded. "I guess I'll go play, then. If that's all right?"

Lupin smiled. "Whatever works for you, Draco. I'd say you've earned it."

Draco spent the entire afternoon playing Sims, and wasn't even aware of how long he'd been there until Lupin came to retrieve him for dinner. "Supper's on the table," he grinned.

Draco looked up. "What? But I always help…"

"I know. But Harry apparently wanted to do something special for your getting an O, so he decided you could stay here until it was all finished."

Draco couldn't help wondering if he'd really wanted that, or if he just hadn't wanted to be around Draco, but when he entered the kitchen, the table was set luxuriously with a tablecloth, flowers, and Harry's best dinnerware. Lucius was sitting at the table, an eyebrow raised, but Harry was at the stove, and glanced his way as he and Lupin entered the room.

"Hey, Draco. I made your favourite meal," he smiled.

"Scallops?" Draco asked, surprised. Harry'd only served them once, and that time had been a treat as well. He obviously disliked the things himself.

Harry nodded. "With oyster mushrooms and linguini in a butter sauce."

"Sounds tremendous," Draco grinned. Maybe Lupin was right. Maybe Harry did just have something he needed to work out.

But Lucius, watching Harry's face, smirked. "Trying to get to him through his stomach, Potter?"

"That's Harry, Lucius, and no, I just felt he deserved a treat for such an amazing score. Jealous?"

Lucius snorted. "Of my own son? Hardly. I wouldn't want you sniffing after me," he said with a sneer.

Harry's face went white. "That's it, Lucius. Go to your room. Remus'll bring you a sandwich later. If you can't be civil, then you can be alone instead."

Lucius stood up, scowling. "Like I wanted to eat anything your filthy hands touched, Potter." He silenced abruptly when Lupin's hand grabbed his shoulder.

"Come along, Lucius. Time to have a bit of quiet time," he said in a calm voice, and led Lucius from the room.

The room seemed deafeningly quiet after that. To distract himself from the quiet, Draco began to serve himself some of the salad in the centre of the table, and then a huge helping of the pasta. Harry joined him quickly, and for long minutes, there was nothing but the sound of cutting and eating until Lupin returned.

"I'm sorry about that," he said as he settled back into his chair. "He's not happy, but I'll work on the rules with him, Harry, okay?"

Harry nodded, but said nothing, still thoroughly interested in the food on his plate.

Draco glanced at Lupin. "Thank you." Lupin looked at him, surprised. "For…for taking him on. I know he's not the best person, but—well, he is my father. I don't know that he'll make it through the testing. Three years is a long time. But I'm glad you didn't let them take him back, Lu—Remus."

Lupin smiled. "No problem, Draco."

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Chapter: 15

A/N: Chapter fifteen: more clues about Harry's secret, and a secret plot is discovered.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, and am posting one a week. There will be 23 chapters total. All that's left is the editing.

Disclaimer: Not mine.

Dedication: To Foodie, who still betas me despite my predilection for slash, and for FionaFawkes, who read and reviewed every single chapter, and gave me such excellent feedback. Also, for everyone who's read and loved my Harry/Draco. This one's for you.

-15

Harry and Draco watched a movie alone that evening. Draco found himself watching Harry more than the movie, and was hard-pressed to recall what it was called, or even what it had been about once it was finished. Whatever was going on with Harry needed to either stop now, or he needed to tell Draco what he was on about, because this was simply getting far too old.

Harry turned to him and asked about the movie, but Draco shrugged. "My mind was on other things."

Harry's brow furrowed. "Is something the matter?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, actually. I've been trying desperately to understand what's been going on with you. You practically ignored me all afternoon, then made my favourite meal for dinner, and even made sure we got 'alone time' together tonight… I just want to know why. I—I realize that with L—Remus here, and my father, and the way you managed to get the Minister to allow it, that you've been rather busy, but…" he sighed. "I just don't understand what had you so upset today. And don't tell me you weren't. I've certainly known you long enough to know your moods by now."

Harry closed his eyes. "It's nothing you need to worry about, Draco. It's my problem. Nothing you have to worry about. I shouldn't have let it affect me as strongly as I did…"

"Damn it, stop that! I don't know what you're dealing with because you won't tell me. I'm not the age I look, Harry. Please, talk to me. I—" He swallowed roughly over the lump that had formed in his throat. "I thought that maybe we were friends now. Was I wrong?"

Harry smiled sadly. "Of course not, Draco. If it would help things, I'd tell you. But believe me

when I say there's nothing you could do to help. You'd probably be disgusted…" His mouth turned down in a frown, and he looked away. "Just trust me. You want nothing to do with this."

"So, you're older, so you know better, is that it?" Draco asked petulantly. "You're starting to sound like my father. I never appreciated it from him, but I hate it from you, Harry. I might trust you, but there's only so far trust can stretch."

"Draco…"

"No, damn it! I need you to realize that I'm not what I look like. I may look two thirds your age, but you know me. We were in school together for six years. Whatever this is, I'm sure I can handle it."

"You don't understand. You don't want to understand, Draco. If you did, you'd already know what it was about, okay?" Harry stood up, and Draco jumped to his feet to prevent him from leaving. He wasn't Harry's size yet, but at thirteen, he'd begun to grow into the frame he'd had by the time he was sent to Azkaban. He might not be able to look him in the eye, but Harry wouldn't just be able to push him out of the way, either.

"You say I should already understand, but how can I? You keep talking in riddles, and now you're never even around! What am I supposed to understand?"

Harry's pupils were wide in the darkness of the room, only a thin rim of green surrounding them, and he moved close to Draco, his mouth drawn into a thin line. "Fine. You want to know why I was angry? Pansy. That's why."

"Pansy? Why on earth…"

"She'll drag you down with her, Draco. She's not even trying. Didn't you hear her? She looked startled that you seemed so happy with your results. She's worse than your father, and I didn't even think that was possible."

"You don't know what you're talking about!" Draco snarled. "Pansy is my friend. Maybe she just doesn't like me being here with you. Have you ever considered that?"

Harry snorted. "If she doesn't, she's smarter than you, Draco."

Draco felt the blood rush to his cheeks. "What the fuck does that mean?"

"It means maybe she knows I'm closer to you than she'll ever get. Especially if she fails."

"She's not going to fail, Potter. She's been getting consistently good grades in each test, or so Shacklebolt has said."

Harry closed his eyes again and took a deep breath. "I'm…sorry, Draco. I didn't mean to—pick a

fight." He sighed. "She rubs me the wrong way, but I know you're fond of her, and that worries me, okay?"

"Harry, Pansy—she's practically a member of my family. We've been friends since we were infants. And we've been betrothed forever. I can't imagine her not being in my life. I can't just abandon her. I wouldn't want to. I don't think you'd like me at all if I were the kind of person who could."

Harry nodded. "True." He sighed. "She's not who you think, Draco. You've changed. She hasn't. I don't think she wants to."

"How do you know that? From one bloody meeting at the Ministry?"

Harry closed his eyes, pinching his nose in frustration. "It's complicated, okay? We're both tired, we should go to bed."

"No. I want to know what's wrong with my talking to a long-time friend? What makes her different than Blaise or my father?"

"Because Blaise will let you sink and fail on your own merits. I could see that he wasn't going to force you one way or the other. And as much as your father hates all this, he knows it's his only way out. He's hardly going to prevent you from taking the same route."

"But Pansy doesn't have my best interests at heart?"

"Pansy wants you where she is, Draco. So that whatever happens, you'll be with her!"

"And you don't want the same?" Draco shrieked. The silence in the room echoed for a long moment after that, and wide-eyed, Draco watched the blood drain from Harry's face. He swallowed. "Harry…I…" Harry pushed past him and hurried from the room, and rather than chasing him, Draco collapsed on the couch. What had he said? Did he really think that Harry wanted him *that* way? And if so, how did he feel about it?

It was a long time before he got up and went to bed.

Harry avoided Draco for days after that. He wasn't unkind or unavailable, just not up to talking much. And he made sure they were never alone.

One afternoon, Draco received a letter from Pansy, and Harry scowled, but left the room rather than discuss it and start another argument. She said she was doing well, and if they only lasted a bit longer, they might be able to plan an August wedding. Just reading the words made Draco's stomach plummet. Sure, he'd always assumed he'd be married to Pansy—someday. It was different when someday was nearly upon them, though. He wrote to her telling her that they should wait at least a full year after their release, so that more of their friends and family, many of which were people who hadn't even made it into the program yet, would be able to attend.

Then he sent it off, and tried to push the subject from his mind. He was confused enough as it was. He didn't need the thought of an impending wedding muddling things more.

There was also the day when Shacklebolt appeared, saying that Ernie McMillan had requested a visit with him. Draco was puzzled. He hadn't even spent any time with the other boy in school, let alone known for sure that he was a Death Eater before he'd seen him the day the Chrysalis program had been announced. What on earth could they possibly have to say to each other? But he acquiesced. Right now, any excuse to get out of the house was a good one.

McMillan was staying with the Finch-Fletchleys, which Draco found rather odd, since most of the people in the program were actually living in Wizarding homes, but the house itself felt surprisingly familiar. He seemed to recall hearing that Finch-Fletchley's Muggle family were similar in rank in the Muggle world to his own, and the house didn't seem too much less opulent than the Manor was, really. Just more Muggle.

When they entered the home, they were greeted by McMillan and the Finch-Fletchleys, minus Justin, who was apparently feeling a bit ill that day. Shacklebolt sat with Finch-Fletchley's parents while Draco and McMillan went to the far side of the room—actually quite a good distance, Draco noticed—so that they could talk.

"What did you want with me, McMillan?" Draco asked when he was sure the adults could not hear him.

"I wanted to find out—" the boy glanced around before turning back to Draco. "I heard that you got an O last testing time. I wanted to know how you managed it. I mean, Parkinson has only managed an A, and Zabini an E. What's your secret?"

Draco looked at the other boy for a long moment. Was he asking what Draco thought? He decided to go with the simple answer, and see how McMillan took it. "Hard work," he shrugged.

"Ah, come on, now. You can tell me." His voice dropped to a whisper. "I'll back you, once you're free, if you'll only tell me."

"Back me? What do you mean by that?"

McMillan shushed him. "Calm down. I just meant, well, you and your father are together, aren't you? I heard that you were. And since you'll be leaving the program before he does…" He shrugged. "I've been working on Finch-Fletchley. He's an idiot. Thinks we're friends. Always has been a bit of a dupe, to be honest. But if I could get in on the ground floor with whatever you're planning on when you're released…"

Draco tried to keep his breathing steady. The Death Eaters wanted to rally around him? Why would they do that? Sure, he had the Malfoy name, and whatever monies his father had managed to hide from the Ministry, but they couldn't be sure he was even on their side. Best to play along for the moment, and see what else he could find out. "Working on Finch-Fletchley? What do you

mean by that? Converting him to our side?"

McMillan snorted. "Hardly. As I said, he's an idiot. He always has been. As I see it, I'm putting him out of his misery."

"I see," Draco managed through clenched teeth. "And you didn't think anyone would notice?"

He snorted. "Nah. The parents think he's just got food poisoning, or something. Sent him to the Muggle hospital, they pumped his stomach. He's upstairs right now, sipping on a new brew I'm trying out on him. I think, if you'd give me a chance, I could replace that traitor, Snape, as your Potions expert. I'm pureblood, too. Much better than his filthy blood."

Draco restrained himself from slapping the other boy. "You are an idiot. If you kill one of them, who do you think the Ministry will believe? The Muggle doctors, or their own scans? Because the moment Finch-Fletchley dies, the Ministry will arrive en masse to take you back. And you won't get a second chance. Or didn't you read the contract you were signing?" he snarled.

McMillan looked at him, wide-eyed. "I…uh…" He swallowed. "That hadn't really occurred to me."

"Did you plan this alone?"

McMillan looked at him, confused. "What?"

"Was this your idea, or did someone encourage it?" Theo was out now, he knew. He couldn't see Greg doing it. Beyond his capabilities, really. Perhaps Blaise, though…

"We—well, we don't use names if we can help it, really. We just share comments on the tests, and scores. So that we can all improve. Sort of a round-robin owl, really. We sign with nicknames."

Draco narrowed his eyes. "And what is yours, McMillan?"

The other boy flushed unflatteringly and mumbled something.

"What was that? I didn't quite catch it."

"Prefect's Pride," he grumbled.

Draco rolled his eyes. "And who are the others?"

But McMillan seemed a bit suspicious now. "Shouldn't you know? They're your friends, Malfoy."

The lie came to him easily. "They've gone behind my back. I need to rein them in. Tell me what

names they use. Now."

"I…"

"McMillan, do you want to be on my side or not?" Draco growled.

"I can't! We swore an oath. On paper. We all signed."

"What about a copy of these letters, then? Surely you have at least one of them left?"

McMillan stared at him for a moment, horrified. "I—well, I was supposed to destroy them or send them on…"

Draco stood up, glowering. "Fine. I'll figure it out on my own. As you say, they're my friends. I'm sure it wouldn't be too hard…"

"No, wait, Draco…" Draco glowered at him for using his given name without permission.

"Yes, *McMillan*?"

"I…I think I have the last one that just got sent about. But it hasn't got everyone on it yet. "

"Get it for me?"

McMillan nodded, and hurried to a desk in the far corner of the room, returning with a sheet of parchment in his hand. "Here, Malfoy. I'm supposed to send it off soon."

"You won't be. Write to the next one. Tell them it got caught in a fire or something." He rolled the scroll up and placed it in his pocket. "And whatever else you do? Ease up on Finch-Fletchley." Then he turned and moved back across the room to where Shacklebolt was sitting with the Finch-Fletchleys. He turned to Mrs. Finch-Fletchley. "I hope your son will be feeling better soon," he said with a slight smile. "I'm ready to go whenever you are, Shacklebolt."

The Auror nodded and stood, shaking Mr. Finch-Fletchley's hand, and nodding to Mrs. Finch-Fletchley before guiding Draco from the house.

Draco waited until they were settled in the car before he turned to Shacklebolt. "McMillan and some of the others are trying to cheat the system."

Shacklebolt raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"He wanted to know how I'd gotten an O on my test."

"How do you know he's not doing that for his own information only?"

"He said that he'd heard it from my friends, and then he told me how. They've been sharing answers." Draco dug into his pocket and pulled out the letter McMillan had given him.

"Why are you telling me?" Shacklebolt asked, looking quite surprised at Draco's honesty.

"I got my mark on my own merits. If they want to turn me into something I'm not just for their own plans—I won't have it. I don't know that I wouldn't have joined them had they approached me in the first few months with Harry, but now? It's not about ethics so much… I just…"

"Harry would disapprove?" Shacklebolt asked.

"Maybe," he said quietly.

Shacklebolt unrolled the parchment. "Code names?"

Draco nodded. "McMillan is 'Prefect's Pride.' Not sure about the rest. If I had to guess, I'd imagine that Theodore Nott would be involved. Maybe Blaise Zabini." He looked out the window. "They're my friends, but I can't let them ruin this for those who might actually want to reform. Even if it means they drag me down with them, I'm not going to let them hurt others' chances."

Shacklebolt was quiet for several minutes. Finally he cleared his throat. "Did you look at this at all?" Draco shook his head. "Good. We might need your help interpreting the names, though. You know them better than we do."

Draco nodded. "Anything I can do to help." He was silent for a moment as Shacklebolt started up the car. "Oh, one more thing." Shacklebolt looked at him, an eyebrow raised. "He's been poisoning Finch-Fletchley. Possibly the parents as well, given that they're Muggles, but that's why Finch-Fletchley is sick. You'd do well to get him out of there as soon as possible."

"It's a good thing I told the boy's parents I'd send over a healer once I'd gotten you back home, then. Gives me a good excuse to be there when they find out it's potion-induced and to take in McMillan without getting you directly involved."

Draco ducked his head. He hadn't even thought of that. What would they all do when they found out he'd ratted on McMillan? Would they care? Still, that was far less likely, now. "Thank you."

"No problem, Malfoy."

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Chapter: 16

A/N: Chapter sixteen: The Ministry reacts to what the other Death Eaters in the Program have done.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

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-16

On the way home, neither Shacklebolt nor Draco spoke at all. Draco himself was too lost in the realization of what his friends had done. He just couldn't believe they had been so stupid. Didn't they know they were going to get caught?

When they pulled up in front of Harry's house, Shacklebolt put a hand on Draco's arm before he got out of the car. "I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't mention this to them yet. I want to do some digging and talk to those in charge before we decide what to do about Mister McMillan. I'll come back and let you know what's been decided, all right?"

Draco swallowed. In other words, the Ministry could decide to discontinue the project, and this might well be his very last night with Harry. He'd never get another chance to really understand what was going on between him and Harry. He nodded slowly. "I won't say anything."

"Good. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Draco slipped from the car, and slowly made his way up the walk. He heard the car pull away as he reached the front door and opened it. Now he just had to use all his skill as a Malfoy to pretend that nothing unusual had happened during his visit with that moron. That should be easy, shouldn't it?

Lucius and Lupin were sitting on the couch talking when Draco entered, and Lupin turned, smiling when he saw Draco standing in the doorway. "Did you have a nice visit, Draco?"

Draco shrugged. "It was all right. I don't know why I bothered, honestly. The boy is such a dreadful bore. Where's Harry?"

Lupin pointed to the kitchen. "Working on something for the Minister."

"Thanks," he said, and headed for the kitchen. Harry was at the table with a stack of parchment in front of him, his hair even more mussed than usual. "That bad?" Draco asked.

Harry's head shot up. "Draco. I didn't hear you come in."

Draco managed a slight smile. "I'm sneaky that way. Need any help?" he asked, approaching the table.

Harry shook his head. "No. I've got it under control. Why don't you go play on the computer?"

"I'd rather play Jet Moto with you."

Harry's eyes seemed to close off. "I have too much to do right now, Draco. Maybe another time?"

Draco closed his eyes and sighed. Another time was rather unlikely to come, but he couldn't say that to Harry. "All right. Sorry I bothered you," then made his way to the den. Some things never changed, he thought to himself. Lucius hadn't been much better about spending time with Draco when he'd been young, either. Of course, his reasons had probably been slightly different, Draco admitted to himself. Still, knowing that his time with Harry might be limited just made things that much harder to deal with.

He started up the computer, pulling up Civilizations without even thinking about it. Right now conquering the world felt like a good idea. He might even get to finish the game before the Ministry came to cart him away again. He had to forcibly remind himself that he wasn't going to think about that, and turned back to the game. He jumped when he felt a hand settle on his arm.

Lucius was standing next to him, looking a bit tentative. "May I join you?" Draco didn't think he could recall his father ever looking quite so unsure of himself before. But he also remembered how his own body had betrayed him in the first few months, making it harder to control his emotions. And the fact that Lucius might suffer from what Draco's friends had done made Draco feel quite guilty. He hadn't even bothered to greet him when he came in.

He nodded. "Sure. Pull up a chair." He was a little surprised that Lucius wanted to join him. The only times Lucius had actually played had been when Harry or Lupin had insisted. "I was just about to choose a nation. Should I make the Wizards again?"

Lucius shook his head. "No need. How about the Celts?"

"We could do that," Draco smiled. He clicked on the button for the Celtic tribe. "Could be fun."

"Only makes sense, after all," Lucius said smugly. "All the best Wizarding blood in England came from the Celtic lines."

Draco smiled. "So you've told me."

The two got lost in playing the game, and when Draco looked up to see Lupin standing in the doorway, smiling at them softly as Lucius leaned forward to direct some of their troops, he was surprised how late it had gotten. "Hello," he said. "I totally lost track of things. What time is it?"

"Nearly supper. Don't worry about it. Harry and I have it in hand. The two of you were just being so quiet, I though I should check to make sure you hadn't murdered each other."

Draco glanced at his father, and remembered how difficult things had been when he and Lupin had first arrived. He was glad they seemed to be getting along so well that afternoon. But now, being reminded of the very thing he'd been trying to forget all afternoon, he was saddened. Would they even be able to continue getting to know each other this way?

Lucius just responded to Remus's comment with a snort. "Like we'd start with each other, Remus. You'd be the first to go. At least Potter—"

"Harry, Lucius. Unless you'd like dinner in your room again," Lupin warned.

"Harry, then, knows when not to push." Lucius turned to look at the man in the doorway. "How long do we have?"

"Should be ready in just a few minutes."

"That ought to be long enough to destroy England," Lucius smirked.

Draco's heart contracted, even as he smiled. He'd miss this when it was gone. "We'll be in shortly," he said quietly.

"No rush," Lupin said, then turned and left.

Draco sighed, and let Lucius take over the game. This was Lucius's favourite part, after all—the final strike on a neighbouring country. Once England had been entirely annihilated, Draco saved the game and shut down the computer. "Come on. Dinner should be done by now," he said, standing up and stretching.

They received a surprise when they got to the kitchen, though. Severus Snape and Kinglsey Shacklebolt were standing there, talking with Harry and Lupin.

"Harry?" Draco asked cautiously.

Harry turned to him and grinned. "Do you know how amazing you are, Draco?"

Draco felt his cheeks heat. "Why?" He glanced at Shacklebolt, who nodded, then looked back at Harry with his face as calm as he could make it.. "I just did what I could to make sure they wouldn't screw things up for everyone else."

"Draco, you saved a life. Possibly three. And you saved the program. You have no idea how proud I am of you right now, do you?"

Draco swallowed and shook his head. "Proud?"

Harry moved to his side and pulled him into a hug. "Immensely," he said quietly into Draco's ear. Draco felt a shiver of something go down his back. He leaned into the hug for a moment, then backed up. "What are you doing here, Severus?"

Severus smirked. "The Ministry has seen fit to reward you."

Draco couldn't resist. He returned the smirk, and raised his eyebrow. "And you're my reward?'

Severus's eyes narrowed. "No." He held out a vial. "This is."

"What is it?" Draco asked, wary.

"It will speed up the aging process for you. Two weeks instead of a month between transitions."

"You can do that?" Draco asked, excited, taking the vial from Severus's hand and examining it.

"Of course. I didn't want to make a potion I couldn't counter. Could you see the Ministry sending any of you back to Azkaban looking as though you were eight? It would have been a scandal," he said, eyebrow raised.

Draco chuckled. "So, I just drink this, and it'll speed up my aging?"

"I do believe that is what I said," Severus agreed.

"Well, then," Draco replied with a grin, "bottoms up!"

Harry caught his hand before he could toss back the concoction. "Perhaps you should sit down before you do that, Draco. I mean, what if you age while you're standing there?"

"Oh. Right." He moved to one of the chairs and sat down, trying to avoid the eyes of his audience. He lifted the vial and swallowed it down with a gulp, and felt something like an electric charge go through him.

Draco came to several minutes later on the couch. Harry was seated next to him, but the others were nowhere in sight. Draco was glad of it. He didn't fancy being the entertainment portion of the evening. "How did I get out here?" he asked.

"You collapsed. I thought you'd be a bit more comfortable out here, so I carried you. You okay?"

Draco nodded. He was a bit sore, but he was used to that, now. "I take it this means it worked?" he asked, bemused.

Harry smiled. "I'd forgotten how strange it was to watch. Of course, the first time you'd aged down, but…"

Draco scooted into a sitting position. "I'm sure I was loads of fun to watch."

Harry sighed. "I didn't mean it that way, Draco…"

"Relax. I was only joking."

"Oh." There was a long pause, then Harry stood up. "Well, the rest of them are in there eating as we speak. I hope you're hungry. Kingsley brought pudding."

Draco grinned. "Famished."

It was a wonderful meal. Even Lucius seemed rather to be enjoying himself, for once. It probably didn't hurt that Severus was there to talk to, but even so, he seemed generally more good-humoured all around. After supper, Harry pulled a pie out of the oven, and some ice cream from the freezer. "So, who's up for pudding?"

It had been so long since Hogwarts, but the simple but delicious pudding brought back so many memories, Draco had to excuse himself to the bathroom to compose himself before he could begin digging in to his own share. Snape refused a slice, and instead busied himself making coffee. It was quite possibly the best evening Draco could recall since well before he'd gone to Azkaban.

Once dinner was over, Shacklebolt pulled Draco into the den. "Here are the other nicknames from that sheet. And the names of the current Azkaban prisoners in the program. If you could match any of them up, we'd be quite grateful, Draco."

Draco raised an eyebrow. "How much more grateful will they get?"

"How about enough to give you back your wand?"

Draco swallowed. That reward was worth anything he could think of. Just the idea of being allowed to do magic again almost made him feel faint. He knew he would have done it, reward or no, but just receiving recognition that his help was that useful… "I'll see what I can do."

"Don't push yourself on it too hard, though. We have other possibilities for catching them. We might have to wait for them to show themselves, anyway."

Draco nodded. "I'll still do what I can, sir."

"Kingsley."

"What?"

Shacklebolt grinned. "It's my name, Draco. I'd be honoured if you called me by it."

Draco managed a smile. "Kingsley, then."

Kingsley turned to go, but Draco caught his arm. "Wait." Kingsley looked at him, expectantly. "The reason they managed to do this as long as they have is because the questions never change on that test. And we all get exactly the same one. Maybe you could find a way to create new questions for them each time? That way there will always be something that could trip one of them up."

Kingsley blinked. "That's a good idea. I'll talk to the people who put the test together and see what they can come up with."

"Good."

"You just work on those names, okay?" Draco nodded, and Kingsley was gone.

Harry came in a few minutes later to see Draco examining the piece of parchment Kingsley had given him. "Hey."

Draco looked up and smiled. "Hi. Just trying to figure these out."

"Well, put it aside for a minute. I have one more surprise for you tonight."

"Oh?" Draco asked, cautiously. Maybe Harry was finally ready to talk?

"Yeah. I got the okay from Kingsley to have Hermione, Ron, and Goyle over for Christmas Eve dinner. I thought you might like to have a visit for the Holidays."

Draco couldn't help the grin that spread across his face then. "Really? You mean it? What about Blaise, or Pansy? I'd love to see them, too."

Harry's face fell a bit. "Well, I don't think the Ministry would allow that many of you in one room. Especially given what you found out today. But Kingsley said one would be okay…"

"Oh. I—understand. Besides, I'm sure you want to see your friends as well. Thank you," he said, trying to keep his disappointment from showing too much.

Harry smiled. "You deserve it, Draco." He left the room before Draco could say anything else.

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Chapter: 17

A/N: Chapter seventeen: Christmas part 1.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, and am posting one a week. There will be 23 chapters total. All that's left is the editing.

Disclaimer: Not mine.

Dedication: To Foodie, who still betas me despite my predilection for slash, and for FionaFawkes, who read and reviewed every single chapter, and gave me such excellent feedback. Also, for everyone who's read and loved my Harry/Draco. This one's for you.

-17

The week before Christmas was hectic, and Draco found no time to go and buy presents for everyone, let alone examine the lists Kingsley had given him again. By the twenty-third, he was nearly frantic. When Harry finally asked him what was wrong, he told him that he still hadn't been able to get presents for anyone, and Harry offered to take him out to Diagon Alley, but this only made Draco's panic worse. If Harry went along, he might never find him the proper present.

"No offence, Harry, but…"

"I get it," Harry said sadly. "Maybe Remus would be willing to take you."

Draco immediately felt relief at the suggestion. Now, why hadn't he thought of that? Remus would be able to help him figure out the perfect gift for Harry. "That would be perfect," he smiled. "Do you think he'd be willing?"

Harry shrugged. "Can't hurt to ask."

Draco ran to the living room where Remus and Lucius were sitting reading. "Remus, would you be up to taking me to Diagon Alley this afternoon? I need to get Christmas presents."

Remus looked at him, a bit surprised. "Of course. Harry will be here all day?"

Draco nodded. "He and father can make do for a few hours," he smiled.

Lucius snorted, but otherwise didn't comment. Remus smiled. "Sounds like a plan, then. How about directly after lunch?"

"Sure."

Lunch was a quick plate of sandwiches thrown together, and then Remus and Draco were off. When they got to Diagon Ally, the place was packed. Of course, Draco had known it would be, but his distracted worry about what to get Harry made the crowd disappear from his consciousness. He turned to Remus. "The reason I wanted you to come with me is that I wanted to find something special for Harry. But I could hardly ask him, now could I? Do you have any ideas?"

Remus looked at him, a bit startled. "To be honest, Draco, I'm not sure how much help I'll be. The only time I managed to get him presents was with the help of his godfather. I'll do what I can, though."

Draco sighed. "Well, I'm sure we'll find something. Come on. Let's start at Flourish and Blott's." He pulled the other man into the horribly crowded shop, and began scanning the books at eye level. Really, he needed to find something for everyone, so this would be as good a place to start as any. He found a journal that had a self-transcribing charm on it for Severus, and another blank for Hermione, that Remus had promised he would help charm so that it would transcribe notes for whatever subject she wished just by writing it on a page.

The Quidditch supply store was next, and Draco found himself drawn to the latest model of Nimbus. He couldn't help recalling the fight he and Harry and his friends had had second year over the Nimbus 2001s his father had donated to the team. Perhaps Weasley might like a new broom…

But Draco knew just how touchy Weasley could be. He'd see it as a dig against him. He turned to the counter where a man was having a new Firebolt wrapped up. "Excuse me. I'd like to buy that Nimbus 2004. But I need to have it dinged up a bit, so that it doesn't look new. How much extra would that cost me?"

The clerk and the man at the counter both looked at Draco as though he were mad. Even Remus looked a bit uncertain. "Why on earth would you want that, sir?" the clerk finally asked.

"The person I'm giving it to wouldn't accept a new broom. But I'm sure you don't have many of those used yet, do you?"

"None, sir," the clerk said with a nod. "I'll see what I can do. No charge. Shouldn't be too difficult. Give me an hour, all right?"

Draco nodded, and placed note on the counter. "Here's a note for whatever funds you need to be drawn from my account, all right?"

"Thank you, sir," the clerk grinned.

After a few more minutes looking around the shop with no ideas for what to get for Harry there, Draco and Remus went back out onto the street. Draco insisted that they stop at Madam Malkin's to get his father a self-sizing cloak. "After all, he really does need one, and I'm sure he misses his old wardrobe. Wouldn't do for father not to look good," Draco said with a smirk.

He saw Remus fingering a new deep maroon cardigan on one rack, and whispered to the clerk to wrap it up as well, and send it along to Harry's house after they had left.

Now Draco only had Greg, Pansy, Blaise and Harry left to buy for. His friends were easy enough. He bought Greg a bag of candies, and asked Remus to remind him to stop back in at Flourish and Blott's for another blank book for Greg to start writing his recipes into. Blaise got a stationary set, and Pansy a lovely pin with a small yellow rose that opened and closed depending on the level of light in the room.

And then all Draco had left was Harry. By this point, he was near frantic trying to figure out what he could possibly give Harry that would show him that they were friends. He wanted Harry to see how pleased he was that they'd finally managed to get rid of the animosity that had dogged them for seven years. And that maybe—just maybe—he might want more.

They were making their way back up to the Quidditch shop when Draco saw something that he knew would be absolutely perfect. In the window of a small junk shop next to Madam Malkin's, Draco saw the most perfect gift he could possibly imagine. A memory crystal. He grinned, and hurried into the shop.

Harry's gift in hand, they made their way back to the Quidditch shop and then out of the alley, where Remus flagged down the Knight Bus. Not the most comfortable mode of transport around, but it would get them home quick enough. Particularly when Draco bribed the conductor to let them off next.

All in all, a pleasant experience, Draco thought, placing the gifts under the little tree Harry'd set up the day before. Despite the fact that he wasn't at the Manor this year, Draco thought that this might well be his best Christmas ever.

Christmas Eve started simply enough. That morning was spent baking and cleaning, and though Lucius grumbled about it, they all helped out, and by the time two o'clock rolled around, the house was spotless. They all retired to their rooms for a quick rest, and a change of clothing, and Draco found himself quite looking forward to the evening ahead, Gryffindor-filled or not.

Draco was still a bit upset he wouldn't be allowed to see Blaise or Pansy, but at least he would get to spend some time with Greg. Greg's scores hadn't really improved much, but Draco was hoping it was just confusion, and nothing more. If he could just get through to him, he was sure everything would improve. There was no way in hell he was going to let Greg go back to Azkaban. Not if he could help it.

At four, Draco was dressed in a new outfit he'd bought the day before, and settled on the couch next to the tree, waiting for their guests to arrive. He couldn't wait to see Greg again, and he was actually rather surprised at how much he was looking forward to seeing everyone's faces when they opened their presents.

When the doorbell finally rang, Draco felt like he shot halfway to the ceiling, and to cover his surprise, jumped off the couch to answer the door. Hermione and Weasley stood behind a grinning Greg, and Draco couldn't stop himself from throwing his arms around his friend. It had been too long. After a moment, Greg cleared his throat. "You okay, Dray?" he asked worriedly.

Draco backed up, embarrassed. "Yeah, just a bit over-excited. Sorry. Come on in, all of you," he said, managing even to smile at Weasley in his over-exuberance.

Lucius was scowling at Draco, but Draco couldn't care less. It was all too much, and he couldn't help but be happy. "May I show him the den?" he asked Harry.

Harry smiled. "Of course."

Draco led his friend through the kitchen and into the den. "Here. Harry's got this great game…" He stopped, realizing that Greg was still standing in the doorway, his mouth wide. "Greg?"

"What is all this?" the other boy asked, looking around at all of Harry's electronics in a kind of horrified awe.

"They're Muggle electronics. Sort of one of their versions of magic. You can watch stories on them, or play games on them. It's very cool. Come on. Let me show you."

Greg nodded, and Draco led him to the couch, then turned to the Telly to set up the game. He handed one of the controllers to Greg, and settled down next to him. "I'll play a quick track, so you can see what I'm talking about, all right?"

Greg nodded, and watched, wide-eyed, as the images played across the screen. Draco chose his favourite character, Irons, then his favourite course, just to give Greg an idea of the game. He finished in first place (not really a surprise, given how much he played, but always nice to see), then turned to Greg. "So, what do you think? Want to give it a try?"

Greg blinked at him for a moment. "I don't know, Draco, it seems awfully complicated."

"Nah, it's easy. I beat Harry first time we played head to head."

"Really?"

Harry's chuckle came from behind him, and he turned to the doorway and saw not only Harry, but Hermione as well. "He not only beat me, he wiped the floor with me. You might not want to

go against him, Goyle."

Draco glowered at him. "It's only fair, considering how you trounced me every year in Quidditch, Potter."

Harry moved to the couch and held his hand out to Greg. "Here, Goyle, let me have that. I'll show you what I mean." Greg gratefully handed it to him, scooting over so that Harry could settle onto the couch next to him.

Harry and Draco debated which tracks they should use for a three-course race, Draco insisting on his favourites, while Harry tried to negotiate for the ones he knew Draco was worst on. Finally, they chose one of Harry's best for the first track, to give him a head start, one of Draco's for the second, and a really horrific one they both hated for the third. They were at it for over an hour when Remus came into the room.

"I think the turkey's done, folks."

"We're nearly done here, Remus. Give us a mo," Harry replied.

"Of course. Boys and their toys," he murmured to Hermione, who had been standing behind the couch watching the entire time.

"I heard that," Harry shouted at him as he left the room. Remus's chuckle floated back to them.

Christmas dinner was surprisingly friendly and cozy, even with eight people crammed around Harry's spell-stretched table. Draco had done his best to try to prevent the Slytherins from all bunching up at one end of the table, but there was only so much he could do. Harry sat at the head of the table, and Remus at the foot, with Draco, Severus and Lucius at Harry's right, and Weasley, Hermione and Greg at his left. The dishes were all wonderful. Snape had brought a cauldron of warm spiced cider, and Hermione had brought Christmas pudding—a plum pudding and two different pies. The turkey was perfect—carved by Remus, and there was enough food to even sate Greg for the evening.

They chattered in a friendly way throughout the meal until Weasley turned to Draco and said, "So, what'd you do to trick the Ministry this time, Malfoy?"

Draco bristled, Harry's annoyed response mere buzzing in his ears. He wasn't going to let Weasley ruin this for him. He clenched his jaw and stood up. "I think it's time to open presents," he said, turning to Remus. "Could you clear the table? I'll bring in the first round. I figure this way we'll have enough room for everyone to see what everyone else gets."

Remus nodded as Draco made his way out of the room. Weasley was going to eat those words, if it was the last thing Draco ever accomplished. He pulled the gifts he'd bought into his arms, and returned to the kitchen, depositing each with its proper recipient, then settling back into his chair.

They all stared at each other for a moment before Severus sighed and carefully began to remove the wrapping from his package. He looked down at the journal in his hands for a moment, the looked up at Draco. "Thank you, Draco. This will quite come in handy when I'm experimenting with new ways to make Lupin's potion less palpable," he smirked.

Draco rolled his eyes, but Harry growled at him, "Can't you even be civil on one night a year, Snape?"

Snape turned his gaze on Harry. "Apparently not, Potter." He put the book on the table, then turned to look at Lucius. "And what did your son get for you?"

Lucius opened the box in front of him, then smiled and pulled out the silvery velvet that filled the box. "Exquisite, Draco. You always did have lovely taste. Even as an infant."

"Thank you father. It's spelled to fit you no matter what size you are. I figured…."

"Very nice, indeed. Thank you Draco."

Draco looked across to Hermione. "You next."

She glanced at Weasley, who was scowling down at the package in front of him, and looking as though he thought it might bite. She sighed and turned back to her own package. Opening it up, she smiled and looked up at Draco.

"Read the note," he prodded.

She looked back down at the journal, and opened it up to see the note stuck just inside the cover. She read it quickly, her eyes widening. "Draco, that's wonderful. Thank you." Weasley scowled at this, but Hermione was too busy scrambling for a quill so she could test it out.

Greg was next, and grinned when he opened the box of candy that Draco'd gotten him, though he seemed puzzled about getting his own journal. "I thought you could use it to keep track of the recipes you liked," Draco told him.

Greg grinned. "That would be cool."

Remus flushed when he opened up his box and recognized the cardigan he'd been admiring in Madam Malkins. "Draco, you didn't have to…"

"I know. That's why I did. I could tell you liked it."

"Yes," Remus said simply, slipping off his old, tattered cardigan and pulling on the new one.

Draco turned to Weasley. "Your turn."

"I'm not opening it. It's probably booby-trapped," Weasley snarled.

"Ron," Harry and Hermione both said in a warning tone.

"Fine. But if I end up in St Mungos, you'll both be in big trouble…"

He unwrapped the large box cautiously, and Draco was about ready to rip it out of his hands and finish unwrapping it for him when he finally slid the paper from the box. He set it on the table in front of himself and Hermione, then slowly lifted the lid. He goggled down into the box for a moment, then slammed it shut. "Take it back."

"What?" Draco asked, incredulous.

"I don't want it. Take it back to wherever you got it. I'm fine with my old Cleansweep. I haven't had it that long, and I don't need charity from you, Malfoy," he growled.

Draco spoke loudly over Hermione's admonitions to Weasley. "I can't, Weasley. It's not returnable. But if you don't want it…"

"What do you mean, not returnable?" Weasley scowled. "It's the latest model. I'm sure someone would take it off your hands."

Draco snorted. "In that condition, Weasley? I don't think so. Why would anyone bother when they could get themselves a new one? I went to some effort to get that for you, but I suppose I could always find another use for it."

"I don't need your charity, Malfoy."

"I didn't think Christmas gifts were charity, Weasel—"

"Draco," Harry warned.

"Weasley, I'm sure there's some orphanage or something I could donate it to. But to be honest, I'd prefer that you take it. I bought it for you, after all."

Weasley looked sullen. "Just so we're clear, I still hate you, Malfoy."
"Feeling's mutual, really. Now, can you stop winging about it?"

Weasley shrugged, which Draco took as a yes. He turned to Harry. "Your turn."

"Draco, you didn't have to get me anything…"

"I know. I wanted to. Go on. Open it."

Harry carefully unwrapped the box and pulled out a small crystal, just about the size of his palm,

looking at it curiously. "What is it?"

"Oh, Harry!" Hermione beamed. "It's a memory crystal."

Harry looked at Hermione, confused, then turned to Draco. "A memory crystal?"

Draco nodded. "It's like a mini-pensieve. I put a few memories in there, so right now it's full, but you can always clear it out and put others in, if you'd like."

"You're giving me some memories, for Christmas?" Harry asked, startled.

"Yes," he answered, heart in his throat.

"How—" Harry swallowed, and tried again. "How do I access them?"

"That's easy. You just tap the crystal with your wand, and the crystal itself will do the rest."

Harry pulled out his wand and tapped the crystal, and Draco watched as his eyes went slightly blank. He hoped he'd done it right. Lupin had helped him transfer the memories, since he didn't have his own wand, but he couldn't be sure that they'd transferred right. After a few moments, Harry blinked, and smiled at Draco. "Thank you."

Draco did what he could to control the blush he felt trying to rise to his cheeks. "I'm glad you like it."

"I do," Harry said, smiling softly.

Remus stood up. "My turn, then?"

Draco stood up as well. "I'll help you."

"Thank you, Draco," Remus smiled.

All in all, it was a lovely evening. Hermione and Weasley had gotten him a new set of robes that fit him properly, now that he was nearly at his full height. His father had found him a writing set, Lupin had gotten him a book on ancient civilizations, Greg had made him a batch of fudge, and Severus had brought him a book on advanced potion-making. Draco was looking forward to finding a way to finish his schooling once all this was over. He didn't particularly need it, but it seemed wrong not to at least try for his NEWTs someday.

His favourite gift was from Harry, though. He'd gotten Jet Moto 2, and Draco immediately ran off to try it as soon as everyone had finished opening their presents. Greg joined him, and actually gave it a shot, taunting Draco for choosing Steele, who was a girl.

"Come on, Greg. Look at Pansy. She's not a pushover. Besides, it's just a game, and she's

handling her bike better than your character is," he smirked.

Weasley and Harry took a turn at the game next, and while Draco and Greg were watching, Greg nudged Draco. "C'n we talk?" he asked.

"We haven't been talking all night?"

"Not like that—in—well, sort of private?"

Draco glanced at Harry. He didn't want to break the rules of the Chrysalis project, but he really didn't think Greg was involved with those who'd been trying to cheat. None of the names had sounded right for him. Even Pansy had matched up with one of the names, though he refused to believe she was one of them. But still, Greg was such a willing patsy, he might not even know they weren't being helpful for him. "All right. But only for a minute, okay?"

Greg nodded, and the two went into the hallway just outside the room. Greg slumped against the wall and looked at the floor. "'M really worried, Dray. This is my third test coming up, and my score hasn't improved enough. I don't want to go back…"

Draco was relieved. He honestly wanted to do better, and that in itself was a good sign. But Draco wasn't sure what more he could do to help his friend. "I don't want you to go, either. But nothing we've tried has helped."

"I know. It's just those questions, you know? They're so confusing. I just never know how to answer them."

Draco sighed, and leaned on the wall next to his friend. Through the hall doorway, he could see Remus and Hermione in the kitchen, chatting away about something or other. If only Hermione could be with Greg at the test… Draco's eyes widened, and his face spread into a grin. "Greg. The problem is how they phrase the questions, right?" Greg nodded. "What if, when you're reading the questions, anywhere it says 'Muggle,' you replace it in your head with 'Hermione?'"

"But Hermione can't be there with me," Greg said, looking confused.

Draco shook his head. "No. When you read a question that says something like, 'If you see a Muggle mugged in the street,' what would your response be?"

Greg shrugged. "I suppose I'd answer something like 'Pass on by.'"

"And if it said, 'If you see Hermione mugged in the street,' how would your answer change?"

"I'd beat the guy up," Greg said indignantly.

"Exactly. So, this time, go through the test, and when you see 'Muggle,' just replace it with 'Hermione.' Okay?"

"But won't they get annoyed with me for crossing out 'Muggle?'"

Draco laughed. "Well, I didn't mean that, but if that works for you, go for it."

"All right, I'll try it," Greg said. "Thanks."

Draco nudged him with his shoulder. "If it works, you won't have to thank me. That'll be thanks enough."

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Chapter: 18

A/N: Chapter seventeen: Christmas part 2.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

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-18

After everyone had left, Draco snuggled up in his bed with one of the books he'd gotten, getting lost in the words. He'd always loved books—the smell, the feel, the way the rest of the world just disappeared…

He'd only been reading for a few moments when Harry knocked on his door, calling out, "Can I come in?"

"Sure," Draco responded, setting the book aside. He was glad Harry'd come to see him before going to sleep. He'd wanted to talk to him about the memories in the crystal, but it had felt awkward with everyone there watching them.

Harry closed the door behind him and settled on the bed. "You were amazing tonight, Draco. I

don't even know who you are any more, you're so different from the boy I remember. Thank you for being so gracious with Ron. I know he's difficult sometimes, but he's still my friend…"

"I know, Harry. It's why I've been trying so hard not to respond to his jeers. I'm sorry I did at all tonight. I—"

"Draco, it was his fault, not yours. I know that. And you backed off as soon as I asked you to stop."

Draco smiled. "Only for you, Harry. If it had just been him and me, it would have been a match to the death."

Harry snorted. "Yeah, I can see it now. Him in a loincloth, and you in a tiger-skin, right?"

"Excuse me? I think you mean dragon skin…" he smirked.

Harry snorted. "Draco…"

They both laughed for a minute, and Harry lay back on the bed, stretched out on his back looking up at the ceiling. "You know, this might be the best Christmas I can ever remember having."

"Really? I was kind of thinking the same thing myself yesterday. I really like being here…" He swallowed the rest of the sentence—'with you,' would just sound a bit too forward. To be honest, he hadn't given a lot of thought to what he knew, but he knew there was something more going on between him and Harry than simple friendship. And he liked it. If he could keep it up, he would.

Harry was looking at him now, and Draco couldn't help but avoid his eyes. He wasn't too sure why he should feel guilty, but he did. "Draco?"

"Hm?"

"That stone…"

"The memory crystal?"

"Yeah, that. Why those memories?"

Draco took a breath before responding, gathering his thoughts so that he could talk without embarrassing himself. "Well, Madam Malkin's was a no-brainer, really. It was the first time I ever saw you."

"And watching me on my broom?"

Draco felt his cheeks colour. "I…that was sixth year. I'd been so busy, I'd missed Quidditch a lot.

I finally decided I just needed a bit of fresh air, so I went and grabbed my broom, and went out to the pitch. But you were already there."

Harry leaned closer. "Why didn't you leave? Or even join me? You never worried about bothering me before…"

"I didn't even think about it. I'd watched you play a lot through our years at Hogwarts, but I'd never really watched you fly. You were always just my competition. My *main* competition, but still… And watching you…I don't know. It just—calmed me down. Almost like I was flying myself."

Harry looked at him for a long moment before asking, "And the last memory?"

Draco had to take another deep breath before he could answer. It felt like all of the air from his body had been expelled at once. "That one—" He swallowed and tried again. "That was when I figured out what my father'd been saying about you—about us."

"When you were telling me off about Pansy?" Harry asked, confused. "How did that help?"

Draco remembered the moment again. How angry he'd been at Harry for insisting that Pansy might not have his best interests at heart. "Yeah. It just came to me, out of nowhere. I think if I hadn't been so angry, and yelling at you, I might still not have figured it out."

Harry looked a bit pale. "And…what do you think your father meant, Draco?"

Draco looked down at his hands, and found his voice simply wouldn't raise above a whisper. "That—that you want me. The same way Pansy does."

Harry sat up. "Draco…"

"Harry, please stop. You can't pretend there isn't something you want from me. I wouldn't be here if there wasn't."

"You deserve as much a chance as anyone else, Draco."

"Maybe. But couldn't someone else have proved that as easily as you?"

Harry snorted and sat up fully then. "What makes me wanting to help you different from anyone else doing the same, Draco?"

"Our history. Harry, there's never been—simple feelings between us. Everyone knows that. I have a feeling that there are other things that most of your friends know that I was unaware of for a while, at least, aren't there?" Harry didn't say anything, so Draco continued. "After all, they didn't want you taking me in. And if it had been just that, I'm sure you would have at least convinced Hermione or Remus. They seem—empathetic people. They wouldn't want anyone to

just rot away in Azkaban if they could help them. So their reasons for being worried when you took me in must have been a bit more personal."

Harry looked away. "So what if they are? It's not their life, is it?"

Draco wanted to touch him, but he had the feeling if he did, that Harry would be on his feet and out of the room faster than he could say "Stop." He swallowed. "Are you—Do you—" He took another breath and tried again. "Harry, how do you feel about me?"

Harry's shoulders slumped. "It really doesn't matter, Draco. Can't we just keep things the way they are? I like being able to finally spend time with you and not be upset. I don't want to mess that up."

"How do you know it will mess things up, Harry?"

Harry laughed and turned to him. "Draco, you're straight. You want to marry and have an 'heir.' It doesn't much matter what I want. You should have the life you want—if you can. And both of you seem to be doing well…"

"Harry, do you really expect me to believe that you're not hoping that Pansy is in on all of this test stuff?"

Harry frowned. "Not if it would hurt you, Draco. I want you to have what you want. Even if…"

Draco raised an eyebrow. "Even if it's with her?"

Harry nodded.

"And if I've changed my mind?"

Harry looked up at him, his expression halfway between scared and hopeful. "Have you?"

"I—I don't know. I…Pansy's been a part of my life for longer than I can remember. You know how it is. You have something—someone—in your life that long, and it's just natural to accept it. I've never bothered to think about alternatives." He swallowed and licked his lips, trying to get some of the dryness from his mouth. "Harry…"

Harry's eyes were glued to his lips, and Draco felt his heart beating heavily in his chest. "What?" Harry managed after a moment, finally recalling that Draco had said something to him.

Draco licked his lips again, and watched Harry's eyes track his tongue. He leaned closer, and whispered. "Kiss me?"

Harry's eyes flew up to meet his, and he backed off. "Draco, that's really a bad idea."

"Why? Because you're scared?"

"No, because you're under age."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Please. Physically, I'm only three years younger, Harry. That's nothing. And we both know that I'm not actually the age I am physically. Would it really be that horrible?"

"Yes," Harry said, stumbling to his feet. "You're my charge, and it's not right."

Draco snorted. "Gryffindors. Always have to be noble," he sneered. "Who'd really care, Potter?"

"I would, Draco. Or doesn't that matter?"

"So, kissing me would be a fate worse than death?"

"That's not what I meant, and you know it, Draco," Harry said angrily. He turned to move away from the bed, but Draco caught his hand.

"Harry, you do want to, right?" Harry made a vague shoulder movement that could have meant yes or no, or could have even been just him trying to get his hand free from Draco's grasp, but if he was, he wasn't trying very hard. "And I want you to. Or I wouldn't have asked. Who would it hurt?"

Harry's mouth was a thin line when he looked back at Draco. "I know you have problems defining right and wrong, Draco, but trust me. This is wrong. And I won't. Sometimes want doesn't really enter into it. Sometimes you just have to do what's right."

"So, you'll just let me go in a little over a month, and not be sorry you *never* kissed me?" Harry's eyes closed at that. "And if I never come back?"

Harry's head dropped. "Please, Draco…"

"Harry, sometimes right and wrong don't enter into it. Have you ever thought of that?"

"Draco, you can't really believe that—"

Draco clenched his teeth. This had gone far enough. He released Harry's arm. "Fine. Leave. See if I care. I need my sleep anyway."

Harry blinked. "Draco…"

"Go away. I'm done. If you don't want to kiss me, I'm hardly going to force you. Just get out already." He was starting to get really angry, and if Harry didn't leave soon…

"Draco, it's not that, it's just…"

"Get out!" Draco stood up and pushed at Harry's shoulders. "I don't want you in here any more. Just go away, damn it!"

Harry grabbed his hands. "Draco, stop it. I'm sorry if I upset you."

"Do you want to know what's upset me, Potter?"

"Draco…"
"Do you?"

Harry sighed. "What?"

"You're too fucking noble. You want this, and I want this, and you're too fucking noble to make the first fucking move. And I don't want to play this game any more. So just get out."

"Draco, I don't know what to say. You think this is a game to me, is that it? This is my life. In six weeks, you'll be gone, you'll probably be planning your wedding to her, and I'll be back where I started. Do you think that'll be easier with a memory of what it's like to kiss you?"

"So, you'd rather regret not kissing me? Not even give it a chance?"

"Draco, you don't even know you want this! Look how long it took you to get it! This is my life. I don't have someone convenient waiting in the wings for me. Not like you."

"What about Weasley's sister?" Draco sneered.

"What about her?"

"I seem to recall you were dating her our sixth year. You telling me she's not pining away for you in the wings somewhere?"

"As a matter of fact, we broke up at the end of sixth year. I had—other things to do. So she moved on."

That took Draco aback. "Oh. Well…It's not like no one would want you. You're Harry Potter. You can have whoever you want."

Harry laughed ruefully. "Right. They'd want Harry Potter. See, you don't get it, Draco. Just go to sleep. We'll talk tomorrow."

Harry pulled away, and Draco watched him walk to the door, his heart sinking in his chest. "Harry…"

Harry turned to look at him, looking at him questioningly.

"I'm sorry. I just…" He sighed. "I gave you that crystal so you could see—I *am* interested…"

"But you're not ready," Harry said quietly.

"Tell me what you expect from me, then, please."

"I expect you to do your best, and grow up well. That's all." Then Harry opened the door, and was gone.

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Chapter: 19

A/N: Chapter nineteen: Christmas part 3. And this is the last, I promise…

If the Pannecock idea interests you, look for German Pancake recipes online. You'd be surprised at how many versions there are. :) My mother cooked and served it exactly like I discribe in the chapter.

This is is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, and am posting one a week. There will be 23 chapters total. All that's left is the editing.

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Dedication: To Foodie, who still betas me despite my predilection for slash, and for FionaFawkes, who read and reviewed every single chapter, and gave me such excellent feedback. Also, for everyone who's read and loved my Harry/Draco. This one's for you.

-19

Draco found himself awake far earlier than he would have liked the next morning, but finally stumbled out of bed and began to dress after at least an hour of tossing and turning. The sky was beginning to lighten, so he figured he might as well give up, anyway.

He found Remus in the hallway, making his way to the kitchen. Upon seeing Draco, he smiled. "Merry Christmas, Draco. Couldn't sleep?"

Draco shook his head. All night he'd been lost in dreams of Harry. At first things were normal, but then they would shift. Some were pleasant enough: Harry leading Draco to his room, and sharing a kiss to die for, or more; Harry returning to his room to tell him he'd changed his mind; even one erotic dream where Harry had rubbed him until he'd gained release. But some weren't nearly so pleasant. Like the one that had shaken him awake at last, where Harry told him that his opinion of him really hadn't changed since they'd first met, and that now that he was grown, he never wanted to see Draco again.

"Ah," Remus said. "Well, a good breakfast should help. Would you like to help? I've got a recipe my mother used to make when I was a kid that I thought I'd share with everyone this morning. Get us feeling a bit festive for Christmas morning. Maybe make a bit of peppermint cocoa."

"Sure." Draco followed him into the kitchen, and Remus showed him the recipe—just eggs, flour, milk and a bit of salt—which they mixed in two batches while skillets heated in the now-warming oven. Once the temperature in the oven was warm enough, they poured the mixes into the skillets, and put them into the oven to cook. Draco set to making some bacon and cocoa while Remus went to wake Harry and Lucius. Things almost felt normal.

When Harry entered the kitchen, Draco couldn't help but tense up. He didn't want Harry angry at him, and he was worried that maybe he had pushed things just a bit too far last night. But Harry just moved to the table and began setting it while Draco finished off the bacon, and pulled breakfast from the oven.

Remus and Lucius entered then, and Remus took over the division of the dish they'd made. The mixture had curled up the sides of the pan, and left a crater in the centre of each to be filled with whatever they wanted. "Mum usually just served it with a bit of butter, some lemon juice, and a sprinkle of powdered sugar," Remus said. "Could you grab all that while I serve, Draco?"

Draco nodded and went to retrieve the things Remus had mentioned. It looked like an odd breakfast, but once he settled down and took the first bite (a feat in itself, as the thing was so thin and wide), he was rather surprised at how good it was for such a simple recipe. "It's very good," he smiled at Remus.

"Thank you, Draco. I've missed having them myself. Never seemed to be somewhere I could make one on Christmas day, most years." He took a bite, his eyes closed in pleasure.

"What's it called?" Harry asked curiously.

"Mother called it something like 'Pannekock,' I think. I've seen it mentioned elsewhere as a German Pancake, though."

"Was your mother German?"

"I think there's a bit of the Dutch on that side of my ancestry, actually."

Harry smiled, but Draco could see that it didn't quite reach his eyes. He only wished he knew some way of cheering Harry up. Still, better to keep quiet for now. Maybe after they opened the rest of their presents, Harry'd be in a slightly better mood.

Once they'd finished eating, Remus and Lucius cleared the table—to a chorus of Lucius's complaints about being treated like a house elf, and Harry asked Draco to come into the den for a moment before they opened their presents. Draco followed him quietly, and waited for him to speak.

"Look, I thought about this a lot last night, Draco. I realize I never mentioned my feelings. But they were my feelings, and private, and I figured you wouldn't care, or worse, it would upset you and make you pull away from me." Draco tried to say that wasn't the case, but Harry interrupted before he could get more than a syllable out. "I know, you didn't. But…I've known you for eight years, Draco. You always react in extreme ways. Even now that we're friends. And…" he swallowed before continuing, "I really didn't want to risk that. I'd rather just stay friends than lose it forever because I was stupid, okay?"

"Harry, I—" Draco tried to gather his thoughts. "I like spending time with you. I consider you a friend. Whatever else, that will never change. I wish you had told me that day, when you tried to—when you were telling me about Remus and Kingsley?" He laughed. "I feel so stupid. I might have freaked out a bit, but I would have come round."

"I didn't want to chance it. And like I said. It was my thing, and that's not why you're here. I promised myself I could leave you alone until you're free to make your own choices. You can't do that here. And you can't do that now, Draco. You're still engaged to Pansy."

"I know, but…"

"Draco, just…think longer, okay? I'm not going to do this, and you can't. This will be over soon enough, and then we'll see, okay?"

"Why is a kiss such a big deal, Harry?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm not going there, Draco. It's just not going to happen. We're not in a place where that would be a good idea. Besides, it'll give us both time to figure out what we want."

"Like you don't know, Harry. You've already admitted it."

"Fine it'll give *you* time then. Come on, Remus and your father are probably waiting for us," he said, then led Draco from the room.

The second round of presents were nice, but Draco was so distracted by the conversation that he'd had with Harry after breakfast that he was unable to work up much enthusiasm. After everything had been opened, and the room had been emptied of scraps of ribbon and paper,

Draco took his new things to his room, then sat on his bed. He wished he knew a way to prove to Harry he wasn't just curious, that he wanted to know what it was like to kiss Harry. He'd certainly never wanted to kiss Blaise.

Glancing over at his desk, Draco noticed the list Kingsley had given him. There were only three other nicknames to figure out, but he really hadn't had much luck. And with Christmas, he'd become rather distracted and forgotten about it. Maybe it was time to take another look.

He settled at the desk, and put the two lists side by side. The first had only three names: Roi, Bear, and Bo. Draco shook his head. They were such short names, they could mean almost anything. He looked at the list of those currently enrolled in the Chrysalis program. That list was almost as short. Only nine Death Eaters had been enrolled so far. Himself, his father, Pansy, Blaise, Greg, Ernie, Theo Nott, Daphne Greengrass, and Morag MacDougal. He knew most of the people on the list fairly well, aside from McMillan and MacDougal.

He'd been surprised to see MacDougal's name on the list the first time he'd read it. He couldn't believe that he'd missed her at the press conference, though, to be honest, he'd been a bit distracted by other events that day.

MacDougal had been a Ravenclaw in the same year as the rest of them, but Draco had never spent any time with her when they were in school. While Ravenclaws were better to hang around with than, say, Gryffindors or Hufflepuffs, they were quite usually too busy studying to be any sort of fun. He had seen MacDougal around after she'd joined the Death Eaters, though. She'd actually freaked him out. Her appetite for blood and torture had been chilling enough to make his aunt look sane.

The problem was, even though both lists were small, the nicknames could be pretty much for any of them. He couldn't even tell if they were male or female from them. And none of the names appeared to be taken directly from their true names. Draco sighed. Maybe he should assign each name to at least one of the nicknames, and go from there? So, he knew he couldn't be any of them, so he crossed out his own name. Lucius never got mail, so that left him out as well. But everyone else was fair game, as far as Draco was concerned.

He wrote "Roi" on a separate piece of paper, and listed all the names under it, then began to go over the list to see if there were any he could cross off. The name itself could have meant anything, but he'd go with the idea that they were using it as a shortened form of Royal or Royalty. After all, that was what it meant, in French.

He started with Pansy, though he desperately wanted to cross her off all three lists immediately. She was his friend. Surely she wouldn't be involved with something like this? He tried to think of a reason she might chose a nickname like Roi. Well, she did like to imply she was Wizarding Royalty. In fact, she'd even told him once that there was true royalty on her mother's family tree somewhere. But that seemed too easy. It did provoke a different memory, though, and Draco wondered…After Daphne had become his aunt's protégée, she'd taken on the nickname "Queenie." Maybe it was her? He circled both girls' names, just to be fair, then moved on to

Blaise.

Blaise might be considered royalty as well, he thought to himself with a chuckle. To be honest, a lot of Slytherins thought that about themselves. Who knew? Maybe some ancestor or other of Blaise's had once been part of the royal families in Persia or Turkey. And too, he might be termed a 'Queen' as well, Draco chuckled. Blaise had wanted a repeat performance of their little tryst, though they'd never managed to find the time. He circled Blaise's name, then moved on.

He quickly crossed out McMillan's name. He already knew Ernie's nickname, and even if he hadn't there was no way he'd assume that McMillan was royalty in any way. As for Greg, he was pure peasant stock. Strong and sturdy, but no brains. His nickname would have been a lot more obvious, so he was off that list, at least. Nott didn't particularly make sense either. Nott made no bones about the fact that he wasn't fond of the Wizarding Royalty type. In fact, he'd often brought in books about Muggle heroes who had even managed to become known in the Wizarding World for the effect they'd had on it: Che Guevara and Lenin in particular. Peasants, if revolutionaries. He'd have hated the idea of having it as a nickname. So he was definitely off this list…

As for MacDougal, he didn't know enough about her to know either way, only that she was a psychopath… He went back over the remaining names: Pansy, Daphne, and Blaise, circling Morag's name for good measure. Not great, but definitely less than when he'd started. He moved on to the next name—Bear.

Draco rather assumed that Bear was probably a guy, but he didn't want to let his assumptions mislead him, so once he'd written down all the guys' names, he added the girls' as well. This one worked easily for Greg, he supposed, though he would have expected his friend to choose something more ferocious or just plain larger—rhino, perhaps. Still, bears could be deadly enough. He was about to cross out Nott, because he couldn't see the other boy using a creature for a name, but then he recalled the fact that Theo had talked about the fact that the Soviet Russians had used the bear as a symbol, and how he had seemed especially pleased with the symbolism of the creature for them. Draco couldn't say he understood it, but if Nott liked them, that certainly didn't count it out for his nickname, so he circled his name as well.

Blaise wasn't fond of animals. He'd always hated it when Draco's owl had found her way into their dorm, and there had been the morning when he'd woken to Millicent's cat on his chest and nearly had a hissy. No, if Blaise used an animal for a nickname, it would be for a very specific reason—and there was no way it would ever be a bear, so Blaise was out.

Draco moved on to the girls. To him, it didn't fit any of them particularly well, but perhaps it had some personal connotations to Daphne or Morag that he was unaware of? The only one he felt confident it didn't fit was Pansy. Not good enough, but better than nothing, he supposed.

The last name was the worst, really. Bo could have meant anything. Really, for all he knew, it could have referred to Goyle's body odor, he snickered to himself. So, they all seemed to fit that one. He sighed. Well, at least he'd gotten some ideas. Now if he could just find a way to narrow

down the possibilities further. He set aside the lists, and went to see if he could borrow Hedwig to send a message to Kingsley. Maybe talking with him would help.

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Chapter: 20

A/N: Chapter twenty: the conspirators are revealed.

This is is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, and am posting one a week. There will be 23 chapters total. All that's left is the editing.

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-20

Unfortunately, Kingsley turned out to be quite busy not only that day (which really should have been no surprise—Draco'd gotten so caught up in going over the list that he'd completely forgotten it was Christmas…), but would also be quite busy for the next week. And only a few days into the following week would be the next test.

Draco wasn't too worried about it. It would be nice to get his wand back a few weeks earlier, but at the rate he was aging, he only had two tests left. He sent the notes he'd made off to Kingsley, indicating Daphne as his top choice for "Roi," and Theo as his top choice for "Bear." He hoped his guesses would help a little, at least.

Then he spent the rest of the evening conquering the world.

Lucius joined him at some point, and then Harry and Remus came in with a plate of sandwiches for them all for dinner, and the four of them proceeded to watch a rather preachy movie that Harry kept insisting was a classic. There was no colour at all, and the main character continued to whinge about having to forget about his own dreams to keep the family business running. To a point where he even tried to commit suicide. It was really all too much. After it was over, Draco insisted that the only reason Harry liked it was because when everything changed, the town's name became "Potterville."

"Please, Draco. Like I'd want to be in any way connected to a man like that…"

Draco raised an eyebrow, and Harry flushed. "Oh, you know what I mean. I wasn't talking about you or Lucius," he grumbled.

"Really, Potter? Are you sure about that?"

"Come on. Let's go have a bit of pie before bedtime," Harry said to change the subject.

Falling asleep that night, Draco decided that even with the arguments, it really had been his best Christmas ever.

The next week was filled with hurried conversations with Hermione, one visit by Kingsley, who did have some questions about Draco's lists once he managed to find a few free hours, and another visit from Severus.

Lucius seemed to have settled into the program, though Draco could see there were a few things that still bothered him more than they did Draco, and Severus's visit seemed to help him come to terms with them. He'd never be able to separate himself from his Death Eater image, but he might actually make it through the program. He even seemed to be getting along better with Remus, which quite surprised Draco.

The morning of the next test, Draco woke up from a horrifying dream. He'd dreamed that they'd gone to the test, and for some reason, even though they'd caught the cheaters, they'd decided to cancel the program, and de-age them all to the age of four before throwing them back in Azkaban. He'd woken to an image of his aunt Bella pulling him towards her, an even madder look on her face than when he had last seen her in the middle of the final battle. He'd woken, trembling, to feel arms around him, and, terrified, struggled desperately against their hold until Harry had whispered in his ear, "It's just me, Draco, it's okay, it was just a dream."

Hearing the familiar voice, he slumped back against Harry's chest.

"Are you okay?" Harry asked him. Draco nodded, but he still couldn't manage to speak. "Do I want to know what you were dreaming about?" Harry asked softly.

Draco shook his head. "What time is it?" he managed to ask.

"Four fifteen or so. At least it was when I woke up and heard you screaming. That was a few minutes ago, though. You okay now?"

Draco shook his head. "No. Please, stay with me a bit?"

Harry sighed. "I won't leave until you fall back to sleep, okay?"

Draco nodded, turning his face into Harry's shoulder. "Thank you."

"You've been fine practically the entire time you've been here, Draco. What set this off?"

Draco hid his face. "Azkaban."

"What about it?"

"What if they can't figure out which of the others were involved with McMillan? What if they decide to send us all back, just to be sure?"

"Draco, they won't do that. Besides, the Minister and I have a—special arrangement. I won't let them take you or your father, okay?"

Draco nodded. "Thank you." He thought for a long moment, wondering what Harry had actually said to the Minister to convince him to leave the Malfoys alone, when another thought occurred to him. He pulled back from Harry's shoulder to look up into his face. "You're willing to protect my father, despite what he did to you and your friends when you were younger, and what he tried to do to Remus?"

Harry shrugged. "Well, Remus insisted on that part, and I didn't want to hurt you, if there was any chance of saving Lucius, so, yeah, I'm willing. And despite everything, he does seem to be trying, now, doesn't he?"

Draco looked at Harry for a long moment before he had to turn away. Harry's nobility confused him. Sure, they liked each other, but Draco still had a hard time dealing with the idea of anyone putting someone else before themselves. It just really wasn't in his nature.

"What if they don't figure out who did all this, Harry? Will the others be sent back?"

"I honestly can't say, Draco. I wish I knew, so I could reassure you. I promise, whatever happens, I'll do what I can to keep that from happening, okay?"

Draco smiled. "Thank you. I don't know why you bother, honestly, but thank you even so. I only hope I can return the favour someday."

It was only the blush that spread across Harry's cheeks that made Draco realize exactly how that sounded, but he did his best to remain nonchalant. "That too, if the occasion arises," he grinned.

"Draco…"

"I'm just saying…"

"Stop saying, and lie down and get some more sleep, or you'll be groggy when you take your test today."

Draco snuggled under the covers, reassured by the slight dip in the bed that Harry wasn't going anywhere just yet. He was asleep before he could think of any response.

Kingsley came to pick them up shortly after nine. Draco sat in the front seat so they could talk on the way there.

"What's going to happen if you don't figure out which ones are doing this, Kingsley?"

"We will. Don't worry about it, Draco. We've got it all under control. We had Mister McMillan send around a new sheet, saying he'd lost the old one, but we coated it with something that'll let us know exactly who's touched it. We'll get them all today."

Draco nodded, but couldn't help but still worry. "What's going to happen to them?"

"They'll be placed under truth serum, and asked a few questions. Beyond that, they'll probably be sent back to Azkaban."

"But what if they were just doing it so they could pass? Not because they wanted to hurt anyone any more, but they just didn't want to be in Azkaban?"

"They'll be judged on a case-by case basis, all right?"

Draco nodded. "Thank you for telling me. I know you probably weren't supposed to."

Kingsley smiled. "Well, you've known almost as much in this case as those of us in the Ministry, so I figured a little more information wouldn't hurt."

Draco smiled. It was nice to be trusted, for once.

When they arrived at the testing centre, he was surprised to see that all the other Chrysalis subjects were there as well. The only time he'd seen them all together before was at the press conference when he'd learned Lucius had entered the program.

Pansy hurried up to him and flung her arms around him. "Draco! I've missed you so much," she squealed.

"Pansy, control yourself," he chided, trying very hard not to look at Harry. "What is everyone doing here?" he asked her quietly.

She shrugged. "Who knows? They said they had some silly extra test to administer before we sat for the written one today. I'm just glad I got to see you. It's been too long. And you completely ignored me last time we saw one another. I heard that Potter let Greg come for Christmas. Is that true?" Draco nodded. "Why couldn't I, then? I *am* your fiancée, after all…"

"Pansy, please…"

"Yes, do control yourself Parkinson. It's not as though you're not already engaged to my son. You hardly need to advertise the fact," Lucius drawled.

Pansy flushed and pulled away from Draco, and he couldn't help but feel relieved. He'd definitely have to find a way to make that up to him later. "Mister Malfoy. You're looking…"

"Young, I believe is the word," Lucius said with a less-than-pleasant smile.

She tittered, then backed off towards Andromeda when Kingsley and someone Draco didn't recognize approached.

"All right, if all of you could gather around me for a moment, we'll do this quick test, and then you can go in and finish the written." Some approached Kingsley a bit slower than others, but Draco knew that didn't mean much. He himself had only just started to like the man. He was rather intimidating, after all.

Once they were all directly in front of him, Kingsley waved his wand and cast a cloud of fog that engulfed them for a moment, then dissipated. Draco looked at him bemused, until he heard Pansy shriek behind him. "What have you done to me?" His heart sank, and he glanced at the Auror, who was already picking his way around their little group to grab Pansy.

Draco turned to see that her hands had gone violet. Something on the paper McMillan had used, he assumed. He glanced around, wondering who else's hands had changed colour, and was pleased to see that Greg looked completely normal. He smiled when his friend caught his eye, looking a bit worried, but Draco just shook his head. Draco glanced around to see who else would be taken, and noticed that both Nott and Daphne were rubbing their hands desperately, trying to remove the stain. There didn't seem to be any more, at which Draco was thoroughly grateful, but the fact that Pansy had been involved at all was a serious blow.

He moved to Kingsley's side. "You promise you'll question them fairly?"

"On my honour as an Auror, Draco, I promise I'll give your friends every chance."

Draco nodded, and watched as Theo, Pansy and Daphne were lead away. He had to remind himself it was their own fault for even trying something so ridiculous in the first place before he could convince himself to move into the testing rooms.

Kingsley was waiting when he came out of the test. Draco'd had a much tougher time of it this time because apparently they'd taken his idea to heart and made up new questions for the test. He'd still managed to maintain his O, though, and Lucius had managed an E. Even Greg had gotten an A, though the face of the person grading the tests had gone a bit strange when she'd noticed that everywhere it said "Muggle," Greg had replaced it with "Hermione" on his test sheet.

Hermione was thrilled, and after hugging Greg, she'd turned to Draco and hugged him too. "Thank you so much," she sobbed into his shoulder. "I was so worried they'd take him in…"

He patted at Hermione's shoulder. "I did it because he's my friend, Hermione. But it's nice to know I'm not the only one who cares about him." He smiled at his friend, who managed a ruddy flush, then pushed Hermione off towards him. "I've got to go, now. Congratulations, Greg."

Greg grinned back. "All because of you, Dray."

Draco nodded, and moved towards where Kingsley was speaking with Harry and Remus. They looked worried, and when Harry looked towards him, he had a feeling he knew why. "She's the one who started it, isn't she?" he asked. He'd known it was a possibility, but that didn't make it any easier to deal with.

"Draco," Harry said, "I'm sorry."

Draco laughed sourly. "Don't bother. She isn't worth it." Of course, it was one thing to say, quite another to believe. Draco just truly wished he could. Maybe then Harry would actually kiss him. Maybe then he'd actually deserve Harry's kiss.

It was a long ride home.

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Chapter: 21

A/N: Chapter twenty-one: Draco and Pansy talk, and he makes plans for his post-Chrysalis future. Only two chapters left, folks…

This is is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

I've got this all written out, and am posting one a week. There will be 23 chapters total. All that's left is the editing.

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-21

The next few days dragged as Draco waited for exact word of what would happen to Pansy and the others. He also spent a great deal of time going over what ifs. What if he'd talked to Pansy more? Maybe they would have caught her before this got so out of hand? Maybe she would have started seeing what he had—that Muggles were just like everyone else, they just didn't have magic. Maybe then she wouldn't be going back to Azkaban.

Harry tried several times to talk to him, but it was hard to meet Harry's eyes now. He'd been right about Pansy, and Draco had refused to believe it. Sure, no one had gotten hurt, but that didn't seem to help him feel much better about it. It got to the point where he began avoiding Harry, even going so far as to retreat to his room when he had no other option. Finally, Harry left him alone. Draco wasn't sure whether that made him happy or sad.

Kingsley allowed Draco to see Pansy one last time before she was taken back to Azkaban. It hadn't been an easy visit. At first Pansy had tried to get him to help her, but when she'd realized he wouldn't, she'd flung accusations at him, a few of which hit particularly close to home. He'd simply stood there, watching her as she ranted, wishing he could somehow fix everything. This was his fault, and he was sure of it. Her tirade wound down, and Draco had tried to pull her into a hug, but she'd hit at him, and moved across the room.

She'd crossed her arms and glowered at him. "What did Potter do to you, Draco? It wouldn't have been this way just six months ago. I don't know how he's managed to brainwash you, but this isn't who you are."

Draco sighed. "All he did, Pansy, was show me the truth about Muggles. He didn't brainwash me. He just helped me think. I'm sorry Aunt Andromeda couldn't do the same."

"Your Aunt spent all her time telling me about her poor dead daughter who fought against us, Draco. How was that supposed to help me?"

Draco shook his head. "I don't know, Pansy. I wish I could have helped you. It didn't have to be this way."

Pansy sniffed. "I suppose you'll go and find some other girl to marry now? Since I doubt they'll allow you those kinds of visitations at Azkaban."

"To be honest, I'm not sure what I'll do. I've never thought of marrying anyone else, Pansy. Just you."

Her eyes softened at that. "Really?"

He nodded, and she hurried towards him, and fell into his arms. Even now that she was back at eighteen and he was only sixteen physically, she still fit just so under his chin. It felt good. And that hurt. "God, Pansy, why didn't you talk to me? Ask to see me? Something?"

"I wanted you to see how I could work things on my own," she said. "I just wanted to show you that I was worthy of being your wife…"

"Couldn't you have done that better by *being* my wife, Pansy? You know I've never looked at anyone else."

She was quiet for a long time before saying, "You and I both know that's not true, Draco. And we both know the regard is returned, don't we?" Her voice was low, but he could hear her frustration in every syllable.

"What are you talking about?" Did she know how he felt about Harry?

She pulled away and looked up at him. "Draco, from the moment you met Potter, he was all you ever talked about. In fact, that was true even before you met him. It was just worse after. Everything in school was about him. You might have hated him, but it wasn't because you disliked him, it was because he disliked you. You couldn't stand it. I suppose now, you're free to act on it." Her face was pained and angry.

"Are you saying I had a crush on him?" he asked, incredulously.

"Please, Draco. It was the joke of Slytherin House. Every time you started ranting on about him, we all just glanced at each other and rolled our eyes. Blaise hated it, though."

"I do recall a biting comment or two from his direction, but I thought he was just annoyed at my griping…"

Pansy sighed. "And then you were so busy sixth year with your task… You might not have noticed, but I did. He watched you all the time. I really hated that."

"Pansy, whatever you think—"

"Doesn't matter, because I'm not going to be there, am I?" she said in a bitter voice. Draco wanted to say something to reassure her somehow, but there was nothing he could say that would deny that. She laughed sourly. "I saw the way you looked at each other at the test. You don't even realize how you look at each other. I wish you looked like that when you looked at me, but you don't. I'm just a comfortable piece of furniture," she shrugged. "So now I'm out of the way. Just—get him this time?"

Draco's heart sank. He hadn't even looked at Harry since what had happened to Pansy. He hadn't been able to. He remembered their fight Christmas Eve, and the conversation the next morning. It wasn't going to happen, and he knew it. Harry would just keep avoiding the subject, and let him go. It wasn't fair. Did he have to lose everyone in his life?

"Pansy…"

"No more, okay? I—I can't do this any more, Draco. Just—be good to yourself, okay?" He nodded, and she moved to the door, and knocked on it. "He's ready to leave," she told the guard.

It had been hard to go home after that. Even the realization that Harry's house had become "home" was difficult. He just wanted a way to get through to Harry, because right now, what he needed was Harry's arms around him.

He still hadn't thought of anything by the time he'd made it to Harry's house.

Draco and Harry were now awkward around each other all the time. Draco never knew what to say to Harry any more, and when he tried, he couldn't manage more than a few words before he stopped again. Frequently he or Harry would leave the room if they saw the other was there already. Draco spent all of his time either in his bedroom, or in the Den playing Civilizations. The only time they spent more than a few minutes in the same room was when they were eating meals together.

Draco woke up the morning his body turned seventeen, and realized he had no idea what he wanted from life now. Pansy was gone, Harry was avoiding him, and it would be years before his father was allowed to handle his own finances again. In essence, Draco was now the head of the Malfoy family. He still had deed to the Manor, and a few of their homes on the Continent, plus an account at Gringotts that the Ministry hadn't been able to confiscate. Perhaps it was time he put them to good use.

That morning, after breakfast, he owled Kingsley Shacklebolt and asked if he could be allowed to visit Malfoy Manor in Wiltshire, and if Kingsley would escort him there. Kingsley arrived to answer personally, a bemused expression on his face. The trip was quiet. Draco wasn't sure what, exactly he wanted from this trip, but it was time to look at the Manor again.

The wards accepted the car, since he was in it, and they drove up the still well-groomed drive, then parked in front of the main doors. Obviously the house-elves were still in residence, so they had been continuing to do their jobs as though told to do so only the day before.

The house was in excellent condition, no dust or cobwebs, the rugs clean and well-kept. The portraits seemed a bit huffy that none of the Malfoys had been around lately, but he shrugged them off and continued to make his way through the house.

Kingsley had been quiet at first, but by the time they made their way to the second floor, he was spending half his time glancing between Draco and some of the objects decorating the Manor. Finally, he seemed unable to keep himself from commenting. "Draco, you do realize…"

"That you'll be required to confiscate some of these things? Yes. Why do you think I brought you? I really just want to make up a list of what's here, what should be sold, and what needs to go to the Ministry."

"And then what?"

"I haven't thought that far, to be honest. This was home, you know? But now it just seems big, and rather empty, really."

"Will you be staying on with Harry, then?"

Draco shook his head. "I don't think so. We're friends now, but even so—"

"I'm sure he'd want you to stay. You seem to be getting along quite well."

Draco frowned. Not any more, he thought to himself. Sure, they hadn't been fighting, but they weren't being overly friendly, either. "I think I make him uncomfortable, to be honest."

"Ah," Kingsley said with a nod. "Still, you never know. That might go away, after…"

Draco snorted. "After I'm of age again? I don't know. Maybe. But even then, I still need to decide what to do with all this," he waved at the house around him. "It can't just keep sitting here, empty. And I'm obviously not going to be having that passel of kids with Pansy…" He sighed. "It should be put to some use, you know?"

Kingsley nodded. "Maybe you should ask Harry and Remus what they think?"

"Perhaps."

Rather than thinking about what Harry or Remus might suggest, Draco called for a house-elf, and asked it to bring him a piece of parchment and a dictating quill. Then he and Kingsley began discussing which things the Ministry would have to confiscate, and the pen jotted down those things that Kingsley and Draco agreed upon. It was a long list.

He came home that night, little happier about his future, but at least feeling better that some of the dark objects his father had hidden away in the Manor would now be used for research, or at least be unable to hurt anyone else again.

When he arrived, Remus and Lucius were nowhere to be found. Harry was sitting in the living room waiting for him. He looked up from the book he was reading and smiled. "Did everything go well?"

Draco shrugged. "Well enough. Where are Lucius and Remus?"

"They went to visit Severus for the evening. I…I thought maybe we could try to talk."

Draco sighed. "No offence, Harry, but neither of us have been particularly talkative lately."

Harry smiled sadly. "I know. I just wasn't sure how to help. I know it couldn't be easy, losing

your future bride like that, and I didn't want to push. I…I don't want to upset you more."

Draco didn't know if he wanted to escape, or if he wanted Harry to hug him. He'd missed Harry's easy touches the past two weeks. He'd gotten so used to them that he hadn't even noticed them until they were gone. "I didn't want you to feel you had to do anything, really. I figured if I said anything, you'd think I was just trying…" Draco closed his eyes and sank onto the couch.

"Draco?" Harry asked worriedly, moving to his side, his hand settling on Draco's shoulder. Draco shuddered at the touch. It felt so good. He turned and buried his face in Harry's shoulder.

"I don't want to go," he mumbled. "I'm not ready yet."

"What?" Harry asked. "I can't understand what you're saying, Draco. Look at me?"

Draco pulled away from Harry's shoulder, and looked up into his face. "I—I'm not ready to leave."

Harry frowned. "Who's going to make you leave?"

"You. It's been bloody obvious that you're uncomfortable around me now. And I don't want your attention just because you pity me for losing Pansy. I just…I'm not ready yet."

"You've got two weeks, Draco. And I'm certainly not just going to throw you out." He took a deep breath. "I like having you here, Draco. I'm just—I'm trying not to do something stupid and make everything worse."

"You couldn't possibly make anything worse at this point, Harry. I deserve everything I get, to be honest. I can't believe she did that." He looked down at his hands. The pain of what had happened with Pansy was still a raw wound. He couldn't imagine how he could do anything now. Everything had depended on Pansy being there.

"Draco, I know it's upsetting, but you'll find a way to make something of your life. That's why I did this. You're an exceptionally strong person. And I knew you were worth the effort."

"Why? What makes me worth your effort? You don't even want me. If you did…"

Harry closed his eyes. "Draco, it's not like that. Good people, when they want something, they follow the rules. If they can't have it, then they find a way to do without. I can't force you to want me—"

"I do!"

"—Or to get over Pansy that quick, and you shouldn't expect yourself to, either. I know you're curious, Draco, but…I need more than curiosity. And until you're willing—and able—to give that, then I'll just have to wait."

Draco bit his lip. He hated to admit it, but Harry did have a point. He wasn't being torn between Harry and Pansy any longer, but he was having trouble letting go of the future he'd imagined with Pansy. "So, how will you know if I'm telling you the truth when I say I'm ready?"

Harry sighed. "I don't know, Draco. I wish I did."

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Chapter: 22

A/N: Chapter twenty-two: Draco finishes the program.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

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-22

The two of them had a quiet but pleasant night, even despite the tangled feelings lying between them. Harry had ordered in Chinese food, and once it arrived, they settled in the den with plates and silverware and watched some rather fun but ridiculous movies with a tall black actor that reminded Draco a bit of the Gryffindor in Harry's year.

When he mentioned it to Harry, he smiled. "Yeah, Will Smith is a bit like Dean, though Dean's a lot quieter."

Both movies were about aliens, though the second was a lot more serious than the first, with whole cities being destroyed by the aliens as the characters hurried to save themselves.

After they were over, Harry asked him what he'd thought of them.

He grimaced. "I think I prefer destroying the world—well, conquering it myself—to watching it happen," he said.

Harry laughed. "Yes, I suppose that would be a Slytherin thing, wouldn't it?"

"What? Watching the world be destroyed?"

Harry smirked. "No, conquering it. I wonder if Napoleon was a Slytherin."

"Napoleon? Who's that?"

"A French dictator a century or two back…"

"If he was French, he would have gone to Beauxbatons, not Hogwarts."

"Never mind, Draco. It was just a joke."

"Oh." Draco squirmed on the couch. This had been nice. He really didn't want it to end. But Remus and Lucius would be back soon, and they'd all go off to bed, and that would be that. Harry would pretend like nothing was going on between them again, Pansy would still be gone, and he'd still have no idea what to do once he finished with his rehabilitation. He was reminded of what Kingsley had said. "Harry?"

"Yes?" Harry asked, looking up from the carton of sweet and sour he was scraping the last bits from.

"If…I've been trying to decide what my next move should be. About the Manor," he added, when Harry looked at him, wary. "I don't think I could live there any more. It was supposed to be where Pansy and I were going to raise our children, but now… It's just sitting there, empty. And I feel like I should do something with it. Something that will help others, maybe. I just—I don't know what that could be."

"Oh." Harry looked a bit surprised. "But don't you have to live there?"

"No. I can get myself a flat in London easily enough. Or maybe even Bath. I always loved the trips we took there when I was a boy."

"You go there often?"

"Well, we did live close by, so it made sense. And father always liked it, despite the Muggles. It's got a huge wizarding influence. One of the most ancient cities in Britain."

"Oh." Harry looked at him for a long moment, obviously thinking over the question Draco had asked. "Well, I suppose if I had a house and grounds, I might donate it for a museum—about the war, you know? Or even wizarding history, perhaps."

Draco made a face. "I suppose. But that wouldn't really help people. I want to do something

that'll make a difference, you know?"

"Well, how large is it?"

Draco sat back and tried to recall the exact numbers. "Well, there are three floors, plus the catacombs—no one's ever managed to figure out their extent. The first two floors are pretty extensive. Four wings each, plus the main part of the house… I don't know if I know exact numbers, really."

"Well, if it were big enough, I suppose you could make it into a hospital, or something like that. Maybe a school?"

Draco shook his head. "Hogwarts is good enough, and now that Severus is deputy head, Slytherins should be getting better treatment, I'd imagine. A hospital's an idea. But everyone's so used to St. Mungos."

"Maybe they could use it as a new wing?"

"No. I want something different. I want something that'll make a mark. A statement. That Malfoys aren't what we appeared to be during the war, and that we want to make reparations."

"I'm sure you'll think of something, Draco," Harry smiled.

"I suppose."

They cleaned up the empty boxes, and were putting away the leftovers when Remus and Lucius arrived.

"Everything all straightened out?" Lucius asked.

Draco looked at him. "What?"

Lucius rolled his eyes. "Has he kissed you yet, or is he still being 'noble?'"

"Father—"

"For your information, Lucius, whatever happens between Draco and I is just between us. I'll thank you to keep out of it."

"In other words, no you haven't. He'll be gone soon, Potter. Better take your chance while you can."

Remus, who'd been watching this interplay, bemused, frowned at that. "All right, Lucius. That's enough. I think it's time you were in bed."

Grey eyes narrowed, and Lucius glowered at him. "I am old enough to know when I am tired, Lupin…" But Remus grabbed his shoulder and steered him out of the room. Draco couldn't help but wonder how his father would be paying for that one.

The next week flew by, and then it was testing time again. Draco didn't feel that much different that morning, but he knew, aside from the test, he was done. It was exciting and horrifying at the same time. It took him a long time to convince himself he could leave his bedroom that morning. He wasn't too sure how he would react to seeing Harry now. After all, he was practically out of the program. How would Harry react?

He was rather disappointed when he reached the living room and found only Lucius and Remus waiting for him on the couch.

"Where's Harry?" he asked.

"He went ahead. There was some paperwork the Minister wanted him to sign," Remus told him. "He said he'd meet us outside the testing room, okay?"

"Right," Draco said, though he was sure his disappointment showed in his response. "How are we getting there?" he asked. Kingsley hadn't come to pick them up, but he supposed it was possible he just hadn't shown yet.

"Floo. Kingsley took Harry in, so it's just the three of us."

"Ah." Draco wasn't thrilled about that, really. He'd gotten so used to Kingsley driving them in. At least he'd give them a ride home, he thought to himself, then paled at the realization that when he'd finished his test, this wouldn't *be* home any longer. He felt ill.

The floo didn't help, either. He managed to bump his elbow, and fall from the fireplace, landing face first. He scrambled out of the way so that Lucius could come through, then looked down, horrified, at the state of his clothing. It was enough to make him want to turn around and go right back home. He sighed. He could do this. He had to prove to Harry's friends that Harry'd been right about him, if nothing else.

Maybe Blaise'd need a place to stay for a bit. Of course, as soon as he'd thought that, he remembered that he had been aging faster than the others, and Blaise still had several months to go. Why hadn't he thought of that when he'd gotten this reward? It seemed less like a reward than another punishment now.

Blaise and the others were already in the testing room when they arrived, and Draco wished he could talk to his friend before he left for the day. He hurried through the test, hoping they'd be allowed to talk after.

It was rather anticlimactic, being told that he'd passed. He stepped out into the hall where Hermione was standing with Harry, Remus and Kingsley. He smiled, but he couldn't quite feel as

happy as he wanted to be. It was over.

Kingsley handed him his wand, and the rush of magic when he accepted it helped a little. "Thank you."

"Thank you, Draco. You helped us a lot. We wouldn't have even known what they were up to if you hadn't told us. The Minister himself wants to give you an Order of Merlin for it."

Draco felt his cheeks flush. That was definitely going too far. "I don't want one. I did what was right, that's all." He couldn't stand the thought that they might give him a medal for sending Pansy back to Azkaban. He wouldn't be able to handle it.

"I'll tell him you said so, Draco."

He moved back, and Hermione hurried forward to hug him. "Congratulations, Draco. You did it."

"Yes, well, the only time I've ever lost out was to you or Harry, and you weren't competing with me this time, now, were you?" he smirked.

"True enough. Thank you again for what you did for Greg. He's been so happy this month, it's been wonderful. Even Ron seems to be getting on better with him."

"I told you, Hermione. I did it for him. But thank you for caring enough about him that it matters. As to Weasley… Well, he'd better treat Greg right, or I'll come after him."

When Hermione finally pulled away, Draco found himself staring at Harry, who was leaning against the wall, smiling softly. "I knew you could do it, Draco. You're too stubborn not to make it."

Draco swallowed. "Thanks, Harry." He wanted to say more, but Greg came out at that moment.

"Another A!" he was crowing. He saw Draco, and looked at him, grinning. "I did it, Draco."

"Of course you did. I always knew you could."

"What's up?" Greg asked, noticing the wand in Draco's hand.

"I'm done."

"Done? You mean with the program?" Greg's grin grew so that all his teeth showed. "Congratulations!" he said, throwing an arm around Draco's shoulders. "Now you can go out there and figure out what the rest of us're supposed to do once we get out there."

"No pressure, then," Draco said dryly.

"Oh, none at all," came Blaise's voice from behind him. Draco turned to look at him. "Congratulations."

Draco wasn't sure if Blaise was sincere in his well-wishing until the boy held out his hand. "Thanks," Draco said. "It wasn't the easiest thing in the world…"

"Well, sometimes a Slytherin has to do what's best for himself. Think you'll have space for a visitor in about two months?"

Draco smiled. "I might."

"Good," Blaise said, a smile finally appearing on his face. "I'll see you then."

"I'll be waiting."

Once the others were gone, Draco turned back to Harry. "I don't know…"

Harry sighed and pushed away from the wall. "Draco, I didn't do this for your thanks, or even to get you to like me. You just deserved it. All of you. Never forget that, okay?"

Draco nodded. "Would you mind sending my stuff on when I'm ready?"

Harry looked at him, surprised. "You're not coming home?"

Draco shook his head. "Better a clean break, and all."

Harry stared at him for a long time, unblinking. "Draco…"

"No, you're right. I still have a lot of growing up to do. And you gave me that option, Harry. So, thank you." He turned to leave, but Harry caught his hand.

"Draco, wait, I…"

They just stood there for a moment, Draco waiting for Harry to say whatever it was he needed to say, and Harry searching for the words he needed. Finally, Harry sighed and pulled Draco to him. "Just once," he said.

Draco felt his heartbeat speed up as Harry's face came closer, not even realizing when his eyes fell closed. Harry's lips were everything he'd imagined. Not soft, like Pansy's, and not coated in gunk, but not rough, either. Just smooth and demanding. When Harry pulled away, Draco had to stop himself from pulling Harry back towards him. He didn't want to let go.

He opened his eyes to see Harry looking at him as though trying to memorize him. "Take care of yourself, okay?" Draco nodded, then watched as Harry walked down the hall towards the lifts.

It was over.

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Chapter: 23

A/N: Here's the end, folks. I hope you all enjoyed it, and I hope you like the future Draco's decided on for himself. Thank you all so much for reading, and I hope to entertain you again soon.

This is Harry/Draco, post-Hogwarts, though the slash content is extremely light. There are very vague suggestions of other relationships as well.

Disclaimer: Not mine.

The magical door in this is based on a door from Howl's Moving Castle, so it's not my idea, as cool as it is, but Diana Wynne Jones's.

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-Epilogue

Draco loved summer. It always felt like a new beginning. What better day to start his new life, he thought, as his car turned down the street to Harry's house, than the first day of summer? Home. He was going home. He couldn't wait to see Harry's face. In fact, he didn't want to wait any longer. He'd walk it. It would almost be faster. And at least then, he'd have something to occupy himself.

"Stop here," he told the driver. "I'll walk the rest of the way." The car came to a halt, and Draco got out and walked past two houses before turning onto the walk of Harry's home. It seemed strange that it had only been three months since he had last seen it. It felt like it had been forever. But it had been a good three months. He'd gotten a lot accomplished. He couldn't wait to show it all to Harry.

He knocked on the door, and it opened almost immediately. "Here's the…" Harry had money in his hand, but when he saw Draco, the hand froze in mid-motion. "Draco?"

Draco smiled. "Delivery?"

Harry nodded, a bemused expression on his face. "Yeah, Lucius got an O yesterday, so we

thought we'd take the day off. Cooking and everything." He looked at Draco for a long moment. "What are you doing here?" He shook his head. "Not that it's not nice to see you, of course…"

"I have something to show you. If Remus can spare you, that is…"

"Sure." Harry stepped back. "Come on in, let me talk to Remus for a moment, and you can see your father…"

"Sure." Draco stepped inside, feeling a bit out of place for a moment before the feeling of 'home' came rushing back at him. He wondered if he could have ever possibly imagined that he'd want to come back here when he'd first arrived. But now, even after three months away, he just couldn't imagine living anywhere else.

Harry led the way to the kitchen, where Remus and Lucius were setting table. "Is something wrong? Did you need more money?" Remus asked when Harry entered the room empty-handed. Then he saw Draco following. "Draco?"

Lucius turned at Remus's exclamation. "Draco, what a pleasant surprise. I was beginning to think you'd fallen off the face of the earth. I assume Shacklebolt told you my score?"

"No, I really had no idea. I've been rather out of contact with just about everyone the last few months, I've been so busy. Congratulations." He held out a hand. Lucius approached him and shook it. They were nearly of a height, now, and Draco knew that within a few months, Lucius would be taller than him once more. It had been nice while it lasted, he supposed.

"Thank you. Perhaps you'd like to join us? I'm sure Harry ordered enough for an army. He always does."

"Actually, I'm here to spirit him away. I have something to show him." He turned to Remus. "If that's all right with you, Remus, that is."

Remus smiled. "I'm sure I can deal with your father on my own for a bit. Will you be returning with Harry?"

Draco smiled, "Quite." He would have said more, but he didn't want to give too much away yet. "Shall we, Harry?"

"Here's the money for the food, Remus. I'll see you later, okay?"

"Have fun," Remus replied as he put the money in a pocket.

Lucius smiled. "Don't do anything I wouldn't, boys…"

Draco rolled his eyes, but Harry flushed. "Come on, Harry. My car's waiting."

"Car? You drove?" Harry asked, surprised.

"No. I have a driver. I'm still working on my license."

They got out to the car, and Draco climbed in, then scooted over so Harry could sit beside him. "Nice, hm?"

Harry nodded. Draco had found the Bentley at an auction he'd been attending as a seller, and hadn't been able to resist. It was a near-black green, and the interior leather was all white, with smoke-grey carpeting. "I didn't want to wait before I got my license to use it, so I hired myself a driver."

Harry was still looking around, wide-eyed. "You had enough money to buy this?" he asked, amazed.

Draco laughed. "The Malfoys never lose everything, Harry. We always know how to squirrel something away, just in case."

"Right. So…where are we going?"

"It's a surprise. You'll see when we get there."

"Not even a hint?'

"Only if you want to spoil the surprise…"

Harry rolled his eyes, but said, "Fine," in an amused voice. He glanced out the window, but they were already out of the city, and there wasn't much to be seen, so he looked back at Draco. "So you've been working on this little surprise for three months?"

"Maybe. I had to do something with my time, after all…" Draco said, grinning at him.

Harry stiffened and looked away. "You could have stayed with us…"

"Would things have changed, Harry?"

"What do you mean? Things were fine as they were."

Draco shook his head. "No they weren't. We were both miserable. I've missed you, but at least I haven't had to wonder if this was the day you were going to get sick of me…"

"Draco…"

"No. Harry—I…I thought about you a lot these last few months. Trying to figure out a way to prove to you that I knew what I wanted—you. But every time I came up with something, I

realized you'd find a way to prove that meant nothing. Pansy's out of my life, but that was out of my control so that doesn't count. I haven't ever wanted anyone else but the two of you, and certainly not since I became your ward this past year. But I knew you'd just say that it was proximity that made the difference there, not that I wanted you specifically. You always manage to counter every argument I have. It's not fair." Draco looked out the window, flustered and a bit upset, and realizing he sounded a bit petulant. "I don't know if there is a way to convince you, Harry."

He heard Harry sigh beside him. "I'm not someone who has an easy time getting close to people, Draco. Probably the only reason I have friends at all is because they're so tenacious. As for my love-life, I've never had much luck. It's hard to open up to others when you don't know where to begin."

"You could let me try," Draco said, glancing at him out of the corner of his eye.

Harry seemed to fold in on himself at that. "I don't know if I could handle it, Draco…"

"Was the kiss that bad?"

"God, no…"

"My turn, then." Draco leaned towards him, sliding his hand behind Harry's head so he couldn't just pull away. "You're not going anywhere," Draco whispered, then moved that final inch remaining between them and kissed him.

It was nothing and everything like he remembered. Harry's mouth was just soft enough, a slight roughness that Draco tried to smooth down with the tip of his tongue. When Harry's mouth opened with a gasp at the contact, Draco slid his tongue inside, tasting Harry for the first time. He tasted the coffee Harry had drunk that morning, and a nutty flavor—peanuts, perhaps. Harry's tongue responded to Draco's, and it was all Draco could do not to climb into Harry's lap.

When he pulled away, Harry's eyes stayed closed for a long moment. "So?" he asked, terrified that Harry would pull away again.

Dark green eyes opened, and Harry looked at him as though he wanted to devour him. "Come here."

Draco grinned. "Gladly." He quickly unbuckled his seatbelt, and climbed onto Harry's lap, barely catching a breath before they were pressed together the heat of their arousal palpable between them. Harry had his head at an angle, lapping at Draco's lip, and biting it.

Harry pulled away. "Are you sure about this, Draco?"

Draco ground into his lap, showing him just how sure he was, and noticing that Harry wasn't much better off. "Yes, damn it, now kiss me."

"What about the driver?"

"He'll be fine. He knows where we're going…"

"No, I mean, what if he watches?"

"We'd better give him a good show, then," Draco whispered in his ear, licking along the outside of the ear before closing his teeth around the fleshy bit. "He'll have to find his own way of working off his interest, though. I'm not inclined to share."

"Draco!" Harry managed with a bit of a squeak. "I'm not putting on a show for the driver."

Draco sighed. "Then why did you want me over here?"

Harry flushed. "I'd forgotten where we were, actually."

Draco smirked, and leaned in close to Harry to whisper, "Good."

He settled on Harry's lap with his head on his shoulder, and spent the rest of the ride just touching or occasionally kissing Harry. It was bliss.

When they finally arrived at their destination, Draco climbed out of the car, then helped Harry out before turning to the driver. "We'll be fine from here. Thank you."

The driver nodded, and the car pulled away.

"Um, Draco…"

"Yes, Harry?"

"If we don't have the car, how will I get home?"

Draco grinned. "Don't you trust me?"

Harry sighed. "Of course I do, Draco, but…"

Draco put a hand to his mouth. "Then stop worrying, and let me show you what we've come to see." He put his hand on Harry's shoulder, and turned him so he could see the sign only two feet away. *The Potter-Malfoy Orphanage and Wizarding Museum*.

Harry's eyes went wide. "Draco?"

"Yes, Harry?" Draco said, not even bothering to hide the smirk at Harry's surprise.

"What is this?"

"What does it look like?"

"Well…It looks like Malfoy Manor, but…"

"But?"

"You turned it into an orphanage?" Harry said, turning back to Draco with a look of amazement on his face.

Draco nodded. "It's what I've been working on since I saw you last. What do you think?"

"What do I think?" Harry laughed. "I think you're amazing, Draco."

Draco blushed. "Thank you. It's still got a ways to go, but the structural changes have been finished, and I've gotten the okay from the Minister. He's even appointed me a governmental staff—just a secretary at the moment, but still…"

Harry pulled him into a hug. "I don't know what to say, Draco. You have no idea what this means to me…"

"I might have some. Harry, if you hadn't taken me on, no one would have bothered. This doesn't even go halfway towards repaying that. It's about time this Manor was put to better use."

Harry kissed him, too overcome to say anything else.

Then Draco offered to show him around. The main part of the Manor on the first and second floors had been turned into display areas for the Museum. Most of the walls were blank, and the cases stood empty, but Draco assured him he already had several things that would be arriving soon, as well as a curator who would be able to deal with the upkeep.

The back of the house, and the East and West wings had been turned into the orphanage. The double beds in the guest rooms had been taken away and replaced with singles, and the main dining hall had been turned into a cafeteria for the children. The ballroom had been turned into a play area, with Muggle as well as Magical toys of all sorts lined up against the walls, just waiting for children to come and claim them.

"And I've got a governess and an administrator who will handle most of the needs of the children. The house-elves will be in heaven watching after them and cleaning and cooking for them. It's perfect," he smiled at Harry once they'd finished the tour.

"It really is amazing, Draco. I can't believe all the work you've managed in three months. When do the children start arriving?"

"Well, the Ministry is aware, of course, so they'll keep their eyes out for me, and I know of at least three children who should be arriving within a week." He paused, unsure how Harry would take his plans for Muggle children, but plowed ahead. "And I've got people in the Muggle government looking for orphans as well. No more Tom Riddles if I can help it."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, sounding a bit concerned.

"Well, I've told them to look for children who seem to have magical abilities, and test them. If they find any, they're to bring them here." Harry looked as though he wanted to disagree with this idea, but Draco pressed on with it. "I'm not taking children from their families, Harry. Just the ones who don't have any. If they have to go without their families, at least they can grow up knowing what magic is."

"I suppose. It's just a bit dangerous, Draco. What if someone goes overboard? They see a kid they're sure is magical, and takes them away, not realizing that the child isn't an orphan for whatever reason, or worse, not caring? It could happen."

"That's why we'll be here, Harry. We'll interview the children personally. Does that help you feel better?"

"Me?" Harry said, surprised.

"Yes, you. Your name's on the plaque. Or weren't you paying attention?"

"But it's so far from my house, Draco…"

Draco grinned. "One more thing to show you." He moved off to the third floor staircase, which housed the old servants' quarters, the owlry, and the attic. Harry followed quickly behind.

"I've been working with someone Kingsley pointed me to in the Department of Mysteries. They helped me develop a spell. I hope you'll like it." He waved towards the door just off the stairwell. "Go on, open it," he smiled.

Harry looked at him warily, but moved to the door, twisting the knob and opening it cautiously. His eyes grew wide when he saw what was on the other side. "My house!" He turned to Draco. "Did you have it modeled after mine or…"

"Harry?" Remus's voice came from the door leading to the kitchen. He opened the door, Lucius following behind. "That was fast. I didn't expect you back for at least another hour."

Harry stared at him for a moment, then turned to Draco. "How…?"

"I told you. I got help. There's a simple password that will let you chose which place the front door opens into when you're in the house. But this way, no traveling," he smiled.

Harry blinked at him for a moment, then threw his arms around him. "You really are amazing, Draco."

Lucius sniffed. "Must you do that in front of decent people, Potter?"

"I'm thinking we'll be doing more than this," Harry murmured in Draco's ear, making him shiver at the air whispering across it.

"Promise?" he smiled.

"Oh, definitely." They made their way down the hallway as Lucius stepped out into the Manor, and glanced down the stairwell.

"Draco Lucius Malfoy, what have you done to the Manor?" they heard his outraged voice shriek before they closed the door of Harry's room behind them.

The End