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Author: Cheryl Dyson
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Chapter: 1

High Priced

Malfoy Edition

Draco leaned against the wall at yet another dull Ministry function. They had been throwing these ridiculous get-togethers for a bloody month and there seemed to be no point in them other than allowing the Ministry to trot out their little hero for yet another round of congratulatory hand-shaking. Frankly, the false pleasantries made Draco want to vomit, and he had been raised in an environment in which false pleasantries were a way of life.

Draco intended this particular get-together to be the last such event he attended for quite some time, no matter how much Pansy and Blaise whined. If they felt it so important to attend every stupid "We Love Potter" party in order to nudge people into forgetting their role on the Dark Side in the war, then they could do so alone. Draco had managed to avoid the mandatory handshake with the Jewel of Gryffindor at each function by entering with a large crowd and then slinking into the shadows. He had no intention of touching Harry Potter save with a fist if the Savior ever got too close.

Frankly, the Chosen One was looking a bit ragged these days. His hair seemed more atrocious than usual and there were dark circles beneath tired-looking green eyes. At times it seemed Potter swayed on his feet. Draco would have thought his Auror schedule to be too grueling, but rumor had it that Perfect Potter had been pulled off of active duty and stuck behind a desk. Draco wondered if the pressure was finally too much for the Gryffindor. Or perhaps Potter had a drinking problem? He glanced at the Auror over Blaise's shoulder and barely avoided Potter's glance as he turned suddenly.

Draco decided it was time to hit the loo and then make a strategic retreat. He had stayed away from the champagne in order to ensure safe Apparition, although he had supplied Pansy and Blaise with enough to keep them from following him home in a snit. They could rub elbows with

Ministry gits like Potter all night if they chose. Draco was going home.

His business in the loo was attended to quickly and as he exited the gents, he rehearsed what he planned to say to Pansy, already anticipating the annoyed argument she was certain to put forth. Thus distracted, he did not notice the man rushing toward him in the darkened passage until he was nearly bowled over. Draco staggered when a hard chest slammed into his. A hand reached out and touched his neck as if to steady him. Draco felt a jolt that was nearly electric.

Bloody hell, who is trying to kill me now? And what spell did he use? A strange roaring had begun in Draco's ears and a bizarre lethargy stole over him. The man suddenly pressed Draco into the wall. Draco fought to reach his wand, but the man's torso blocked the pocket of Draco's formal robes as his body plastered firmly to Draco. A cheek suddenly rubbed against his, catlike, and Draco froze. His brain shifted onto another track, wondering if the man was merely drunk and groping the first body he encountered in a dark hallway.

Drunken idiots Draco could handle. The thought was confirmed when the man's lips pressed into Draco's neck and a tongue flicked out to taste him. Draco shoved at the fool with both hands. He felt a strange, unpleasant sensation as the man was torn from him by the action. The bloke staggered against the opposite wall and caught himself with splayed hands. Green eyes stared at him with a shock that Draco mirrored. On the list of people Draco expected to attempt to molest him, Harry Potter was at the very bottom.

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

"*Malfoy*?" The Chosen One looked almost hysterically surprised. He obviously had not expected Draco to be the man he had attempted to devour outside the loo. "Malfoy. This has got to be some incredible cosmic joke."

Draco drew himself up haughtily. "A joke. Right, then. You shall hear from my legal counsel, Potter." With that, Draco Disapparated. Fuck Pansy and Blaise. Perhaps the damned Gryffindor would have better luck rubbing himself against Blaise.

When he got home, Draco poured himself a drink and touched his fingers to his cheek. Potter had been almost mindless. Was he really that passionate when he wanted someone? Draco scowled and downed his drink. He recalled the tingling and the spell-like quality of the encounter. Perhaps someone had slipped Potter a potion and Draco had been caught in the backlash.

He shook off the strange experience and went to bed.

Draco had a grand time writing a formal complaint to the Ministry. Luckily the Malfoys had filed quite a few lawsuits in their time, so pulling up records of similar incidences in the past took no time at all. Draco accused Harry Potter of Assault, Improper Advances, Public Deviancy, and Unlawful Touching of Persons Malfoy. Draco had been quite surprised to discover that last bit. Apparently his Great Aunt Lucretia had been stalked relentlessly by a former suitor at the same

time she had dated the Minister for Magic. The devious old bat had managed to have a Malfoy-specific law drafted.

It was too bad Draco had not known about that one at Hogwarts. He would have *owned* Potter.

Hermione Granger worked for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. It was almost comical how upset she became. She sent owl after owl to Draco insisting that there was some "mistake" and claiming there were "extenuating circumstances" in regards to Potter's behavior. Draco gleefully ignored each missive. On the third day, the fine was paid without comment. Draco could only assume Potter had sobered up and simply wanted the incident forgotten.

Two weeks passed and the Potter episode became only a vague memory that haunted Draco at unexpected times. He had never discovered why the Auror had pounced on him, and Draco hated unfulfilled curiosity. Rather than sit around brooding about it, he threw himself into his business affairs, namely trying gamely to salvage the Malfoy fortune. His father's association with the Dark Lord had thrown the Malfoy Empire into a state of neglect for over a year. The subsequent imprisonment of Lucius Malfoy left Draco running things almost single-handedly, with only occasional missives from Azkaban to provide direction.

Thus it was that Draco was in Gringott's the next time he encountered Harry Potter. The bloody damned goblins refused to behave in a civilized fashion and demanded all transactions be conducted in person. They refused to perform the simplest transactions without a personal visit.

Draco had just concluded an irritating conversation with a goblin attendant when he felt a pair of arms slide around his waist.

"Come here for a minute, Malfoy," a honeyed voice said. Draco grinned, assuming it was Blaise having him on. Draco was drawn toward the front doors and he did not resist the guiding hand around his waist. If Pansy waited outside with the expectation of Draco buying lunch, she and her co-conspirator were sorely mistaken. The instant the wards surrounding Gringotts were breached, Draco felt the wrench of Disapparition. His captor shifted slightly and Draco found himself staring at Harry Potter.

The Auror stared at Draco for only an instant before pressing him back against the door and touching their lips together. Draco felt a shock of brilliance and nearly moaned aloud at the sensation.

A spell, he thought lamely. *Surely this is some bizarre spell*. Potter's hand gripped Draco's neck and his thumbs traced the curve of his jaw. Potter's lips drank from Draco's as if they had never tasted anything sweeter. The Auror's tongue drew lightly over Draco's lips and pressed hard with a whimper, as though pleading for a response, one that Draco was sorely tempted to give.

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

grunt of pain.

Draco released him as Potter doubled over, fighting for air.

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

Draco stood in Kingsley Shacklebolt's office within the hour.

"I want that Auror of yours put on a leash," Draco said haughtily. Shacklebolt barely looked up. Instead he rubbed his bald temples with stiffened fingers.

"What did Potter do this time?" he asked tiredly. Draco wondered if their precious Savior had finally cracked. Perhaps Draco was not the only victim of Potter's erratic behavior. The thought filled him with a simmering rage. It was quite bad enough to be attacked in broad daylight, but to think it was merely an amusing game of the Auror's…

"I think this formal complaint should be specific enough," Draco said and flung the scroll on the desk.

Shacklebolt sighed and picked it up. His lips thinned as he read the long list of complaints Draco had introduced, including kidnapping and unlawful Side-along Apparition.

"A Restraining Order?" Shacklebolt asked and blinked at Draco in surprise. "Are you sure?"

Draco stared back, stunned that the Minister would ask such a question. Was Draco supposed to sit back and accept Potter's manhandling merely because the Gryffindor was some sort of hero? Could Shacklebolt seriously expect such an attitude? "Of course I want a fucking Restraining Order! The prat is a menace. You might allow him to get away with this behavior with other people, but I have no intention of looking the other way just because Potter has the entire damned Ministry in his pocket!"

Shacklebolt gaped at him like some sort of landed fish. Draco began to wonder at the man's sanity. "But Harry could die…"

Draco rolled his eyes. "He's an Auror!" Draco snapped. "Of course he could die! That sure as hell doesn't give him the right to paw at me whenever he sees fit. Has he done this before? How many times have you covered for him, Shacklebolt?"

The Minister looked more and more confused. Draco realized he was getting nowhere trying to pound some morality into what was obviously a very corrupt Ministry, at least where precious Harry Potter was concerned.

"I seem to be wasting my breath. I expect my complaints to be taken seriously, especially the Restraining Order," Draco warned and departed.

The next morning an article appeared in the Daily Prophet. Draco smiled. Rita Skeeter had been very interested in Draco's information. Her strident commentary questioned Potter's behavior and the Ministry's duplicity. She had even gone so far as to suggest Potter had an obsession with Draco, backed up by several complaints recently filed with the Ministry.

Draco tossed the paper aside with satisfaction. He doubted he would receive a visit from Harry Potter in the near future. He only wished he could eradicate the prat from his dreams as easily. He sighed heavily. It had only been a stupid kiss. Why couldn't he forget it?

As it turned out, Draco was correct. Potter did not show his face for the next five weeks. Draco quashed something that felt uncomfortably similar to disappointment and carried on with his life. Until the visit from Hermione Granger.

She appeared at the front gates of Malfoy Manor, which was quite astounding and brought back very unpleasant memories of the last time she had been there. Draco frowned, not appreciating any reminders of the war, especially those dealing directly with Voldemort. Granger, being Granger, ignored the messages delivered to the front gate by the house-elves stating that Draco was not at home.

"The Mudblood insists that Master is being home," the elf said with a sniff of disapproval. "It is refusing to leave."

Draco was tempted to let her stand out there for the rest of the bloody day if she so chose, but he suspected her visit had something to do with Potter. Draco's most recent set of complaints had been paid without comment and he had not seen even a magical trace of the Auror. Perhaps the git wanted to issue a formal apology? The idea was not without merit. If so, Draco would force him to do so in public. He sent the house-elf out to let Granger inside.

The bushy-haired Gryffindor looked at the house-elf with a stiff set to her jaw, but she turned directly to Draco when she entered the drawing room. Draco did not bother to rise from the couch where he had been pretending to read a book of French sonnets. Where did his mother find such tripe?

"I'll get straight to the point, Malfoy," she said as though Slytherins valued such bluntness. "Harry is dying."

Draco frowned, despite his intention to remain expressionless. Had the Auror been injured? She paced, probably because Draco had neglected to offer her a chair.

"Look, I promised him I would never tell you, but he's going to let it kill him just because it's *you* and because he's too stupid to actually talk to you and work out some sort of arrangement. I told him we had all changed since school, even you, but he's so damned stubborn sometimes…"

"Granger, you mentioned something about getting to the point?" Draco said dryly.

She took a deep breath and nodded. "All right, I'll tell you, but only because I'm hoping you can save his life. Harry has Veela genes from his father's side. No one bothered to mention it to him, probably because they expected him to die facing Voldemort, but that's neither here nor there."

The book fell from Draco's hands, unnoticed.

"I see you understand," Granger said. "Yes, Malfoy. You are Harry's mate."

Draco's shock turned rapidly to something akin to glee. At least Shacklebolt's confusion was finally explained. The Minister had obviously expected the imbecilic Gryffindor to actually *speak* to Draco about the situation prior to attacking him. Draco was only at a loss for a moment when he wondered the same thing. After all, it was Potter. The idiot seldom did anything intelligent.

Deciding what he would do about it took a bit longer. He assured Granger that he would hurry off and at least have a chat with the tragic hero figure and then spent the next few hours concocting one mad scheme after another. In the end, he decided the simplest approach was the best, and Apparated directly to Potter's London flat.

Potter was asleep on the couch. Draco quietly took off his dark cape and hung it from the rack near the door. He walked over and looked down at the sleeping Auror, who seemed to be dreaming. His brow was furrowed, marring the scar, and his head tossed restlessly. Draco did not think he made a sound, but suddenly the Auror Summoned his wand and half-bolted from his reclining position before Draco had taken two steps.

"Going to hex me, Potter?" he drawled, somewhat expecting that very thing. Potter's wand sagged, and he sat back heavily on the couch. The wand fell away and Potter buried his face in his hands.

"Malfoy," he said hoarsely. "What are you doing here?"

"You brought me here once, Potter, quite against my will. I sort of assumed I had an open invitation." Draco spoke quietly and studied the Auror as he approached. Potter looked like hell. He was thin almost to the point of emaciation and his bones jutted sharply where muscles had been only weeks before. His hands shook visibly where they covered his eyes—eyes that had looked like twin lanterns of pain when they had stared at Draco. The Auror's hair was too long and more unkempt than usual.

Draco sat next to Potter and then reached out to place a hand on the back of the Auror's neck. Potter's hands dropped and he leaned into Draco's touch like an attention-starved kitten. Draco pulled the Auror closer and settled Potter's face into the hollow of his neck. The Gryffindor's head settled comfortably on Draco's shoulder and a soul wrenching sigh exhaled over Draco's throat. He held Potter for long moments and realized with a start that the Gryffindor was sound asleep.

Holding Harry Potter was quite a lot more pleasant than Draco expected. Pleasant and disturbing. The Gryffindor slept with his arms wrapped around Draco like a trusting child, something no one had ever done. None of Draco's lovers had ever dared to *snuggle* and most had not been invited to stay long enough attempt it, anyway. With Potter's hot breath tickling his neck and warm arms clenched around his waist, Draco drifted off to sleep.

He woke with a start to realize that he was lying flat on the couch with Harry Potter sprawled over him like a Gryffindor blanket. The flat was brightly lit—they must have slept the night away on Potter's sofa. Draco's jolt of shock awakened the Auror, who pulled back slightly to stare at Draco. He met the surprised green eyes with carefully blank features.

"You're crushing me, Potter."

"I thought you were a dream," Harry said in a tone of amazement.

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

Harry blushed and unwrapped his arms from Draco's waist. He shifted his legs a bit—the damned Auror might be thin but he was by no means a lightweight. Potter froze suddenly and the breath caught in Draco's throat. His eyes widened when he heard the Auror gasp sharply and saw the green eyes darken nearly to black.

Draco was suddenly very aware of Harry Potter. The same man who had kidnapped Draco from Gringotts and devoured Draco's lips with a greedy kiss. Potter's body rapidly awakened in ways Draco was not prepared to deal with and he definitely was not prepared to handle the answering response already charging through his own body.

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

"You know, I don't think I will," the Auror said huskily. The tone, even more than the words, sent a jolt of pure heat straight to Draco's cock. Potter's mouth lowered with obvious intent to kiss, but Draco turned his head sharply. The Auror's lips met the edge of Draco's jaw, which did not seem to bother him in the slightest. Potter nibbled at it and worked his way to the soft area just beneath Draco's ear. Draco felt like he was on fire and things were waking up that had no business waking up at all.

Draco twisted and heaved in a single motion, dumping Potter on the floor. He drew his wand and glared down at the baffled-looking Auror, who stared up at him with those fucking green eyes and that delightfully rumpled hair.

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

Potter blinked at him and got to his feet.

"You know?" he asked.

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

Potter sat on the couch and looked a bit chagrined, except that his eyes seemed to be permanently fixed on Draco and a calculating glint shone in their depths.

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

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

"Why are you here?" Potter asked sharply.

Draco nearly laughed. It had certainly taken the Auror long enough to cotton to reality. He sneered. "Don't think I'm here for your sake, Potter."

The Auror laughed, although Draco thought he looked slightly lost for a moment before Potter gained control. He moved over to sit in a chair near the window, far enough to defend himself should Potter's hormones become suddenly overwhelming.

"All right then," he said, "I have a business proposition for you, Potter."

"Business proposition?" Potter asked.

"Indeed. Since you apparently require my touch to keep from pining away unto death, and since I have no reason whatsoever to grant you the use of my… flesh, shall we say, I have made a decision that I believe we will find mutually beneficial."

Draco's words seemed to send Potter straight into a trancelike state. The Auror stared at Draco so intently he nearly looked down to make certain he was still wearing clothing. The Auror licked his lips and rose from the couch with a sinuous movement, looking very much like a hungry lion stalking his prey. The sight was strangely enticing.

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

The Auror blinked at him for a moment and sat back down, although the slightly mad light never left the emerald eyes.

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

That seemed to snap the Auror's trance.

"A price," Potter repeated.

"Several prices, actually," Draco said with a nod. "I've made a list." He flicked his wand and whispered a spell that sent a piece of parchment flying from his cape near the door. It floated to Potter, who took it. He unrolled the scroll.

Varied emotions played across the Auror's face when he read Draco's price list, beginning with amusement and ending with rage. It had taken Draco quite some time to decide what to charge the needy Auror and he had added oral sex merely for the sake of irritating Potter. Now he began to hope the Gryffindor would take him up on it, and wished he had added more besides.

Touch – Per finger, 1 Galleon, 1 minute maximum

Full hand – 6 Galleons, 1 minute maximum

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

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

Kiss – No tongue – 50 Galleons

With tongue – 100 Galleons

Oral sex – Performed by Potter – 200 Galleons

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

Other sex – Forget it, Veela-boy

The Auror glared at him. "Even without the sex, doesn't this make you some sort of… prostitute?"

Draco shrugged. "As I see it, I'm merely performing a service, rather like a medi-wizard or a therapist." He got to his feet. "Needless to say, I have removed the restraining order."

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

Draco grinned wickedly. "I'll send you a bill," he said as he slung the cape over his arm and Disapparated.

Draco did not see Potter for the next few days. He began to wonder if the Auror had managed to fight the curse, or if he had chosen to die rather than pay Draco for anything. Draco shrugged and told himself he did not care. As luck would have it, Potter chose the worst possible time to request an appointment. A Malfoy warehouse in Dublin had caught fire and Draco spent half the

morning Floo-calling the local authorities to determine whether or not it had been accidental, deliberate, or Muggle-spawned. The Chief Auror there was a blithering dunderhead and Draco had finally Apparated all the way to Ireland to survey the damage for himself.

The fire seemed to have been Muggle-induced—damn the bastards and their constant stupid wars!—which meant a nightmare of paperwork for Draco in order to have the insurance claims properly filed. In the meantime, he was out several thousand Galleons in flying carpets, which were illegal in Britain but worth a fortune in Borneo. He hired some local underlings to sort through the mess and salvage anything possible. By the time he left Dublin, Draco was in a foul mood and reeked of smoke. He was also late for his appointment with Potter.

Draco took a quick bath and changed into suitable robes before finally making his way to what his mother had called the Sunrise Antechamber, but what Draco referred to as the Mahogany Room due to the overuse of that particular wood. Potter was nearly asleep on the couch—it was almost an hour past his appointed time and he had likely been bored stiff. Draco suppressed a smirk and decided his day was looking up.

"I'm quite busy today, Potter," he said condescendingly as Potter got to his feet. "What shall it be?"

"A kiss," Potter snapped. "With tongue."

Draco blanched. He had fully expected the Auror to ask for something simple, like a handshake or other innocuous touch. He tried to ignore the flare of lust that nearly exploded through him at the simple words. Bloody damned Gryffindor! Draco hoped to hell none of his internal struggle showed on his face as he shrugged.

"Fine," he said.

He didn't move, and neither did Potter. The Auror seemed to have used up all of his courage merely uttering the words that had apparently frozen them both.

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

The Auror stalked forward and curled a hand behind Draco's neck before he leaned forward to press their lips together. Draco tried to think unsexy thoughts, such as the time he had caught Goyle wanking in the Slytherin dorm to a naked photo of Millicent Bulstrode. It nearly worked, except that Potter seemed to be single-minded in his determination to devour Draco. The hand on Draco's neck eased into something like a caress and Potter tipped his head slightly.

Draco obediently parted his lips and Potter's tongue slipped inside to brush against his own tentatively. Draco's arms reached up instinctively to pull the Auror closer because, fuck, the kiss was amazing, hot and sweet and intense all at once. It was lucky he did so because the Auror's delightful mouth suddenly slipped away from Draco's as Potter collapsed in his arms.

Draco hoisted the limp Auror back to the couch and laid him down gently. He combed the hair away from Potter's brow and smiled almost tenderly at the foolish man. It was really quite a pity that Potter would always hate him. After that kiss, Draco might have considered changing his ways and staking a claim on the noble hero.

He called for a house-elf, who hovered over Potter anxiously.

"Will he be all right?" Draco asked, planting himself in a chair across from the unconscious Gryffindor. The elf leaned closer and Potter chose that moment to regain his senses. He nearly leaped through the back of the couch with a cry of alarm. Beppy backed away and threw a questioning glace at Draco, whose nearly imperceptible gesture allowed the elf to disappear.

Draco watched Potter expressionlessly.

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

Potter got to his feet. "I think I've humiliated myself enough for one day," he said without meeting Draco's eyes. "Thank you for your time, Malfoy. Be sure to send me your… you know… bill."

"I will, Potter," Draco said softly, already regretting the bloody price list. If he had not been so bent on revenge, perhaps there would have been a chance for something between them…

Potter walked quickly to the door and fled without looking back.

Draco expected not to see the Auror for several more days, if at all. When the house-elf summoned him from his room the next night, it was quite a surprise. Draco threw on some ice blue robes and made his way to the library. He poured a quick drink and sat in a chair to await the arrival of the Chosen One.

Potter stepped out of the fire looking too good by half for Draco's sanity. He wore his usual Muggle jeans and some sort of soft-looking black shirt. His hair looked slightly damp, as if he had bathed some time previous. The thought made Draco want to taste his skin to determine what sort of soap he used. He gulped his drink and forced his thoughts away from that direction.

"What will it be tonight, Potter?" he asked, striving for a tone of nonchalance as he set aside his glass. He hoped to hell the Auror did not request another kiss, because Draco's willpower would be tested to the breaking point. The memory of yesterday's kiss alone had caused him to nearly wank himself raw.

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

Draco sighed in relief and held out his hands without bothering to rise. Potter walked forward

and dropped to his knees, surprising Draco with the action. He took both of Draco's hands in his own and held them gently. Draco wondered what he felt when they touched, because Draco felt nothing but warmth, slight roughness, and the urge to shag Potter senseless…

He tried to make small talk to cover his apparent growing stupidity.

"So…" he said lamely. "How was your day?"

To Draco's relief, the Auror responded. "Wretched," Potter admitted. He briefly described the difficulty of tracking some magical ghoul-creature through rugged, treacherous terrain while waiting for it to leap from hiding and rend him with claws and teeth. Draco laughed when Potter finished.

"That's so… *you*, Potter."

"What do you mean?"

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

Potter grinned and looked a million times cuter than he had any right to. "Thanks."

Draco snorted. "That was not a compliment. What would you do if you could not be an Auror? Seriously, you would curl up and die."

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

Draco nodded. It seemed obvious. "I'm somewhat surprised you chose the Auror route over Quidditch, actually."

"Why?"

"More fame, greater glory with Quidditch," Draco replied.

Apparently Draco had said the wrong thing. Potter snatched his hands away. The sweet grin and pleasant conversation were erased, as though they had never been. Potter's usual stormy expression had returned.

"I never wanted that," Potter snapped. "Never." He walked to the fireplace, but glanced back over his shoulder. "Thank you for seeing me on such short notice," he said politely.

Red powder flared and Potter was gone. Draco cursed himself for not calling him back.

Potter was absent for the next three days. Draco foolishly worried about the Auror and finally sent an owl to Granger in desperation. She informed him that Potter had returned from a dangerous mission and would be home after he had filled out requisite paperwork. She had asked

no questions whatsoever, to Draco's eternal gratitude.

Draco sent an owl to Potter's flat informing him that he would be home after 11 pm. He had an unfortunate event to attend prior to that time.

As it turned out, Draco had drunk far more than intended and he was in a foul mood long before he returned home. He had been hoping to see Potter all day, but after the events of the afternoon he only wanted to imbibe a Forgetfulness Potion and go to bed.

The clock on the mantle had not even finished chiming eleven before Harry Potter stepped out of the fireplace.

"Punctual," Draco said dryly as he looked through the window at the moonlit grounds. He had no wish to look at Potter at all, but finally swiveled his head to see why the Auror made no sound. Potter stood by the fireplace, looking like he might dive back into it at any moment.

"For Merlin's sake, sit down, Potter," Draco snapped. The Auror straightened and walked to the couch. He sat and ran a hand over the soft velvet, which was Draco's favorite pattern of green on green. Potter glanced at Draco and then his eyes narrowed. Draco smoothed his robes self-consciously and wondered if Potter found fault with the deep violet material. They were a bit formal for their little meeting, but Draco had barely returned in time and had not bothered to change.

Draco sighed and walked over to sit next to Potter, making certain to leave a safe distance between them. He would be damned if he would give himself willingly to Potter. If the Auror wanted something, it was up to him to bloody well take it. He relented slightly by placing his hand palm up on his thigh in silent invitation.

Potter quickly placed his hand on Draco's and linked their fingers. Draco tried not to think about the unspoken intimacy of the simple gesture. It was almost worse than kissing; because it was something longtime lovers did when they were comfortable with each other.

Potter did not seem bothered. He sighed and leaned his head back against the sofa. Thickly lashed lids closed over the green eyes, closing Draco out. It was with some surprise a few moments later that Draco realized the Auror had fallen asleep. He reached over experimentally and cupped Potter's cheek with one hand. The only response was a gentle nudge, as though the Auror wanted to get closer to Draco's flesh.

Draco sighed and pulled the Gryffindor into a close embrace before placing a chaste kiss on the Auror's lips. There was no response—Potter was dead to the world. Draco grinned and ordered a room prepared before he Levitated the limp hero upstairs.

The room adjoined Draco's own, and he placed Potter gently on the bed before removing the Auror's scuffed boots. He shook his head sadly and wondered when Potter had last gone shopping. The damned Gryffindor definitely needed a keeper. His Muggle jeans were not in

much better condition. Potter likely wore every item he owned until they fell to pieces and only then sought a replacement.

Draco tossed the boots aside and started to gleefully unbutton the Auror's shirt. It was nearly white, but hinted at green. Draco wondered if Potter had worn it specifically for him and tried not to be pleased by the idea. Potter's torso was gorgeous, marred here and there with scratches and old scars. Draco traced them all with a finger and wondered what story lay beneath each one.

It doesn't mean anything, he snarled at his colder self to still the sneer.

Potter's jeans were next and Draco teased them down gently, hoping not to wake the Auror at this late stage, even while somewhat hoping Potter *would* awaken. He wondered how soon before the conflict would start to drive him mad.

You want Harry Potter. You're already mad.

Potter was gorgeous, though. Even his wiser, more cynical self had to admit that. Draco cleaned and folded Potter's clothing with a few choice spells, all while drinking his fill of the nearly nude body sprawled on the silk bedspread. When he finished the mundane task, he arranged Potter on the sheets and tugged the blankets up over him. Draco allowed himself one small indulgence—he placed a soft kiss on the flesh just over Potter's navel and teased the delicate hair with his tongue.

The Auror never stirred.

Draco ordered a house-elf to drag the reluctant Gryffindor down to breakfast the next day. It was likely Potter wanted nothing more than to Apparate home, but Draco counted on his natural Gryffindor politeness to coax him to the dining room. Draco entered to find the Auror sitting most uncomfortably at the table and reminded himself to give Wyrm a special treat later. He would forbid the house-elf to punish himself for an hour or something.

"Morning, Potter," Draco said pleasantly as he strolled in and seated himself across from the Gryffindor.

"Good morning," Potter replied with evident surprise.

"Sleep well?" Draco asked with a mere hint of a smirk.

Several house-elves appeared and placed the morning repast on the table. When they vanished, Potter opened his mouth to speak.

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

The Auror gaped at him. "Nothing did happen!"

Draco grinned. "Are you sure?" he purred and was rewarded by an incredible blush flooding over the Gryffindor. Potter reached for a glass of juice and gulped it like a bone-dry Quidditch player after a long game.

Draco watched Harry carefully and deliberately ate with a sensuality he had not practiced for years. He delicately placed each bite of food into his mouth and made sure to lick his lips with suggestive relish. Potter watched like an enraptured schoolboy for a while, but then seemed to lose interest. The Auror kept his eyes firmly on his place and seemed fixated on his food.

Draco stamped his disappointment flat and refused to let it rear its head. Potter finally finished massacring his meal and stood awkwardly.

"I'll take you to the library," Draco offered.

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

"The house-elves would never let that happen," Draco said and tried not to think about keeping Potter locked in his house to wander around lost. He led Potter to the library, where the Auror stood before the fireplace and picked up a handful of Floo powder. He looked at Draco.

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

Draco realized he wasn't ready for the Auror to leave. He reached up and took Potter's chin in his hand before he placed a sweet kiss on Potter's lips. Draco met the confused green eyes and smiled.

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

When the Auror had gone, Draco went upstairs and prepared for his journey. He was not looking forward to his visit to France. Before Potter's Veela situation, it had seemed inevitable and necessary. Draco looked at himself in the mirror when he was dressed. He looked out of sorts and almost nervous. That would never do.

He carefully schooled his features into a mask of icy indifference and nodded approval at his cool image. That was much better. The façade was shattered when he bit his lip, realizing he should have mentioned the trip to Potter. The damned Gryffindor was going to be livid.

Draco sighed and resolved to send the Auror an owl. There was no help for it. Draco had agreed to meet with his fiancée and begin to finalize their wedding preparations. Draco's growing infatuation with Potter would not change that.

Three days in France felt like eternity. Draco found himself daydreaming about Potter more than once, and only his Malfoy pride kept him there. He tried not to compare his pale blond fiancée to Potter. They were dissimilar enough that it should have been easy. She was pale, petite, and

demure. Draco found himself wishing she were darker haired, and taller, and fierier of temper. The wedding plans were more annoying than he could have imagined. His opinion was expected on everything from flowers to venue to lettering on the invitations. Draco didn't give a fuck about any of it, but he forced a smile and pretended interest. His mind was far away.

It was late when Draco returned home. He expected to find a message from Potter, but there was nothing. The Gryffindor was probably still angry about Draco's disappearance. The idiot would probably waste away before his pride allowed him to ask if Draco had returned.

Draco Apparated to Potter's flat. The living room was empty, but a sound from the kitchen gave evidence of the Auror's presence. Draco entered the room and gasped when his arms were suddenly full of Harry Potter. The Auror held him tightly, face buried in Draco's hair. His bare skin seemed to burn through Draco's clothing—the Auror wore nothing but a pair of boxers. He seemed to be trembling. Draco didn't dare return the embrace, for fear he would never let go.

Potter sighed, but did not release him. "This is so fucked up," he said.

Draco said nothing, but mentally cursed Potter's Veela genes. He wished things had remained the same between them—mutual dislike and irritation. This enforced need made Draco wonder what life would have been like if Potter could have sought him out willingly, ridiculous fantasy though it was. Potter had to detest his dependence on Draco; in his position, Draco would have hated him with a royal passion. He scowled and patted Potter lightly on the back, rather like he would a small pet. Potter finally stepped away.

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

Potter followed him to the living room. Draco went immediately to the sidebar, tugging off his outer robes as he went. He tossed them aside and peered at a few bottles. Potter had a decent bar. He noticed the Auror edging toward the bedroom.

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

Potter sat on the couch with obvious reluctance.

"Where did you go?" the Gryffindor blurted and then blushed scarlet.

Draco poured two glasses and crossed the room. He sat on the couch near the Auror. Potter sniffed at the liquid and raised a brow at the smell of pure vodka. He looked at Draco dubiously. Draco said nothing, merely watched him over the rim of the glass as he took a sip. Potter glared and then gulped at his drink. Draco nearly smiled at the Auror's expression. Apparently he seldom drank straight alcohol.

"I was in France," Draco admitted.

Potter made no comment and they drank in silence for a time. The Auror got to his feet and

poured another drink. Draco admired Potter's muscular back and tasty backside. The damned Gryffindor had astoundingly nice legs, and Draco had never paid much attention to that sort of thing before. He looked away before the Auror turned around, and thought it might be a very good idea to go home.

Potter returned to his seat and sat down. "France, eh?" he commented casually. "What's in France?"

"My fiancée," Draco said bluntly. Potter's full glass dropped to the floor, darkening the pale carpet in a vaguely round shape. Draco pulled out his wand and cast a quick Cleaning Charm before he retrieved the glass and went to refill it for the Auror.

Draco held out the drink. "Here, Potter. Bloody hell, you look pale as death. Are you all right?"

Potter took the glass and gulped half the contents. He looked a thousand miles away and wore an expression Draco could not catalogue. The Auror seemed to shake himself and forced a pathetic imitation of a smile. Draco had seen enough faked grins in his life to spot one immediately.

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

Draco felt his jaw clench. Of course not. Why would the great Harry Potter know anything about Draco Malfoy? Potter had no use for him, except for some pathetic and annoying need to touch him every so often. When he spoke, Draco's voice was like ice. "Understandable. My every move is not reported on the front page of the Daily Prophet." *Unlike yours*. Potter said nothing and drank his vodka like it was water. Draco suddenly wondered if the news of his engagement had shocked Potter that badly. Did the Auror think their "arrangement" would come to a halt once Draco married?

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

Draco reached out and touched the Auror's forearm, suddenly fearing that Potter would try to reject him. Their brief exchanges had been strange and rather tense, but Draco decided it was better than nothing. Potter dropped his glass for the second time. A sound resembling a growl purred from his throat and he leaned over and bruised Draco's lips with a near-violent kiss. Draco tasted blood as the Gryffindor pressed him into the sofa. Potter lapped and sucked at Draco's lips. The kiss was hot and almost dangerous and Draco wondered if it was possible to die from a single kiss.

Gooseflesh erupted everywhere as Potter's hands roamed over his skin, touching everything within reach. Draco could barely think between the kiss and the molten hands caressing him. He felt Potter jerk at the buttons on his shirt and tried to bite back a moan when the Auror's fingers splayed over his bare chest.

Potter paused for a moment, but not long enough for Draco to regain his senses. The Auror's hands moved lower, sliding out of the shirt to discover Draco's obvious arousal. Potter's hand touched him through his trousers and Draco gasped sharply through their linked mouths. *Fuck, I'm not supposed to want him*.

Potter opened Draco's trousers with the same determination he used for every situation, and yet managed to continue teasing Draco's lips with nibbling kisses. Potter's hand dipped inside and his fingers glided over Draco's tormented flesh. The Auror thankfully broke the kiss then, because Draco thought they both might die of asphyxiation.

Potter drew back for a moment and his gaze seemed to roam over Draco. The Auror almost seemed like a wild creature. His hair was like a shadow and his eyes were half-lidded. His lips were wet and partially open as if preparing to devour Draco. His features were more delicate that Draco would have imagined. He longed to reach up and smooth his hands over Potter's cheeks, to curl his hands into the thick hair, and lose himself in those green eyes.

Before Draco could move, Potter's perusal dropped lower, observing Draco's cock as he stroked and caressed it. Draco's hips moved involuntarily, leaning into Potter's touch.

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

Draco forced his hands to stay flat on the couch. He couldn't touch Potter; he dared not. Potter might want this right now, but he would hate Draco in the morning, and hate himself for being placed in this position of unwilling desire. Draco would not admit even to himself how much he wanted to be someone Harry Potter would not despise. In fact, he should do the noble thing. Draco should stop him before it was too late.

He should, but fucking Merlin, Mordred, and Morgana he couldn't. Not when Potter's hand stroked him so brilliantly, tearing panting breaths from Draco's lungs with every stroke. Bloody hell, it was amazing.

Potter's mouth slid over his jaw and down the side of his neck. The Auror quickly shifted until he half-knelt between Draco's open legs. He sucked greedily at one nipple, and then the other, until Draco felt the orgasm building through him like water racing toward a breach in a dike.

"So close," he gasped.

"Not quite yet," Potter commanded in a hushed tone and moved down to take the head of Draco's cock into his exquisite, hot mouth. Draco cried out and came, exploding into the Auror's mouth as blessed release shuddered though him. Draco quivered violently, expecting Potter to pull away, but the Auror sucked and swallowed at him greedily. *Bloody fucking hell*, Draco managed, nearly overcome with awe. He thought he should move, and see to Potter's needs regardless of damned Veela genes and obligations, but Potter seemed to shiver slightly and his mouth tightened on Draco's spent cock. The Auror licked Draco's sensitive shaft one last time and then laid his cheek on Draco's abdomen. The gesture was so curiously touching after what he'd done

that Draco's throat felt suddenly tight. He lifted a hand and rested it gently on Potter's head. The black hair was soft and seemed to absorb Draco's pale hand.

Draco couldn't move. The Auror's hands caressed Draco's bare hips in slower and slower strokes as his breathing deepened and his body relaxed. It wasn't long before the Gryffindor was sound asleep in one of the most awkward positions Draco had ever seen. He remained where he was and allowed his fingers to trail through Potter's thick hair until he began to feel a chill on his naked torso. He managed to shift the sleeping Auror onto the floor before he rose and adjusted his clothing. Potter's boxers had twisted around his hips. Draco quickly cleaned up the evidence of Potter's orgasm and then modestly tugged the pants into place.

Once that was done, Draco cast a Weightlessness Charm and knelt down to take the Auror into his arms. He carried Potter into the bedroom and placed him gently on the bed before tucking the blankets carefully around the sleeping Auror. As an afterthought, he leaned down and pressed a soft kiss against Potter's lips.

"Goodnight, Harry," he whispered.

Draco returned to the living room and finished his drink as he stared out the window at the multicolored lights of London. He was torn on what to do. Part of him wanted to crawl into bed with the Auror and never leave. He snorted softly. At least until morning, when Potter awoke and relived the night's events with horror—if he remembered them at all, that was.

No, it was far better for Draco to stand by their arrangement. Let Potter hate him for forcing the Auror to pay for every touch, whether alcohol-induced or not. The knowledge that Draco could never have Potter would be far easier to bear if the Auror detested him. After all, Draco was a Malfoy. He had obligations to live up to.

Draco picked up a quill from the nearby desk and drafted Potter a bill before Flooing home to spend a restless night dreaming about things that could never be.

Draco was awakened by a house-elf. He sat up in bed and stared at the creature, unable to fathom a logical reason for a house-elf to rouse him from a perfectly nice sleep. The creature stood next to Draco's bed, already tearing at his large ears in abject apology.

"Is the house on fire?" Draco asked.

"No, Master Draco! Wyrm is being sorry, Master Draco, but a nastybad Mudblood is being downstairs." The house-elf threw himself to the floor and began to pound his forehead into the hardwood. "Please don't be angry with Wyrm, Master! The nastybad Mudblood is refusing to leave! It is demanding to see Master Draco! Wyrm is not being able to make it go away, Master!"

Draco rubbed a hand through his hair in annoyance. The creature's caterwauling was like a Crucio against Draco's pounding head. He made a quick vow to give up vodka. "Does this Mudblood have a name?" he asked dryly, mostly to get the pounding to stop. The pounding

stopped when Wyrm lifted his head to peer at Draco.

"It says its name is being Hermione Granger-Weasley, Master Draco."

The house-elf resumed the self-punishment and Draco yanked on a dressing gown as he hurried to the door. "Where is she?" he called on his way out.

"In the Receiving Room, Master!" he heard from the hallway. Muffled thumps followed him down the hall.

Granger was pacing in apparent agitation before the large fireplace. Draco's heart nearly stopped, wondering if something had happened to Potter. Merlin, he should not have left the Auror alone last night.

"What did you do to him?" Granger demanded the instant she caught sight of Draco, who froze just inside the doorway. His mind went back to the night before and he tried to think of what he might have done to the Auror, but the only thing that came to mind was what Potter had done to *him*. Luckily, Granger's strident voice continued. "He's gone! Harry's gone!"

Draco hoped to hell he had heard her wrong, or that she was panicked for no reason. "Gone where?" he asked foolishly.

"If I knew where, do you think I'd be *here*?" she yelled.

"Then why are you here?" he asked, thinking it was the last place Granger would have come to look for a lost Potter. She sank down on the couch miserably.

"I don't know," she replied in a lost tone. "I guess I foolishly hoped you might care."

Draco ignored that. "I was with him last night. What makes you think he's gone and not just off for a… stroll or something?"

Granger pulled a crumpled ball of parchment from her robe and held it out to Draco. "This," she said without looking at him.

Draco walked forward and took it. He unballed it and tried to smooth it enough to read. It read *Hermione, I've had enough of this Veela business. I will never have what I want and I believe I would rather be dead than live without it. I am sorry to disappear like this, but I know you would try to stop me. If I can't find a cure, I won't return. Harry.*

Draco clenched his teeth. He wanted to find the idiot and shake him. "He thinks he can cure this? Like it is some sort of illness?"

"To Harry it's a disease. Frankly, from my research he may be somewhat right to think that. It's genetic, obviously, but so are a lot of medical conditions…" Granger's voice continued on, but

Draco had stopped listening. He was thinking bleakly about the word *disease*. Potter thought of his need for Draco as a *disease*, something to be rid of, something that needed curing.

"What does he mean by 'I will never have what I want'? What is it he wants?" Draco asked and realized he had already answered his own question. *He wants to be rid of me, naturally.*

Granger bit her lip and then said sharply. "I probably shouldn't tell you, since you've been wretched about this whole ordeal, even though it had to be just as much of a shock to you. I mean, I'm certain it was far too much of an opportunity for you, finally having Harry under your bloody thumb. He never told me what your 'arrangement' was, but knowing you it can't have been anything beneficial to Harry, except perhaps on the most superficial level." Her chest was heaving and she was really getting up a head of steam. Draco watched her impassively, not allowing her to see the guilt that had already been eating him alive.

Granger began pacing again. "I could tell he was getting in too deep. I should have warned him, but I thought since it was *you* he couldn't possibly… And then he did and it was too late, and I should have fucking seen it coming and done something, *anything* to prevent it!"

"Granger, you're not making a lick of sense," Draco broke in before she really got going on her incomprehensible tirade.

"It's *you*!" she yelled. "Harry wants you! He's in love with you, even though you're completely soulless and probably think that's the most hilarious thing you've ever—"

"What did you say?" Draco asked sharply. His tone seemed to knock her agitation flat. She stopped pacing and looked at him through serious brown eyes.

"He loves you," she said quietly. "And he knows you'll never love him and now he's fled. I've got to find him." Granger looked like she might burst into tears, but Draco heard only the same three words that made even less sense than anything else she had uttered.

He loves you.

"That's impossible," Draco snapped finally.

She looked at him sadly, as though he should be pitied. Maybe he should. She smiled ruefully. "He never said the words, of course, but I can tell. He talks about you sometimes and his eyes get that soft, faraway look."

"He talks about me?"

"Yes. He says you're horrible and evil and all that, but his tone tells a far different story from his voice. I know Harry better than I know anyone in the world. He's fallen for you. Maybe it was the Veela thing to begin with, but no longer."

"Where would he go?" Draco asked, not quite daring to believe her words. Why would she lie? Merely to coerce Draco into helping her find the Idiot Who Lived?

"I've looked everywhere I can possibly think of," she said. "Why do you think I came to you? I'm hoping maybe, since he's your… soulmate, or whatever, that perhaps you have some sort of connection? Or damn it, I'm even hoping he might have said something to you, given you some hint as to where he might have gone."

"I don't know anything about him," Draco admitted and realized with a twinge of guilt that it was true. He had never taken the time to ask Potter anything of import. Even their most civil conversations had turned into angry outbursts. "He goes to the Ministry, goes on dangerous missions, and he goes home. That's all I know."

Granger gave him a look that let him know how pathetic she thought he was and said, "Well, he's not at the Ministry and he's not on any dangerous missions. Kingsley said he received a message from Harry stating that he is on indefinite leave of absence as of this morning."

Fuck, Potter loved his job. For him to give that up…

"We've got to find him," Draco said. "I'll do whatever you need."

For two weeks, they searched every bloody place that Potter had ever been. They scoured London, searched Hogwarts, visited every friend Potter ever had, and even started dropping in on mere acquaintances. To no avail. After yet another fruitless trip, they Apparated to Potter's flat, hoping by some miracle that he had come to his senses and returned. The place was empty and unlived-in, as it had been every single day since the Auror's disappearance.

Granger was near to tears. Draco blasted a decorative vase into powder and shouted, "Damn you, Harry! *Where the fuck are you*?"

He met Granger's surprised gaze, which immediately turned speculative. A mere fortnight ago, Draco would have despised that expression, but now it gave him a thrill of hope. "What?"

"You said 'Harry', not 'Potter'," she said.

"Never mind that! What are you thinking? I recognize that crafty look of yours by now."

"Actually, I'm disgusted with myself for not thinking of it earlier. Kingsley. Harry's an Auror. How would they locate Harry if he were ever kidnapped? They've got to have some way—"

Draco Apparated before she could finish. Within five minutes, he was leaning over Shacklebolt's desk.

"Where is Potter?" Draco demanded.

"Mr. Malfoy, this is quite inappropriate. You nearly gave my Undersecretary—"

"*Where is he*?" Draco thundered. The Minister shot to his feet. Before he could snarl whatever words he thought might cause Draco to leave, Draco reached over the desk and snatched Shacklebolt's robes in a fist. The Minister raised his wand angrily, but paused when Draco continued. "I haven't seen him in two weeks. Do you understand what that means? *Two weeks*. If I don't find him soon, your Prime Auror and Chief Ministry Poster Boy is going to *die* if he isn't fucking dead already. I know you have some way of locating him, so out with it!"

The rage left Shacklebolt's face and he said calmly, "Let go."

Draco released him and sagged into a chair, suddenly fearing Granger's idea would end as fruitlessly as the others. The Minister seated himself and reached into a drawer. "I thought Potter was simply taking a much-needed break. You should have told me he was in danger."

He opened an envelope and shook out a scattering of what looked like small silver ingots. Each one was engraved with a set of initials. Kingsley's wand tip touched one marked with HJP.

"These are Portkeys, cast with a hair from each Auror. When activated, they can take us directly any missing Auror. We use them only in case of emergency, of course."

"This qualifies," Draco said dryly.

Shacklebolt slid the ingot across the desk toward Draco, who was somewhat surprised that the Minister would take him at his word, until he saw Shacklebolt's gaze slide toward the door. He turned and noticed Granger slouched in the doorway.

"Bring him back," she said.

Draco nodded, reached for the Portkey, and was swept away.

Wherever Potter had ended up, it was hot. Stifling, actually, and covered in sand and dust. Potter was sprawled on the floor of a dark corridor and for a terrifying moment Draco thought he was dead. He knelt quickly and gathered the limp Auror into his arms, and felt nearly overwhelming relief when the body stirred beneath his. On the heels of relief came the urge to shake the bastard for scaring Draco out of ten years of his life.

He gripped Potter tightly and pressed his cheek against the Auror's before whispering softly in his ear, "You are the stupidest person alive." He would have said more, but the Gryffindor had fainted dead away.

From the heat and the hieroglyphs on the walls, Draco deduced they were in Egypt, or somewhere near it. Still holding the Auror, he Apparated them directly to a hotel in Alexandria. Although he had been there a mere handful of times, the staff recognized Draco immediately and scrambled to arrange a decent room. They asked no questions whatsoever about why he carried

an unconscious man with him.

Once alone in the nicely-cooled room, Draco stripped off most of Potter's clothing, thinking that the Veela side of the Auror would benefit most from skin-on-skin contact. He removed his own clothing and climbed into bed with Potter. He wrapped himself around the Auror and felt Potter move against him. Draco slid a hand over his chest and then linked their fingers together, finally allowing himself to hope that the Gryffindor would be okay. He placed a soft kiss on the Auror's neck and touched it gently with his tongue.

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

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

"Idiot," Draco said, though he smiled and tightened his grip.

Potter was out for nearly two full days. Draco spent most of that time in bed with the Auror, holding him tightly and murmuring to him when Potter thrashed in the grip of dream assailants. He began to fear Potter would never awaken, and decided to take more drastic measures.

He caressed the Auror's skin, starting at the face and tracing over the famous scar before sliding gently over his forehead and smoothing down the dark eyebrows. Draco traced his nose and splayed his fingers over Potter's fine cheeks before gliding over the slightly parted lips.

There was no reaction as Draco's hand moved over Potter's neck and drew delicate circles on the collarbone and outlined his nipples. Draco's hand dropped lower and followed the soft line of hair down to the waistband of Potter's boxers. His lips took over where his fingers had been moments before and licked slow rings around one of Potter's nipples.

Draco's hand slipped beneath the waistband to touch Potter's cock, which hardened almost instantly in Draco's grip. He stroked gently and earned a moan from the Auror. He chuckled against Potter's skin and increased the tempo. Harry gasped and Draco felt the need to take those beautiful lips in his. He let go the hard nipple and captured Potter's mouth, plundering it with his tongue through the Auror's increasingly frantic gasps.

Draco's kiss muffled Potter's cry as he came, and Draco continued to stroke until the last pulse sent tremors though his fingers. He sucked gently at the Auror's lips one last time before pulling away with a smile.

"I thought that might wake you up," he said when the green eyes finally opened. Potter smiled at him, looking strangely bemused.

"You're awfully nice in my dreams," he commented, but the smile faded when a puzzled look crossed his face.

"No dream, Potter," Draco said and squeezed the Auror's softening cock once more before letting

it go. Potter looked nearly stricken as he took in his surroundings.

"I'm still in Egypt," he murmured in a shocked tone.

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

The green eyes snapped shut and Draco wondered what he was thinking beneath those shuttered orbs. Was he sorry for Draco's rescue?

"Why are you here?" the Auror whispered. Draco moved away and cast a quick Cleaning Charm on the seductive mess marking Potter's abdomen. The Auror cringed, but said nothing as Draco tugged the blankets up to his chest. He left the bed and poured a glass of water for Potter.

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

Potter glared, but he took the proffered glass and drained it. A second drink was dispatched just as quickly.

"How long have I been out?" he asked.

"Two days," Draco said as he returned the empty glass to the table. "You're probably starved. Can you walk?"

In typical Gryffindor fashion, the Auror immediately swung his legs off the bed and stood. His upright position lasted only a moment before he swayed and held out a panicked hand to stop himself falling. Draco caught him before he fell.

"Imbecile," he said quietly. He expected the Auror to fight him, but Potter only sighed and leaned his head against Draco's neck as he relaxed into the embrace.

"Come on," Draco said and eased him into a sitting position on the bed. "Get dressed, and we'll go get something to eat." He began to lob clothing at the Auror and pretended not to watch as Potter pulled on each item. As soon as each piece was in place, Draco longed to tear it off again. He finally stopped observing and gulped his own glass of water, wishing it were something stronger. He had to remember that Potter was not well.

"How much is this going to cost me?" Potter asked suddenly as they exited the bedroom into the outer portion of the suite.

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

"Seriously," the Auror snapped. "How much?"

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

"You don't have a heart."

The words hit Draco like a hot knife. He sneered to cover the wound. "Whatever. Let's go." He grabbed the Auror more roughly than intended and Apparated them to a crowded marketplace. It was in the wizarding section of Alexandria, but the place was just as loud and disorganized as the Muggle marketplace. Draco would have preferred to remain in the room and have the house-elves deliver food, but he did not trust himself to stay in such close proximity to the Auror with nothing to do. At least the city provided a distraction.

Draco purchased bread laden with figs and dates, a white-bean dish, and pastry, grinning at Potter's dubious expression. He Apparated them to a remote stretch of beach. Several benches dotted a long pier that jutted out over the azure waters of the Mediterranean. The sun was just beginning to set and left glittering patterns on the waves. They ate in silence, sitting close enough that a short lean would have allowed Draco to steal a kiss. He noticed Potter glancing at him several times, and wondered what thoughts tumbled through the Auror's mind.

Potter Vanished his paper wrapping and rose suddenly. Draco watched as the Auror walked down the pier and leaned against the railing. He seemed very pensive and Draco wondered if keeping him here was the right thing to do. He should probably drag the Auror back to London and allow Granger to browbeat him, but Draco wasn't quite ready to give him up, yet.

Draco silently joined Potter, who seemed lost in thought. He wondered if the Auror was sorry Draco had saved him. He nearly asked when Potter turned and met his gaze for a long minute, but in the end he did not dare to break the comfortable silence. Instead, he held out his hand and Potter took it. Draco silently Apparated them back to the hotel. His heart was pounding in a foolish rhythm as he released the Auror and stepped away. He cursed himself for his sudden attack of nerves.

"I think I'll read for a bit," he said quietly. Potter just nodded and padded into the other room.

Draco did not dare sleep with Potter, although he did climb into bed with him for a short time to cuddle him close and ease any Veela-induced agitation the Auror might experience. It wasn't exactly unpleasant for Draco, either. He held the sleeping Gryffindor for a half-hour and then returned to the other room where he transfigured a plush chair into a small bed. A small, very uncomfortable bed, as it turned out. Draco barely slept and awoke before dawn.

Draco left the hotel and went to the marketplace where he tried to revive himself with scalding Turkish coffee and plenty of sugar. He had no idea whether or not Potter drank coffee, so he purchased a pastry and Apparated back to the hotel just in time to see Potter exiting the bathroom. The Auror rubbed his hair with a damp towel, but he was already fully dressed and looked nearly back to normal. Draco cursed himself for leaving and wished he had foregone that last cup of coffee to return while Potter was still in the shower. Draco could have joined him…

He scowled and shoved the pastry into Potter's hands.

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

"The Library burned down."

"The *Muggle* Library burned down. Don't you know anything?" Draco smirked at Potter's annoyed look. "The Wizarding Library is underground, safe and sound after all these centuries."

Potter sighed heavily and Draco grinned. He reached out and curled a hand around the back of Potter's neck to draw him close. The Auror leaned into him as they Disapparated and his lips touched Draco's neck. They appeared in a huge, underground chamber and Draco stepped away from Potter quickly. The darkness was nearly complete but for a single pathetic oil lamp standing atop an ancient desk. Behind the desk sat a witch that appeared older than the desk. Draco smiled amicably at her.

"Hello, Madam," he said pleasantly. "What lovely robes you have there! Any woman with such a stunning sense of fashion cannot possibly be bookish enough to work here. You must be filling in for the regular attendant, are you not?"

The old girl showed him a gappy smile and giggled. "Oh, be off with you! I've seen many charmers like yourself in my day, all flattery and fluff, you are."

Draco huffed in pretend indignation. "I will have you know I'm made of stern stuff, Madam…"

"Just call me Gertrude, dearie. I have little doubt your need is dire or you wouldn't be wasting your time on an old thing like me. What are you looking for, dear?"

"Come, Potter," he said a short time later. "Lovely Gertrude has given us excellent directions to the Veela section." He blew a kiss to the giggling woman and lit his wand. They walked through a seemingly endless maze of shelves that stretched into the neverending darkness. The shelf markings were a nearly incomprehensible mishmash of Roman numerals and Latin phrases.

At last they reached the proper section and Draco spied a long table adorned with several dark lamps. He lit all of them with a flick of his wand and eyed the punishingly large number of books revealed on the nearby shelves.

"Have a seat, Potter," he said while trying to decipher which shelf was the likeliest candidate for the required information. He added, "And for pity's sake, eat. I won't have you fainting on me *again*."

He strode away as Potter obediently dropped onto a chair in front of the table. When Draco returned with half a dozen gigantic books, he was glad to see the Auror had finished the pastry. The books were actually quite fascinating. Draco loved to read and even the driest information

generally contained a tidbit of useful information. In the current case, nearly all of the information was useful. Unlike Potter, who was nigh unto useless. The Auror listlessly turned pages and acted for all the world like a child being punished. The only time he perked up was when Draco reached out an occasional hand to rest it on the back of his neck, in order to maintain the Veela contact the Auror needed.

After a time, Draco noticed Potter was not looking at the books at all and instead sat staring dreamily at Draco.

"You're not even reading, are you Potter?" he asked finally. The Auror flushed and stopped turning random pages, but he said nothing. "Dumbass," Draco said affectionately and grabbed Potter's neck to pull him into a sweet kiss. He meant to just give him a quick snog, but it quickly grew out of Draco's control. Potter was just too malleable and willing. Draco could have pulled him down onto the filthy floor and Potter would not have protested at all. Draco knew he had to have enough control for the both of them. He pulled away and Potter thankfully straightened in his chair, although he panted quite becomingly.

Draco stood and strode off into the shelves again. Once out of sight, he leaned against the shelves until he felt his blood begin to flow in more normal patterns. Bloody hell, he should have taken Potter back to London immediately, instead of putting himself through this torment. Draco had a fiancée, for fuck's sake. He had already cancelled a trip to France last week in order to search for the damned missing Auror. It would be beyond stupid for Draco to give in to this ridiculous lust, even if it did feel like quite a lot more. It couldn't be more. It simply couldn't.

Regardless, Draco was not ready to give Potter back up to the masses. He returned with another armful of books and began to read as if uninterrupted. Potter said nothing, and actually renewed his effort to be somewhat useful by opening another tome with determination.

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

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

He grabbed Potter's hand and Apparated them outside. The Auror's annoyed glare dissipated almost immediately and he tipped his head back as if to soak up the sunlight. The weather was actually passable and the sea breeze was refreshing. It ruffled Potter's black hair slightly and Draco felt a tightness in his throat as the Gryffindor looked at him with unrestrained joy. Fuck, but Potter was beautiful when he was happy. Well, he was beautiful all the time, but seeing that loopy smile was enough to make Draco willing to do almost anything to keep it there.

He flushed and shifted his gaze to the Mediterranean.

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

Potter's happy gaze turned to confused and Draco rolled his eyes.

"Come on, idiot. I know you're hungry."

Draco took them back to the marketplace, where he bought meat skewers and bread, and thick, dark coffee. It turned out Potter did not particularly care for it, but after adding an obscene amount of sugar and cream he managed to drink a glassful. After eating, they wandered the crowded market where Draco found loads of gifts for his mother: bolts of cloth, copper framed mirrors, mother-of-pearl inlaid wooden boxes, and delicate gold jewelry set with lapis and malachite. He noticed Potter admiring a golden chain adorned with a tiny ankh. Impulsively, Draco purchased it and fastened it around the Auror's neck, despite Potter's babbled protests.

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

Potter glared and Draco was almost sorry for lying. It was a stupid trinket, but it certainly meant more than Draco let on. The bit of gold was an apology and possibly a declaration of something Draco could never admit. Draco's heart warmed each time Potter's fingers touched necklace during their circuitous route through the marketplace. Finally, Draco was sick of the market and the crowds.

"We should go to Karnak," he said decisively. "You enjoy stomping around in dingy tombs, right? We'll go back to the Library tomorrow." Potter only smiled and held out his hands like the trusting, gorgeous fool he was. They went to Karnak.

Potter seemed awestruck by Karnak. He stared at the carvings and statues like any first-time tourist.

"Muggles have already raped most of this place," Draco said, feeling like a tour guide as he laughed at Potter's expression. "There are more artifacts in London than Egypt these days."

"Then why are we here?" Potter asked.

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

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

"We're closing soon," the man said absently.

"I'm prepared to make a large donation, of course," Draco said dryly in a tone that never failed to capture the attention of the inherently greedy. In a short time, he and Potter were deep beneath the temple among walls filled with hieroglyphs. The damned attendant had refused to allow Draco his wand, despite his superior powers of persuasion. They were apparently

hyperconcerned about theft, rightly so if the amount of Egyptian artifacts grabbed by other parts of the world were any indication. Nevertheless, Draco had agued lengthily as a matter of principle. To no avail. He and Potter were wandless.

Draco held a magically lit lantern high. It had been provided by the attendant.

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

"I can read it," Draco replied and repressed a grin when Potter tore at his hair slightly. It was rare that Draco could feel superior to the Auror, but he decided not to rub it in, especially when he became distracted by a blocked-off tunnel. A crude sign had been written in several languages.

Danger – Keep Out was emphasized with a crisscrossing of boards that could not have kept out a first year Slytherin. Draco peered through the boards curiously.

"Danger from what?" he mused.

"What difference does it make?" Potter asked.

"Where is your sense of adventure, Potter?" Draco countered.

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

"We're not bonded yet," Draco murmured, and tried not to think about what a true bonding would be like. It was foolish to even contemplate it. He yanked at the boards and wondered what Potter would say in response to Draco proposing such a concept. Draco nearly snorted aloud. Ha! Potter already hated being forced to accept Draco as a soulmate. Even though Granger had insisted that Potter loved him, Draco had seen no evidence of it other than Potter's Veela genes craving intimacy on whatever level Draco saw fit to deliver. Whether or not Potter actually wanted such rapport was unclear.

A board gave way with a splintering of wood, forcing Draco back to reality. He grinned as another plank of wood let go, leaving a space large enough for him to wriggle through. Draco immediately did so.

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

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

He took the light and started down the corridor. He felt a burst of satisfaction when he heard the Auror clamber though the boards after him.

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

"Safety is overrated, Potter." He reached up to touch a low beam that was propped over the ceiling and an instant later he was crushed beneath thunder, dust, and pain.

"*Draco*!" he heard Potter bellow before the pain turned to darkness.

There were strange dreams, visions of Potter yelling, and dust and darkness, and worried green eyes boring into his. He dreamt of bright light and tingling warmth, of soft lips and the rush of Apparition.

When he awoke, he was in his own bed and for a moment he wondered if all of it was a dream.

"Potter." He felt something close to panic. Perhaps Potter was not a Veela and was not Draco's soulmate. Perhaps he had dreamt everything: Potter's kisses, shouting at Shacklebolt, racing to Egypt—it could all have been unreal.

"Malfoy?" A sleepy voice murmured. A groping hand touched Draco's and he pulled the Auror onto the bed with such a crushing sense of relief he nearly felt giddy. He could not see the Auror in the darkness, but he knew it was Potter.

"I'm home?" he asked quietly.

"I brought you here," Potter said. "I was worried."

Draco thought of a hundred things to say to that, but instead he said quietly, "I think I was dead."

A hand squeezed his. "Not dead, but it was a near thing."

"You brought me back."

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

Draco chuckled into the darkness, unable to stop himself. "Potter, you are a dunderhead. You didn't read a word of that Veela lore, did you?"

Draco couldn't see him, but he could picture Potter's flush perfectly. "Of course I did."

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

A kiss was suddenly pressed into Draco's lips. As a way of silencing him, it had a definite charm. Draco wrapped his arms around the Auror and kissed him back. He had never fully given himself to Potter before; he had always held onto his reserve. Such foolishness seemed trivial now. Draco had nearly died, would have died if not for Potter, but it was more than that. Draco was tired of

denying himself.

His hands slid down Potter's back, beneath his shirt and up again. Potter trembled and Draco kissed him every way he knew how, from devouring, rough, and needy to gentle, slow kisses of devotion. Potter's hands roamed over Draco's skin without guidance, as though he sought to envelop Draco through touch.

Draco removed Potter's shirt with the Auror barely noticing. Draco was already nude but for his boxers. He was grateful to Potter for that little detail and grinned through the onslaught of hot kisses. He unfastened Potter's trousers with hands that shook slightly with the knowledge of what he was about to do.

Naturally, the Gryffindor in Potter would not be silenced.

"Malfoy, we… we can't…" He panted prettily against Draco's lips. Draco kissed him again to encourage silence and his hand closed over Potter's erection. The Auror whimpered and tore at the sheet suddenly, striving to get closer to Draco's flesh, kissing and touching him in near-frenzy. Then the sheet was gone, and so were the last of their clothes. Draco felt all of Potter—all of*Harry*—stretched out over him. Nothing had ever been quite so incredible. He dimly wondered why he had fought it at all. He shifted slightly and yielded everything to his former nemesis.

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

"Draco," Harry said in a tortured voice, thrilling him to the marrow with the sound of his name. "Oh god, Draco, we can't. The bond… we'll never escape the bond." Harry's body trembled wildly against him.

"It's okay," Draco said, trying to reassure the Gryffindor.

"No," Harry said.

Draco shifted and muttered a spell. The air was suddenly full of tiny purple lights, floating like fireflies. The motes surrounded Harry like a violet halo and gleamed against his midnight hair. Draco reached up and cupped Harry's cheek.

"I want you," Draco said earnestly. Astoundingly, it worked. Harry leaned down and kissed him with a moan of surrender. Draco felt the Auror's hands slide over him with something near to reverence. The touch was uncertain and Harry trembled almost violently. Draco took the Gryffindor's hands to calm him and then cast a few spells to ease the way. He opened himself to Harry and the Auror sheathed himself with gentle sloth, obviously trying to spare Draco any pain. After a moment, Draco tried to hurry him along with pressure on the Auror's firm arse. When that was unsuccessful, Draco arched and drove himself upward. Draco had only a moment to enjoy the sensation of being impaled by Harry Potter before a jolt of magic cascaded through

and around him. He felt like he'd been hit with a Cruicio, but the instead of pain it carried an electric sensation that woke up every nerve ending and left him gasping.

"Holy shit!" Draco breathed and met Harry's eyes. The Gryffindor looked just as shocked.

"Wow," Harry managed, nearly pulling a laugh from Draco at the understatement. He retaliated by moving against the Auror once more. The motion buried Harry so deeply inside of him that a very un-Malfoylike sound escaped his lips. It seemed to galvanize the Auror, who moved with the determination inherent in this particular Gryffindor. Harry was inexperienced, but he definitely made up for it with enthusiasm. Every thrust was gorgeous and he made certain not to neglect Draco's pleasure—his hand his slicked against Draco's cock with every jarring motion, until Draco could no longer hold back his moans of delight. They mingled with Harry's panting gasps and unintelligible murmurs. He wondered that the Auror could get a word out through the volume of kisses he planted on every part of Draco he could reach. Draco was no stranger to carnal pleasure, but he was definitely new to the feeling of being worshiped.

"Harry," he murmured once and then bit into the side of Harry's neck as he came. His orgasm was violent and brilliant and completely novel. Harry tried to hold back a scream as he came and Draco watched with amazement as the Auror arched backward and bit his lip until it bled. When his shudders eased, Draco wrapped his arms around Harry and held on tightly.

The Auror pressed gentle kisses into Draco's temple, jaw, and throat. Draco thought he might die of bliss merely from the aftermath of making love to Harry Potter. He sighed in supreme contentment. Harry must have misread the sigh, for he stopped tasting Draco and pulled out carefully. When Harry moved as if to slide off the bed, Draco caught his wrist with annoyance. Would Harry always think the worst of him?

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

Harry said nothing, but obediently slid next to Draco. Their eyes met and locked in the purpling light of Draco's magical motes. Harry opened his mouth to say something stupid, most likely, but Draco halted that ridiculous idea immediately.

"Don't," Draco said flatly.

Harry swallowed and then covered Draco hand with his own before lifting it and kissing each fingertip. Draco shut his eyes. When Harry finished his veneration of Draco's fingers, he took back his hand and wrapped it into Harry's thick hair. He dragged the Auror forward until his face was snuggled into Draco's chest. Harry sighed, threw an arm over Draco, and went to sleep.

Draco dreamed.

His fiancée waited for him in a stone walled church. The pews were empty, but the rows were bedecked with the flowers they had chosen together. The vicar waited for him with a beatific smile. Draco wondered in bemusement why he was the one walking down the aisle while she

waited. He thought it should be the other way round. When he reached her, he looked at his fiancée and felt a moment of disquiet.

The vicar cleared his throat and Draco looked back at the man, but he had been replaced by Harry Potter.

"Do you, Draco Malfoy, take this woman—?"

"No," Draco said.

Harry raised a brow and quirked a grin at him. "No?"

Draco's attention shifted back to his fiancée, who smiled at him encouragingly. "No."

With immense relief, Draco turned back to Harry and cupped his face in both hands. "No," he breathed and kissed his lover.

Draco woke up with the taste of Harry still on his lips and the dream flooding him with a nameless emotion. He reached across the sheets—to find nothing. He sat up quickly. The damned Auror was gone.

Draco threw himself out of bed and reached for his clothes with a glance at the clock. Nearly noon. He wondered how long Harry had been gone. A tapping sound drew his attention and he noticed a brown owl pecking at his window. He managed to open the glass without knocking the owl to the ground, though it was a near thing. The bloody stubborn thing did not want to move aside in the slightest. He recognized the baleful look in its eyes and avoided the beak when he untied the message. Damn Granger and her psychotic bird.

Her message consisted of three words. *Harry is here*.

Draco relaxed, knowing his little Veela was not going anywhere for awhile.

Several hours later, Draco Flooed through Granger's fireplace. She shot to her feet with a guilty look thrown in Harry's direction. Dissemblers, Gryffindors were *not*.

"I need to… um… get something from my room." Granger bolted for the hallway, and Harry glared after her suspiciously. Draco stalked toward the Auror.

"How dare you skulk out of my house like some 50-Knut whore?" he snarled, somewhat surprised at how quickly his banked rage returned to full flame.

Harry gaped at him in astonishment. "I did not 'skulk'! It was nearly 11:00 in the morning." The Auror quickly waved a piece of parchment at him. Draco wasn't sure if it was supposed to ward him off or placate him. "I was researching the Veela bond, and it led me to a tangent. I remembered a spell I used on a case last year to break a wraith possession. Hermione modified it

a bit, and I think it might work."

Draco snatched the parchment and read it thoughtfully while his anger turned to ice. He glared at Harry.

"This spell could kill you," he snapped.

Harry shrugged. "It's a slim chance."

Draco clenched his jaw and struggled to remain calm, though he longed to grab the Auror and shake the *stupid* out of him. Which would take quite a lot of shaking. The image defused his anger a bit and it diminished ever further when he realized Potter was willing to die rather than remain with him, even after what they had shared. It was a sobering thought. When he spoke, his voice was surprisingly soft. "You would rather risk death than be bonded with me?"

"Not for my sake," Harry said quickly. "I don't… mind, so much… being bonded to you." The Auror closed his eyes. Draco mercilessly allowed him to flounder onward. "But you don't deserve this. You don't want it, and it nearly got you killed once. I want you to be free."

Draco's eyes narrowed. "So your martyr complex compels you to sacrifice yourself?" He sneered. "How noble."

Harry scowled and Draco walked forward until he nearly touched the Auror. His voice was harsh when he spoke. "Don't presume to know what I want or do not want, Potter." He lifted his wand and pushed the tip of it into the soft flesh beneath Harry's chin, forcing the Gryffindor to meet his eyes.

"Here is what I think of your spell," Draco said and flicked the wand tip away from Harry to touch the parchment. It erupted into flame. Harry instinctively tried to save it with a cry, but Draco dropped the burning spell and caught Harry's hand. He gripped it almost savagely.

"No one leaves a Malfoy," he snarled and dragged Harry forward into a bruising kiss. The Auror had always melted before, had always succumbed to Draco's touch, but this time he held his ground and stared at Draco guardedly.

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

"Let's just say the idea is not as repugnant as it should be," Draco admitted and slid his gaze to somewhere just beyond Harry's shoulder. He did not relinquish his grip on the Auror when he added, "I broke my engagement this morning."

"What?" Harry asked idiotically.

"Shut up, Potter. You can't live at the Manor, because the house-elves hate you and would accidentally murder you in your sleep. And your flat is an atrocity. I refuse to live in a place with

fewer than six rooms designated for my own personal use."

Draco felt his words suddenly tangle together and threaten to turn into an incomprehensible babble, because the smile on Harry's face could have rivaled the sun for brilliance. Draco forged onward. "I will absolutely not live in the country—I'm allergic to wildflowers and… country air. Do stop looking at me like that, Potter, or I'll have you sent to—"

Harry's kiss cut off Draco's increasingly erratic speech and he sighed in relief. He leaned into the Auror, who chuckled against Draco's lips.

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

"I will, of course, pick out our house and you will buy it," Draco said and then paused. He felt as if the air had been knocked out of him. "Did you just say—?"

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

Draco couldn't speak for a full minute and a half. Apparently Granger had been correct. The fact that she was always correct had been overlooked, of course, but now Draco wondered why he had ever doubted her.

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

"What would that be?" Harry asked with a choked tone.

Draco whispered a suggestion into the Auror's ear and was nearly yanked from his feet by Harry dragging him toward the fireplace.

"Hermione! I'll owl you later!" Harry yelled as they stepped into the fireplace.

Draco held him tightly and took him home.