Storyid: 1096562
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Name: Blood Mingled
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Chapter 1 to 28

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Chapter: 1

Note to Readers:
".." Denotes speech *..* Denotes thoughts
Chapter 1: The Fall
"Watch out for that bludger!"
Harry heard Fred yell out as he turned to see the black ball come hurtling right towards his face and managed to duck just in time to hear the whoosh above him. His eyes followed the bludger as it hit one of the columns fiercely and come hurtling back towards Marcus Flint.
A wave of relief washed over his features and he gripped his broom handle and flew towards Fred.
"Thanks." He managed out, a little breathlessly.
"No problem, just keep your eyes peeled, huh?" said Fred, wiping the sweat off his brow in concentration. *This game's been going on for far too long. What I would do for a glass, no a jug of cool pumpkin juice. *
"Yeah, doing my best. Its just."
"Yeah I know." Fred threw him a sympathetic look. They were both tired and hot.
A loud groan broke through the pitch as the bludger-wounded column split down the middle and the metal skeleton of the structure tipped forward dangerously. The crowd let out an almost collective "Oh!"
And *Boom*. It finally crashed down onto the grassy pitch below.
Harry winced as he looked at the destroyed structure, metal parts strewn all over one part of the pitch as he tried not to think about what the bludger would have done to him instead.
"You are a lucky bastard, aren't you?"
Harry turned to see Draco Malfoy hovering on his Firebolt, with a smug grin on his face and he sighed inwardly.
"Still, no use crying over spilt milk, isn't it, Potter? We can only hope that you won't be quite so lucky next time."
Harry heard him but refused to look in Draco's direction. Instead he furrowed his brows and looked for any telltale glint of the golden snitch.
He heard Draco snort softly and knew he was pissed off that Harry wasn't rising to his bait.
Suddenly there it was. Harry caught a glint of the snitch over to his right, about 100 feet away

and he instinctively shot off towards that glint, already visualizing his hands going over the cool metal surface of the tiny ball.
Draco spotted it as well and raced off to join Harry and pretty soon they were neck and neck. Both boys desperate to end the match and return to the cool shade of the showers and relax in the celebratory aftermatch.
The snitch moved faster, as if sensing that its been spotted by the seekers.
Both of them moved seamlessly together as if being pulled by an invisible string, mirroring the snitch's movements almost perfectly, yet only a hair's breadth behind.
"Looks like its anyone's match now. Slytherin and Gryffindor are neck to neck. Oh! So close!" Lee Jordan's voice boomed over the speakerphones as the snitch was almost in Harry's grasp before it sped off down to the other side of the pitch.
Draco frowned. *How could he have been so careless? Potter almost won the match. Again.* he thought bitterly to himself.
He sneered as he stole a quick glance over to his archrival who was bent over his handle with a fierce determination in his eyes.
So you think you're going to get the snitch again, don't you? You arrogant little mudblood lover. Well, we'll see about that.
They were halfway over the length of the pitch now, headed near to the column wreckage.
The snitch suddenly dove down and entered the broken frames of the spiny metal, as if seeking temporary refuge.
Draco and Harry stopped and hovered over the wreck.
They both knew they had no choice now but to wait for the snitch to make its exit. The gaps in the metal were far too small to let them fly through safely and continue with their chase.
Harry's dark eyes followed the movements of the little snitch, determined not to lose sight of it again. He didn't notice Draco's steely gaze on him, a hateful sneer on his lips.
God, how he hated The-Boy-Who-Lived. How much simpler his life would be if he had just been The-Boy-Who-Died instead.
At that moment Harry suddenly looked up and met Draco's hateful gaze. He shuddered a little. There was so much hate in it, those eyes were pure venom. Aimed only and directly for Harry.
He must really, really hate me. And why am I surprised, this is Draco Malfoy. thought Harry, trying to get he chill off his spine as he drew in a deep breath.
He could still feel Draco's grey eyes boring through him but he forced himself to look at the snitch's movements instead.
It suddenly stopped weaving in and out and hung in mid-air, a few inches above the wreckage, as if trying to sense whether or not it was safe to venture out.
Harry readied himself as the snitch took off, straight up in the air. He swiftly maneuvered his broom to an almost complete vertical shift.
Draco; suddenly caught short of his hateful reverie growled as his nemesis flew off in hot pursuit of the coveted snitch.
He took off in a dangerous burst of speed and almost gave himself a whiplash but that risk gave him the added boost he needed to catch up to Harry.
They were soon neck and neck again.
To everyone in the stands, they looked like two vertical blurs of red and green.
Harry was a breath away from the snitch and he could sense Draco right next to him. He reached out his right arm in a move to close his grip on the snitch. And he could hear Draco growl softly

beside him.
As his fingers closed over the fluttering snitch, he was almost jolted off his broom. He caught himself at the last second as he felt a searing pain down the right side of his ribcage. Draco had elbowed him there sharply in a fit of rage when he saw Harry had gotten the snitch. Apparently nobody else had, not yet anyway.
Harry was still bent over in pain, breathless and he couldn't hold up his snitch to the crowd. Draco grinned, an evil glint in his eye. And what happened next, nobody else knew exactly.
In a fit of fury, he had swung his left arm over and hit Harry over the side of his head with a force. He felt a momentary twinge of satisfaction at his move.
That was before Harry toppled off his broom.
Which would have been fine with Malfoy, except Harry had instinctively clutched at the nearest thing to fix his balance. And the nearest thing, or rather person; was Draco.
The crowd hushed in perfect silence, as the two seekers fell off their brooms.
To Harry, it seemed as if their fall was in slow motion. He was barely aware of Draco falling on top of him.
And he felt a sharp lightning pain course through his chest as he landed on the ground.
Oh God!
He let out a strangled gasp as he felt the blood spurt out of his mouth.
Draco fell heavily on top of him, half of his left side was covered by Draco's own left side.
I can't breathe, this can't be happening. screamed Harry in his head, taken over by momentary panic by this sudden turn of events.
Draco felt a hot sharp stab to his chest as he fell on top of Harry. *No, God, no.*
A warmth had slowly spread between the two of them. Fresh blood spread itself between the two boys.
The horrifying scene had momentarily stunned everyone, even Dumbledore who was in the stands with the other professors.
The two boys had fallen directly on a sharp metal spike, courtesy of the earlier wreckage. The spike's end wasn't visible from Draco's back, but it had definitely staked him. And it had speared Harry right through.
An almost deafening pandemonium ensued as Dumbledore left the stand to break out into a run. In mid-stride, he yelled out "Protectus Temporarus!" and pointed his wand towards the two boys. The other professors, jolted out off their stunned horror at the brutal scene, immediately went to his aid and rushed to join their headmaster.
Harry laid his head back on the soft grass, he suddenly felt Draco turn his head to face him. They looked at each other in muted silence, fear in their eyes. The blood was trickling down Draco's lips.
"Potter."he whispered raspily.
Harry could almost hear the sound of his heart beating slowly in his battered chest. Or was it Draco's heartbeat? He didn't know.
He felt his heart thump in his chest as he let out a small gasp, and his eyes looked blankly up to the blue sky above them.
He felt it. An overwhelming surge filling his heart. For that brief second, it seemed as if they were one.
Draco.
He met those grey eyes again and knew he had felt it too.

"No! Don't move them!" voices interjected in the background, sounding so far away as Harry and Draco closed their eyes and resigned themselves to the enveloping darkness.
Harry's hand unfurled its grasp. And the golden snitch rolled out of his palm onto the gr

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Chapter: 2

Chapter 2: The Next Day
"Will they live?" asked Professor McGonogall, her voice tense with worry. She had spent most of the harried morning and the day before reassuring the students, that Harry and Draco would be all right. Most of the enquiries were for Harry, but the Slytherins were equally worried for their seeker. And other students, though not fond of the Slytherin, were kind enough to enquire about Draco's welfare as well.
The incident had almost given the 2 rival houses some solidarity in their grief. Both houses had put aside their usual petty insults and snide remarks, at least for this period.
"Yes, but barely."
"The headmaster may have very well have saved their lives. That spike punctured their hearts. Punctured Harry right through. They should be dead, if not for that temporary protection spell from Dumbledore." said Madam Pomfrey.
Her usual brisk, jovial voice had been replaced by a weary, tired one. She, with the assistance of Professor Snape and Dumbledore had worked all night, on a combination of healing potions, protection spells and blood restoration charms. All had thankfully worked well, and now the boys were in stable condition, though extremely weak from their ordeal.
They were lying on hospital beds next to one another. Both looking extremely pale and fragile in their light blue pajamas.
Madam Pomfrey had attached a warning charm on them earlier, in case their condition took a turn for the worse, she would be alerted immediately, along with Dumbledore and Snape, at their insistence.
Both were extremely worried. *And who could blame them?* thought Madam Pomfrey with a slight shake of her head as she tucked a coverlet over Harry and did the same for Draco.
It was mid-afternoon and the sun was creeping slowly down the horizon. An almost peaceful, serene atmosphere could be felt as the lengthening shadows moved slowly about the orange light bathing the 2 boys.
"Is he all right?" Hermione almost shouted as he burst into the hospital room suddenly, the doors thrown open in her haste.
Ron joined soon behind her. He looked as if he hadn't slept at all the previous night.
No students were allowed to visit until now. The day's classes had just finished and Hermione and Ron practically ran all the way from Herbology to the hospital.
Both had sat up all night, comforting each other. Fearing the worst for their friend.
Minerva was about to chastise her 2 students when she saw the dark circles and red rimmed eyes they both had. Her heart softened and she nodded to Madam Pomfrey.
"He'll be all right, from the looks of him." She said softly, patting Hermione on her shoulder

before she stepped out of the room to give the 2 friends some time alone.
Madam Pomfrey nodded and motioned for the 2 to come nearer.
"He's still sleeping. They're both worn out and I expect he won't be waking up so soon. It takes time to heal from such a serious... accident." She added.
"You can both stay with him until the dinner bell, but try not to wake him." She finished before leaving to the storeroom with a pile of folded linen in her arms.
Ron was the first one to move closer to the bed, Hermione soon followed suit. Both were taken aback by Harry's appearance. His face was pale and gaunt; a dark shadow had settled beneath his closed lids and his chest were drawing weak ragged breaths.
He looked like broken child.
Hermione caught her bottom lip with her teeth and bit back her tears. She can't cry again. She'd been doing that; it seemed the whole of last night.
Ron unconsciously reached out for her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze as they stood next to each other by Harry's bed, looking down at him.
"He'll be all right, you heard what Pomfrey said. That's the most important thing. We didn't lose him, Hermione." Ron told Hermione and it seemed, himself too.
Hermione nodded and gave Ron a small weak smile.
"He'll be up and about in no time at all, you'll see." Ron said again. As he looked at his best friend's white face, the fear and worry closed over his heart like a cold fist.
No, I have to be strong, for Hermione. He shook himself and squeezed her hand again.
Hermione let out a sigh as her eyes welled up with tears she can't control. "You're right, Ron. I'm just so relieved, that's all."
"I know, Hermione. I know." He pulled her in close and she rested her head on his shoulder before giving in to her tears fu

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Chapter: 3

Author's Note: Wow! I was just uploading this fic and when I refreshed the page there were 2 reviews! I couldn't believe my eyes. I can't stop smiling now. Oh boy, and I was just about to turn off my PC and turn in for the night, too. Thank you Caet Rae and Myrddin Ambrosius! You made my day! (or night, rather)
I'll write more ASAP. The story is finished in my head, its just taking longer to put words to screen. (Ok back to the story.
Chapter 3: Awakening
(1 week later)
Draco stirred in his bed, a breeze tickling a strand of his blonde hair to the tip of his nose. He sniffed and opened his eyes slowly.
As his vision adjusted to the weak light, he could make out that he was in a hospital room.
He tried to sit up and winced in pain. He instinctively reached up to his chest and felt the bandages bound around him underneath his pajama top.
He tried to think. *What the hell happened?*

The last thing he remembered was Harry's face.
Those green eyes, looking right at him. And at that moment he thought that he was dying, that this was the end.
He sighed softly and laid back against the pillow, closing his eyes as the memory of that fateful match came back slowly in fragmented pieces.
It was my fault.
He turned and faced the bed next to him; a figure was sleeping soundly on it. His dark hair rumpled against the white pillow. It was Harry.
The door suddenly opened, and Madam Pomfrey stepped in.
She stopped short when she saw that Draco was awake.
"Oh my! You're up!"
Draco frowned slightly at her as she turned and fled out of the room, obviously excited.
Less than a few minutes later, she came back with the headmaster, Professor Snape and McGonagall in tow.
All of them looked extremely pleased, even Snape; who was managing an actual smile.
Wow, I'm actually touched. thought Draco.
Dumbledore spoke first.
"Welcome back, Mr. Malfoy. We were afraid you would be sleeping until the term is over."
"Well, I'm up now. How long have I been asleep?"
"Oh, about a week now."
"Really?" Draco eyes widened slightly at this.
"Do you remember what happened?" Draco nodded silently at the headmaster who continued.
"Yes, both you and Harry had rather serious injuries and they had to heal slowly. We couldn't take any chances."
At the mention of Harry's name, Draco blurted out before he could stop himself.
"What about Harry? He hasn't woken up yet."
This time Madam Pomfrey answered.
"Well, Harry bore the brunt of the fall and he suffered much more blood loss than you did. It just takes a bit longer for him, dear." she said kindly as she saw the worry etched deep in Draco's eyes.
"Yes, Draco. Potter will be fine. He always is." interrupted Snape as he moved closer to Draco's bed and put an awkward hand on his shoulder. "Meanwhile, your housemates send their regards. You've been missed in Potions."
Draco smiled weakly at the Potions Master and mumbled his thanks.
"And now that you're awake, I expect you'll be wanting something to eat." The headmaster noted with a twinkle in his eye.
"No, no. I'm not hungry." protested Draco before the low grumble of his stomach gave him away.
After a few more minutes of small talk and Draco reassuring them that he was feeling very much alive, they left the room and Madam Pomfrey conjured up a dinner of steaming stew, chocolate pudding, pumpkin juice and complete with mashed potatoes and gravy on the side.
Draco dug into his food lustily. He hadn't felt this ravenous since, well ever.
Next to him, Harry's eyes fluttered. And slowly opened.
"Draco?"
The spoon stopped in mid-air, inches from Draco's mouth as he heard his name being spoken.
His heart skipped a beat in his chest and he took a small gulp before turning to face Harry's bed.

Harry had turned on his side to face Draco. His half-opened eyes were still heavy lidded and he looked extremely weak.
"Where.. are we?" he managed out slowly.
Draco put down his spoon back into the bowl, his hunger forgotten.
He slowly slid his feet to the cold floor, biting back the pain shooting up his ribs and sat facing Harry's form that was still slumped in his pillow.
"Harry, we're in the hospital. Are you all right?" he asked, the concern betraying his otherwise steady voice. But Harry didn't seem to notice.
He had fallen back into slumber. His face looked so peaceful and vulnerable at the same time that before he knew what he was doing, Draco had taken a few steps and walked over to his bedside. He reached out and touched Harry's hair, absentmindedly stroking it, frowning at the sleeping boy.
Shit, what the heck am I doing?
He let out a small startled gasp and took a step back as he tried to make sense of what he just did.
It's just Potter. I'm supposed to hate him, for god's sake!
His young mind was reeling with the implications. Made worse by the confusion coming deep from his heart. A dull ache not caused by his injury had settled there.
He took a few more steps back and sat down on the edge of his own bed. But he didn't turn around.
He just sat there, staring at Harry, until long after the sun had set. His dinner had been left cold and long forgotten by t

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Chapter: 4

Author's Note: THANK YOU everyone for your great reviews! I still can't believe that people are actually reading this! (!) It boggles the mind!
You know what? It feels like this huge smile is permanently fixed on my face now, and I don't care that people in the office are looking at me knew you could feel this happy on a Monday morning?
Again, a million times thank you! You guys made me so happy! Love you all!
Chapter 4: Morning After
(The next morning)
Draco woke up and rubbed his eyes sleepily. He looked around and tried to remember that he was in the hospital room and not in his dorm room with the other Slytherins. He covered a small yawn with the back of his right hand.
He had crawled under his covers and fell asleep only a few hours ago. He hadn't realized that he had just been sitting there staring at Harry for so long.
It was still early and the first signs of light were just beginning to show through the white French doors leading to the small balcony outside the hospital room.
Draco shifted his body to face it and was just about to go back to sleep when he realised that the bed facing him was now empty.

He sat up with a start.
Harry?
His heart was beating furiously as mad thoughts of Harry's lifeless body being taken away in the middle of the night ran through his mind. A surge of panic traveled through his body and he shook visibly.
God, what the hell is wrong with me. Get a grip, Malfoy.
Suddenly he spotted a small movement in the balcony. He watched it for a while before he stood up from his bed and started walking towards it.
Harry was sitting on top of the balcony's grey stone ledge, his back resting against one side of the wall. The ledge was wide enough so that he could sit comfortably with his knees folded up to his chest. He had a faraway look in his eyes and didn't see Draco step through the French doors.
"Harry?" Draco started, a little nervously, stepping forward. The relief of seeing Harry safe and alive was still flooding through his veins and he couldn't quite breathe properly yet.
Harry turned to Draco, startled out of his private thoughts.
"Oh, you're up. Sorry, did I wake you?"
Draco smiled. "No, no. I was just worried when I didn't see you in bed."
Did Draco Malfoy just smile at me?
Draco must have seen the incredulous look cross Harry's face when he suddenly caught himself and tried to straighten his mouth, which was threatening to break out into another infuriating smile. *Damn it*
"Oh sorry, didn't mean to alarm anyone. I woke up an hour ago and couldn't go back to sleep so I came out here." He paused thoughtfully.
"Uhm, Draco? We had an accident. Right?" Harry asked, with an uncertain tone.
"Yes, we did." Draco frowned slightly at this. "Don't you remember what happened?"
"Little bits." He sighed deeply. "I've been sitting here trying to remember, but I'm still rather fuzzy on the details."
Harry sighed again and resting the back of his head on the wall, he closed his eyes.
"Oh." Draco suddenly felt overwhelming sense of guilt bearing down on him as he was looking at Harry's weary expression. *Does he remember what I did? It must all have happened so fast for him.* He gulped and moved a little closer to the boy.
Dim light from the dawning sun was washing over Harry's face.
Draco noticed that Harry's dark hair caught the reddish glints as a soft breeze ruffled his long dark fringe over his forehead.
He had to resist the sudden powerful urge to reach out and brush back those strands back. Instead he started to take a few steps closer towards Harry.
Harry suddenly opened his eyes and turned to him, his eyes wide. "I remember one thing, though."
Draco stopped in mid-stride.
A pause as Draco looked at him expectantly. "Oh?"
Harry opened his mouth, as if to say something. He then promptly closed it again, thinking better of it and stuttered "Err, its nothing." He felt himself flush for no good reason.
"I see." Draco looked down at his bare feet, suddenly feeling very awkward.
"I mean, I remember thinking I was going to die." Harry quickly finished. *Phew, that was close* thought Harry.
"Oh yeah. Me too." Draco tried to keep his voice level, for some strange reason he felt utterly

disappointed with Harry's perfectly reasonable answer.
Draco shuffled his feet awkwardly for a few seconds and was about to turn to leave the balcony and go back to his bed.
Seeing this, Harry felt suddenly desperate for Draco to stay with him and continue their conversation. *Must be the blood loss* he thought to himself and frowned slightly.
"It's weird though, isn't it?" Harry said hurriedly. He felt an irrational gladness spread through him when he saw that Draco now stayed in his spot and didn't seem to be making any more moves towards the doors.
"What is?" Draco lifted a questioning eyebrow at him.
Harry slowly swung his legs down from the ledge, with a small grimace and let his bare feet dangle above the floor, so that he was facing Draco.
"All my life," he said "I've been hidden away and protected from Voldemort; someone who so desperately wants me dead and will do almost anything to get there. I've even had to fight him to stay alive. And no doubt, he'll be after me again as soon as he gets a good enough chance. But yesterday." he paused for a moment "Yesterday, everything almost ended for me. And it wasn't Voldemort; it wasn't a dementor or even a death eater. It was a simple school Quidditch match that almost did it."
"And the single most ironic thing is that its one of the things I love most in life." He looked at Draco.
Draco listened to this and he nodded. "You're right, Harry. Except for one thing."
"And what's that?" came Harry's slightly muffled reply. He was now concentrating on trying to slide himself down from the ledge and stand up without causing too much pain through his chest.
"Erm, that match? It was over a week ago."
"What?" At this, Harry couldn't help but look up at Draco, in disbelief and shock.
Unfortunately, that momentary lapse made him lose his footing and he half- stumbled, half-collapsed over. And he was about to land painfully on the hard stone floor.
Except for a pair of strong arms, which swiftly circled his waist, keeping him upright.
He instinctively gripped the back of Draco's arms with his hands to give himself more support.
He looked up gratefully and was about to blurt out a quick thanks when he stopped and saw that Draco was staring at him.
Not just looking, but staring. Unabashedly into his eyes. It was strange. His face was completely devoid of expression; he wasn't even blinking, simply staring into Harry's green and somewhat astonished eyes. As if it was the most normal and natural thing in the world.
Harry felt his heart skip a beat in his chest, which was pressed tightly against Draco's own. And stared back in silence.
Behind them the reddish light was swiftly changing into an orange glow.
Neither of the two moved away.
Harry felt as if he was hypnotised. Stunned speechless and completely thrown by this sudden unexpected development, he'd stopped breathing completely on his part.
Still, he couldn't make himself move away. Instead he gripped Draco's arms tighter, in a bid to try to keep away a violent shudder that was threatening to break out all over his body at any moment.
"Boys!" Suddenly a loud voice from the hospital room broke through the air, breaking them out of their spell.
Harry blinked as he felt Draco quickly let him go and move back a few steps. With the sudden

loss of those arms around him, Harry felt cold and somewhat abandoned almost immediately. He was also gasping for breath. Apparently his lungs weren't too pleased by him not breathing during those precious few seconds.
The doors swung open and missed hitting Draco by inches.
And Madam Pomfrey burst through, reminiscent of a raging bull.
"Where are." she stopped when she saw the two standing in the balcony. "Oh, thank god, there you are." She breathed out a heavy sigh of relief as she clutched both hands over her chest.
Immediately after somewhat regaining her composure, Madam Pomfrey looked like she was just about to start yelling at the two for being out of their beds when she suddenly struck by a realisation. Standing but a few feet from her.
She turned to Harry and gasped.
"Harry. You're awa

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Chapter: 5

Author's Note: Again, I'm loving the reviews.
author gives each and every one of the gorgeous, sexy, talented reviewers big noisy kisses on each cheek
(You guys should probably know that I'm starting to develop a strange addiction for compliments and other forms of positive reinforcement. I expect this might lead to some therapy in future and at least a few awkward moments with my boss. But I'm trying not to think about this.)
Some current/overdue special thanks: Thanks to Fin-Phoenix & Darragh Tieraneux, who referred to me as a 'writer'. I am awestruck and humbled by the association- you have no idea...
SnippyandSnarky: Yes, it does me give some sort of motivation to write faster. Hugs to Hippy Flower=Voldie's Kid, your enthusiasm is wonderful. & hugs to zipzoey, thanks for the cookie and your great feedback on that scene, I was worried people wouldn't appreciate the gore - which I have an affinity for myself.
Chapter 5: Reunion
Soon after Madam Pomfrey had recovered from her shock of seeing Harry awake, she immediately dragged him back into his bed and forced him into it before flying down the corridor.
Not long after that, Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall entered the room and rushed over to his bedside, beaming at him, and showering him with reassurances that everything was all right and he'd be back to his classes very soon, his friends were missing him terribly and that the Quidditch matches had been postponed until further notice.
The headmaster had acted a little strangely, he kept asking Harry a few times if he'd felt any different. Which Harry thought was an odd thing to ask to someone who'd recently almost died and been in a coma for a week. *He must've been really worried, I guess* he thought as he brushed it off his mind.
Hagrid had also come with them and gave Harry such an enormous bear hug before he left that Harry was afraid his ribs would break again.

They were still not allowed to go to classes or go back to their dorms. Madam Pomfrey had insisted on keeping an eye on her two invalids for a couple of days.
Harry sighed and leaned back and he rested against his pillow. He was sitting up on his bed. It had been wonderful to see everyone so concerned about him but truthfully it had also worn him out.
"Tired?"
Harry turned at sound of the voice. He had almost forgotten that Draco was still in the bed next to his; he'd been so quiet the entire time. Also Hagrid had effectively blocked any view of the boy with his large frame.
Harry looked at Draco who was sitting cross-legged on his bed, and noticed for the first time how skinny he was. And his skin and blonde hair were so fair that the combination of it it made him appear all the more fragile and delicate.
"Hmmm."
"What are you looking at?" Draco asked, a little defensively as he noticed how Harry's eyes were appraising him all of a sudden.
"Oh, nothing. You should eat more. You're too thin."
"Ha! You're one to talk..." Draco sniffed slightly, looking pointedly at Harry's own skinny frame.
Harry looked down at himself and shrugged.
Suddenly he felt a dull throb on his chest right over his wound, and he winced visibly at the pain and placed his hand over his chest. He could feel the bandages underneath the thin material of his silk pajama top. The pain only lasted for a second though and he curiously started to lift up the bottom of his shirt to look at the bandages that bound him.
The wide strips of cotton had been wrapped from his upper chest, beginning from underneath his armpits and several times over where it ended a couple of inches above his navel. He tentatively fingered the area right over the area where the spike had exited and entered Draco.
He wondered briefly what the wound must look like underneath and remembered he had another one in his back where the spike had run through first.
"I keep forgetting how bad it was." he said absentmindedly to Draco, his eyes still on the bandages, prodding it with his fingers with all the curiosity of a child.
When he didn't hear a response, he looked up and saw Draco looking at him with his mouth slightly open.
He suddenly realised that he'd been sitting there all this time with his shirt flap tucked under his chin, exposing himself to Draco, and hastily pushed his shirt back down.
That move made Draco quickly avert his eyes, trying to cover up his embarrassment for having been caught staring at his enemy's chest. *Well, it was a rather nice chest.*
He groaned inwardly and started to pick at the coverlet on his bed, his fingers finding a loose thread and pulling it out.
"Errr..." Harry started, noticing Draco's obvious discomfort and feeling a little guilty for somehow causing it.
He didn't get to finish however, because at that moment the doors burst open and Ron and Hermione came tearing into the room.
"Harry!"
"Ron! Hermione!" Harry exclaimed in surprise.
He didn't manage to get anymore out because he was suddenly being enveloped by two pairs of arms hugging him. Harry laughed and hugged them back.

Hermione squeezed him hard, and planted a big loud kiss on his cheek, before hugging him again.
"All right, Hermione..." Ron said jokingly, he'd already pulled back and had plopped himself on the foot of Harry's bed "Errr...I think you might be squeezing the life out him."
"Oh!" Hermione stood back quickly, looking a little flustered and concerned. "Did I hurt you, Harry?" she asked worriedly, looking at her friend.
"No, no, Hermione, I'm fine. Ron's just kidding." he said, laughing. It felt so good to be with his two best friends in the world again. He hadn't realised how much he missed being with them.
"Ah." she said, shooting Ron a look, who was completely oblivious or at least pretending to be. He was still smiling at Harry and couldn't help it. It felt like such a huge relief to see his best friend awake and himself again.
The past week of going to classes alone, not seeing him at the Great Hall at mealtimes, and not being able to hang out together in the Gryffindor common room like they always did, had been very lonely for Ron. Hermione had been a great friend, but she's not nearly as much fun as Harry, and her idea of hanging out comprised mostly of going to the library and getting a head start on homework.
Although Ron had to admit that he managed to do some of his best work last week. But not that he wanted to make a habit out of it or anything.
"So, when are you getting out of here, then?" he asked impatiently.
"Not for a couple of days. Pomfrey still wants to keep an eye on us, I guess." Harry sighed.
At the mention of 'us', Ron instinctively looked over at Draco, who seemed to be busy doing something to his coverlet. He frowned and opened his mouth to say something to Malfoy, when Hermione interrupted him.
"Well, don't you worry about all the homework you've missed, Harry. I've been keeping tabs on all the assignments that you need to do." she continued thoughtfully, "Some of them are due quite soon, so you might want to get started on them right away. Would you like me to bring them over to you? You can get started on them here." she looked at Harry expectantly.
For once Harry was thankful for Hermione's enthusiasm for schoolwork. He had seen the look on Ron's face and was afraid that his best friend was about to say something mean to Draco and he didn't want that.
Not now, not when everything's changed.
Hearing Hermione's little speech, Ron, distracted, turned away from Draco to her, "Hermione, Harry doesn't need to do his homework right now. There's more important things to think about!"
"Like what?" Hermione frowned, hands on her hips.
"Well, like..like...Everything!" Ron said, throwing his hands up in the air to prove his point.
"Oh... really? Well, that wasn't what you said when Professor McGonagall gave you that mark for your Transfiguration paper a few days ago..." Hermione said slyly.
Ron turned red and managed an embarrassed half-smirk.
"Er, what's she on about, Ron?" Harry asked, wondering what other secrets the two were keeping from him.
"I got a 78!"
"Wow, that's great!" "But How? I mean, I don't mean to be bad but..." he teased.
Which promptly earned him a pillow on his face. He threw it back at Ron, who clearly wasn't expecting this and got it full on his face. Laughter from Hermione. Ron playfully lunged at Harry and a mock struggle ensued. After a few minutes of play, both boys finally gave up and slumped

next to each other in defeat.
"Harry."
"Yes, Ron."
"I'm glad you're back." and he put his arm behind Harry and ruffled his already messy hair.
"Me too." He grinned at Ron and then at Hermione who practically fell on top of Harry and hugged him again.
Nobody noticed Draco had l

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Chapter: 6

Chapter 6: The Tower
Harry only realised that Draco had gone after Ron and Hermione said goodbye to him to go have their breakfast in the Great Hall.
Damn, I better go find him and bring him back before Pomfrey finds out. he thought, feeling slightly guilty for not having noticed when Draco had slipped out.
He left the room quietly, lest Madam Pomfrey was somewhere nearby. He didn't fancy getting dragged back into bed again.
He shook his head slightly to himself *Honestly, that woman must think we're made of glass or something.*
He looked down both sides of the corridor and tried to figure out which way Draco might have gone.
He couldn't have gone right, that leads to the classrooms and towards the Great Hall.
Somehow Harry knew that Draco would probably want to be alone, and not surrounded by people.
He looked to the corridor leading to his left, he didn't really know where it led to. It looked kind of dark and a little disused.
Perfect.
He made his way down the corridor and came to the end where it forked out in two different directions. One way led to outside and as Harry neared it and nudged the door open, he could see Hagrid's hut in the far distance. There was a little smoke furling out from the chimney. *He must be making breakfast now.* And his stomach growled in response to remind him that he hadn't had his yet.
Harry closed the door and turned back to go the other way, and quickened his pace slightly. Somehow he didn't think that Draco would want to go outside either.
He almost missed it.
Except for a familiar drawl that stopped him in his tracks.
"Going somewhere?"
"Draco!"
He turned and saw that Draco sitting halfway up some stone steps. The steps were leading up a winding staircase, which was buried in the right wall of the long corridor. The stairway had been partially hidden from view from a huge stone statue of a menacing looking gargoyle; so that

people passing by the corridor would not likely see it unless they knew it was there.
"What are you doing?" Harry demanded.
"Last time I checked, this was called sitting." Draco said sarcastically. He didn't make any move to stand up, but instead propped his elbows on the steps behind him and leaned back, glaring at Harry.
Is he mad at me or something? Harry wondered.
"Why did you leave? Pomfrey will have a conniption when she finds you're not in the room."
"Not to mention the obvious here, but so are you."
"I only left to look for you and drag you back!" he protested.
Draco smirked but he couldn't help feeling a little glad that Harry Potter had came out to look for him.
"And do you really think you could manage that?" he challenged back.
Harry took a step forward closer to Draco, as if to prove that he could.
Draco also chose the same moment to stand up rather suddenly and their noses almost bumped, they were suddenly standing so close.
Neither moved or blinked.
Despite Harry's growing anger at Draco, his heart still managed to jump in his chest slightly at the proximity.
Draco spoke first.
"You seemed pretty busy the last time I checked. It's a wonder you noticed I was gone at all." It was more of a statement, than a question. But something vulnerable flickered over Draco's eyes for a split second when he said it that Harry couldn't ignore.
"Well, I did." he said softly.
Draco acknowledged this silently and stepped back, feeling a little self- conscious all of a sudden.
He nodded but didn't look at Harry, or couldn't, fixing his eyes down the corridor instead. He lifted his right hand and run it through his flaxen hair, swallowing back a small gulp.
Harry felt he should say something; anything to break the awkward silence.
"So. . .where does this lead to anyway?" he asked, looking towards the staircase.
"Oh. Uhm, just a tower." Draco shrugged.
"Really?" Harry took a few steps up and craned his neck to try to see to the top of it.
"You want to take a look?"
"Why not?"
They made their way slowly up and Harry had to gape at what he saw.
The view from the small tower was completely unobstructed by any castle walls. Harry could see most of the school grounds easily. The Dark Forest loomed over to one side, and there was a storm building up from over it, though the rest of the sky was still relatively bright and clear.
"How'd you find this place?" still gaping when he turned to Draco.
"By accident. I was flying around on my broom and it started to rain. I saw the tower and landed on it. Hardly anyone comes here. You know, because the entranceway is quite hidden and all."
"It's great." Harry said, taking in the view again.
"Yeah, I guess it is." He said quietly, trying to see what Harry saw. He'd come up here a few times to be alone after he chanced upon it, but he didn't think it was anything special.
"You know, Hogwarts has a lot of hidden places like these." Draco said, looking at Harry with a slightly puzzled expression.

"I know. I've seen secret rooms, hidden closets, dungeons, but never anything like . . . this! I guess, I just assumed, if it was secret, it had to be. . ."
"What? Dark, spooky and evil?"
"Well, some-thing like that."
Draco was silent for a moment and looked away before he said something so faintly that it was almost carried away by the wind.
"Sometimes good things are hidden too."
Harry heard it and turned to Draco, surprised.
But Draco was looking at the storm which had picked up now. Lightning was flashing, lighting up parts of the Dark Forest.
Suddenly a familiar voice carried faintly through the air. "BOYS!"
Draco met Harry's equally wide eyes, "Pomfrey!"
They ran pretty fast for a couple of invalids.
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Oliver Wood was still angry. Angry that he just came back from Professor McGonogall's office to hear from her that the Quidditch matches between Slytherin and Gryffindor had been moved back until further notice.
It's bad enough that we're trailing behind them in House points, now this.
He slammed his cup down a little too violently and several faces turned to him in surprise.
He ignored them.
He frowned as he saw Marcus Flint sitting at the Slytherin table. He was wolfing down his breakfast with as little grace as humanly possible.
We trained so hard, too. All those afternoons out in the 's not fair!
His frustrated thoughts were suddenly interrupted by Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger; who had just entered and were taking a seat opposite him.
"Morning, Oliver. You don't look so good." Ron said as he reached out for a piece of toast.
"Morning." He grunted back. He didn't feel like talking.
"What's wrong, then?" Ron persisted.
Oliver sighed. Well, everyone would have to know sooner or later, he thought.
"The match with Slytherin is still postponed."
"Yeah, we know." Ron shrugged. Oliver looked at him incredulously.
"You do? How?"
"Harry told us. We just came from the hospital room."
"Oh."
"Yeah, you should visit him. He's quite well enough to receive visitors. Ginny is going soon too, I think."
Oliver didn't hear the rest of this, he was thinking about something.
"Ron, did Harry say anything about what happened that day?"
"No, said he couldn't remember. Why?"
"Nothing." Oliver slumped slightly in his seat, disappointed.
Ron was looking suspiciously at Oliver now.
"You're not still going on about foul play, are you?"
"No." he paused. "Well, so what if I am? People don't just fall off their brooms for no good reason!"
Some of the Gryffindors seated near Oliver who heard this groaned. They'd heard this rant too

many times already and were getting a little tired of it. Everyone had been more concerned about the life-and-death situation of the two seekers to really care about how it happened.
Except for Oliver. He just couldn't let go of it.
Gee, I wonder why... thought Hermione silently as she turned her head to see Marcus Flint leaving the Hall. Oliver's eyes never strayed from his retreating figure.
Men. Hermione rolled her eyes, as she dug into her omele

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Chapter: 7

Chapter 7: Sweet things
When Harry and Draco got back to their room, they found Dumbledore waiting for them instead of Madam Pomfrey.
Uh-oh Harry thought.
But the headmaster was smiling at them as they entered the room.
"Ah! There you two are. Madam Pomfrey was quite anxious to find you," he paused "I heard her from my study." He gave a small chuckle, and Harry managed to look sheepish, despite being a little out of breath from the running.
"Don't worry, I assured her that both of you were just fine and I sent her on her way."
The two boys grinned at each other. They didn't notice that the headmaster was observing them with a little more interest now.
"Thanks." Harry said, and he meant it.
"Oh, it's no trouble. I understand what boys are like. After all I was one myself once. . ." he started to get a faraway look in his eyes and stroked his beard for a several seconds, before he remembered himself and continued as if nothing had happened, "She did however, leave your breakfasts ready for you, and do try to eat them before you start on your treats."
The boys frowned and Draco even wondered briefly if the headmaster had really gone as senile as his father always said.
"Err, what treats, sir?" Harry asked with a little hesitation as the headmaster started towards the door.
He turned to Harry and looked over at the empty beds. "Oh!" he smiled. "I almost forgot."
He waved his wand at Harry's bed and an enormous pile of candies, chocolates, presents and get-well cards shimmered out of thin air.
"Wow!" they both exclaimed in unison.
"Your week's worth of good wishes from your friends." Dumbledore stated with a kind smile. "Try not to eat it all at once."
He opened the door and took a step out before he paused and added thoughtfully as he turned to look back at the two "And boys, I'm always around if you need someone to talk to."
He smiled and shook his head at the sight that greeted him. The two of them were sitting on Harry's bed and were excitedly digging through the pile and laughing; oblivious as the headmaster quietly closed the door behind him.
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(15 minutes later)
"Ughhhh. . .alfalfa." Harry groaned as he chewed on one of Bertie Bott's Every Flavoured Beans.
Draco grinned at him before he tore open an envelope with his name on it.
"You really shouldn't eat so much candy, we haven't touched our breakfasts yet." He scolded.
Harry raised his eyebrows at this and laughed.
"What?" Draco demanded, looking up.
Harry covered his mouth with his hand and tried to bite back the giggles.
"Oh, nothing. You suddenly reminded me a little of Percy when you say that."
"Ex-cuuuuuse me?" Draco's face was so incredulous that Harry was about to laugh again.
They had been sitting on his bed cross-legged, facing each other, with the pile of treats in the middle for a while now and Harry was beginning to relax in Draco's company.
He was so easy to tease and Harry never knew the bad boy had such a goody- goody side. A fact which he found incredibly amusing.
Not to mention adorable. thought Harry as he looked at Draco, who had a silver coloured card in his lap, and shaking his head as he read it. His head was bent down slightly and a lock of blonde hair had fallen down the front of his face.
"What's that?" Harry asked, curiously.
Draco looked up. "Oh, nothing. Just a card from Crabbe and Goyle." He said hurriedly.
"Can I have a look?"
"No!" Draco said a little too quickly, and Harry's eyes widened. Draco cleared his throat and furrowed his brow, trying to make his face seem indifferent again. "Uhm, I meant it's not anything interesting, really." And tried to stuff the card under his right knee.
Harry grinned evilly and thought *Now, I really have to see this.*
With lightning quick reflexes he launched himself at Draco, and grabbed the edge of the card, which was still peeking at him from under Draco's knee.
"Hey!" protested Draco and swung out his arm a split second too late in an effort to grab it back.
"Oh, come on. I want to see it!"
"Give that back!" Draco insisted, but he saw that it was too late as Harry had already begun to read it.
Harry laughed. "Omigod! They even spelt their names wrong!"
More laughter and Draco frowned at Harry who was rolling on the bed in glee.
"Dear Draco, hop you will git up soon. Sincelery from V. Crebb and G. Goile." Harry read it aloud. "Oh, this is too good! Though you have to admit, they have a way with words," Harry teased.
"Are you done?" Draco said and uncrossed his arms to grab the card back from Harry.
"You know, you're cute when all huffy." Draco was about to give his best glare at this, when he realised that Harry Potter had just called him cute and blinked.
Harry's eyes were still dancing behind his glasses as he watched Draco.
Draco snorted as if to brush the comment off, and he prayed that the blush creeping over his skin wouldn't give him away. He can't let Harry think he could just get away with everything.
Just because he gives me butterflies in my stomach every time he looks at me like that.
Draco tried his best to look annoyed. "Make fun of my friends, why don't you? I hate to say this Potter, but you can be quite immature." He smirked, pleased at himself for sounding so self-righteous and snotty at the same time.
Harry had by now stopped his rolling and was lying on his stomach, his elbows propped up on

the mattress, facing Draco. His mouth hanging open in disbelief, his green eyes incredulously fixed on Draco.
"You're joking, right?" thinking of all the times Draco and his cronies had tortured Ron and Hermione mercilessly with their taunts.
"I don't know what you're talking about." Draco's face was impassive and innocent, as he busied himself, digging through the pile.
"Draco!"
"Hmmm?" he replied, ignoring Harry.
Then something soft and white hit him on the face. He fell back and held the thing which had came at him out of nowhere, wondering stupidly if Harry had hexed him.
He sat up, looking at it. A pillow.
"Sorry, Draco. But the situation called for it." Harry said, trying to keep his voice serious as he looked at Draco, who was still staring dumbly at the pillow in his hands.
Wow, hasn't he ever been in a pillow fight before? Harry wondered and images of the Slytherins throwing fluffy pillows at each other in their dorm rooms ran through his mind. He shuddered. *Guess not.*
"Are you all right?" Harry was getting a little worried, when Draco still hadn't moved.
"Draco." Harry got up on his knees and reached over the candy pile to place a hand his shoulder.
Draco looked up at Harry, his eyes a bit dazed. "No one's ever thrown a pillow at me before." He said, not sounding the least bit angry.
"Well, I guess I can say I'm honoured to be your first." Harry joked.
Draco sighed. "Your mind, Potter. . . Is it always in the gutter?"
Harry just grinned at this and can't help but notice how Draco's usually perfectly neat hair was now a little haphazard. Several blonde tufts were sticking right up his head.
"Here, your hair's sort of messed up a bit." He offered as he instinctively started to comb his fingers through Draco's fringe and push it back with his hands, before Draco could protest.
"Well, well, well. . . What have we here?" a familiar voice rang out.
Harry stopped, his hand still in Draco's hair.
It was Marcus Flint standing in the doorway, come to pay his Seeker a vi

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Chapter: 8

Author's Note: Hi All, so terribly sorry about the cliffhanger ending of the last chapter. I didn't mean to be evil, I swear! ! ! Although, I have to admit it *was* sort of fun. (Heh-heh. . .)
I was writing Chap 6 & 7 non-stop (see how much I love you all?) and I couldn't write anymore so that cliffie saved my life! (Well, it let me sleep anyways.)
And I only realised afterwards I hadn't even written notes at the top for those Chaps.
So here are some: Thanks everyone for all the great reviews (Author squeals "more, more, more!" and stamps her foot for emphasis.). Special thanks to Daelan, I think you've written the longest review so far! P.S: I adore MF/OW pairings! Hugs to lecada chan, Sairavanie, Edana, Caet Rae/MerLyn, ronslilprincess, RackeltheRacoon & di for your sweet words. Also

SnippyandSnarky for your constant reviews, its much appreciated. Lots of Gratitude to kale (and Alex Destine too) for your support and words of wisdom, it was just what I needed to hear. Plus the best selling author comment made the wheels start turning in my overly-imaginative head. *blush*. Thanks to Fanny chan & Nez too. Some overdue thanks to zipzoey, JadeDragon, sundance kid and plink for your great feedback.

Chapter 8: Complications & Implications

Marcus Flint certainly wasn't expecting this.

Harry Potter in bed, on his hands and knees, stroking Draco Malfoy's hair?

Well, I'm certainly going to have fun with this. . . he thought with ugly sneer, as he strode into the room, loving every second of that deer-caught- in-headlights look on Potter's face.

"Erm, it's not. . . Oomff. . ." Harry tried to back away from his compromising position too quickly, that he forgot about the pile of treats that was still under him.

The result of which landed him awkwardly in the pile, fumbling for several seconds before he managed to right himself, and sit up properly again.

With a large, pink-and-white swirly lollipop snagged and hanging from a buttonhole, no less.

". . .how it looks." he finished, as he pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose, which had slid down during his clumsy attempts to look normal, and gulped.

Throughout all this, Draco didn't give the slightest inclination of being affected by the Slytherin Captain having witnessed their little interaction and had amazingly managed to keep his composure.

He merely looked amused, as he turned to the Slytherin Captain. "Hello Marcus. Come to pay me a visit, have you?"

"Draco. . .what have you two been up to in here?" Marcus said slowly as he moved to stand by their bedside, glaring at Harry in mock surprise and indignation.

"Nothing! Nothing!" Harry said frantically, getting a little flustered by the implied meaning in Flint's raised eyebrows. Draco wasn't helping either. In fact, he looked like he was enjoying himself.

And why isn't he getting bothered by this? thought Harry a little enviously as he took in Draco's relaxed smirk and casual posture.

"Was there something you wanted, Marcus?" Draco drawled.

So the little twerp's not talking. Marcus thought as he frowned openly.

Draco saw this, but ignored it and just lifted his eyebrow questioningly at Marcus.

Marcus snorted.

"Just wanted to tell you that your father came by to visit you a week ago while you were still unconscious. Guess he wanted to see for himself that you were still alive." Marcus paused. "He really doesn't trust Dumbledore much, does he?" he added.

"Suppose not. Is that it?"

"No. He's been owling me and I've been writing back to update him on your progress. But now that you are up and about, I expect he'll be wanting a letter from you soon."

"Of course. I was going to do that soon anyway. Thank you, Marcus."

"No problem. After all, I have to take care of our house Seeker, now don't I?" he placed a hand on Draco's back.

Harry frowned at this.

"Not that I think there'll be a rematch anytime soon. . ." Marcus continued, failing to notice how Harry was glaring at him. "It's been postponed further back now to give you two time to fully

heal, I suppose."
"And I won't be surprised if it's cancelled completely. . ." He shrugged, hiding a smile, knowing that the House Cup would automatically go to Slytherin bearing this decision, seeing how Gryffindor were trailing behind them slightly in points.
"And you would just love that, wont you, Flint?" Oliver Wood appeared at the doorway, as if echoing his secret thoughts.
Marcus snorted in disgust when he saw who it was, and Oliver entered the room.
"You all right there, Harry?" he asked, throwing a suspicious glare at the two Slytherins as he stood by the bedside, opposite to where Marcus was standing.
"I'm fine, Oliver. Thanks. " Harry smiled, pleased to see that the older boy had bothered to come and visit him.
"What the hell are you doing here, Wood? Followed me out the Great Hall, didn't you?" Marcus spat out.
"Don't flatter yourself, Flint. I came to see how Harry was." He glanced at the lollipop hanging from Harry's shirt and looked back at Harry, who was still grinning up widely at him.
"Touching. Should we leave you two alone, then?" Marcus interjected.
Oliver growled softly at this but he shook himself and instead shifted his focus on Draco.
"So, Malfoy." He began slowly, rested both hands on the mattress, and leaned himself forward to face the blonde Slytherin, their faces inches apart. "Now that you're all better, maybe you could enlighten us on what exactly happened that day."
Draco froze.
"And just what the hell is that supposed to mean, Wood?" Marcus demanded angrily.
"That means exactly what I said, genius." He said, not taking his eyes off Draco.
"You better watch your mouth. We wouldn't want you to get hurt now, do we?"
"Oliver." Harry said.
"Is that a threat?" he finally tore his gaze off Draco to glare back at Marcus.
"Oliver!" Harry said a little more loudly.
Oliver finally turned to Harry, still fuming.
"What are you doing?" Harry asked quietly.
"Harry, I know you don't remember what happened that day, but don't you find it a little strange that you just fell off your broom for no reason at all?"
Harry closed his eyes for a moment and sighed wearily.
"Oliver, look, I understand that you are upset about the match and all, but. . ."
"Harry! You're not actually siding with them, are you?" Oliver interrupted, in sheer disbelief.
"I'm not siding with any-one." Harry stated firmly, getting quite annoyed with Oliver, and feeling suddenly protective of Draco, who was still not saying anything.
"Look, just take my word for it. It was just an accident, nothing more. " continued Harry.
"So," Oliver paused, frowning; "You actually remember what happened?"
"Well, no. . ."
Oliver was getting more and more frustrated with Harry's seemingly completely irrational behaviour.
"Then how do you know?" he almost shouted.
"I just. . . do, ok?" Harry stated simply, looking at Draco thoughtfully.
Oliver just looked at Harry in disbelief and shock.
WHAT is going on? he wondered desperately, feeling as though he'd stepped into another

dimension and an alternate reality.
He raised his arms and clutched at his hair with both hands in frustration while he tried to make sense of what he had just heard and seen.
He looked over at Marcus, who was smirking widely and thoroughly enjoying seeing how the scene was unfolding completely against Oliver's favour.
Bastard!
"You! You did something to him, didn't you?" Oliver accused Flint, pointing a finger to Harry.
"That's pathetic." Marcus snorted in disgust. "Even for you, Wood."
Oliver reddened visibly at this. Harry could see that his hands were also trembling and clenched tightly into fists. He wondered how he could try to defuse the situation.
"You should advise your Seeker to keep his filthy hands off mine." Oliver managed out, his tone slow and dangerous.
Marcus laughed out loud at this.
"I should be saying the same about yours." And shot Harry a knowing look, pleased to see the slightly horrified reaction on the boy's face.
Looks like my work here is done. he thought evilly and with some satisfaction.
"See you later, Draco." He gave him a slap on his shoulder before turning to leave for his first lesson for the day.
He was still chuckling as he walked out, not looking back as he left, leaving behind a very confused Oliver, an embarrassed Harry and a thoroughly amused Dr

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Chapter: 9

Chapter 9: Reality
The next day was spent mostly in leisure. Ron and Hermione had visited him again, with Ginny, Fred and George in tow. Ron was especially excited that Harry would be allowed back in the dorm room the next day.
Crabbe and Goyle also made an appearance, a little later in the afternoon.
Not surprisingly, their pile of chocolates and candies had lessened considerably by the time the two left the room.
Later at night, after everyone had left, they were both in their own beds; neither tired enough to go to sleep just yet.
Harry wasn't sure exactly how the conversation started but pretty soon, he was pouring his heart out to Draco, telling him about his life with the Dursleys and how he spent most of it being bullied by his much larger cousin, and ignored by his aunt and uncle.
"Can I ask you something?" Draco interrupted while Harry was in the middle of his description of the closet under the stairs.
"Of course."
"Why haven't you killed them yet?" he asked matter-of-factly as he looked over to Harry.
Harry was too stunned to answer and took a few seconds to find his voice.
"Draco, they're my family. Besides that would be a little extreme, wouldn't it?" he asked warily.

Draco just shrugged as if to say it wouldn't be to him.
"You frighten me sometimes." Harry joked to cover up his discomfort "But I guess we just grew up differently . . .What was yours like?" he asked a little hesitantly. Draco had been a little quiet most of the day.
"My what like?"
"Childhood, I guess."
"Oh. It was perfectly normal. Ordinary. You'd be bored." He waved a hand in dismissal.
"Draco, I grew up with Muggles, I assure you I won't be bored by anything you have to say."
"Well, if you insist." he paused, scrunching up his face to think, "Father wasn't around much, neither was Mother. He was always busy with work and she had her social obligations." He paused and thought that Harry probably wouldn't know what he was talking about.
"Parties." He clarified, before continuing. "I saw more of the house-elves than my parents; growing up. But I always had a proper nanny around to take care of me. Eventhough Mother and Father didn't have much time to spend with me, they still made sure I was raised properly."
"Erm, so to you . . . that's normal?"
"Well, yes." Draco looked at Harry in confusion.
"Ah. Just checking."
Both lay in silence after this, mulling over all that had been said so far.
It was Harry that broke the silence after several minutes. He had something on his mind that he just had to say out loud.
"Draco?" he asked softly, hoping the other boy wasn't asleep yet. They'd both been lying silent in the darkness for quite a while.
"Hmm?"
"Are we friends now?"
Silence.
Bloody hell. Draco groaned inwardly. *Damn this Potter. How in hell does he manage to ask the hardest questions so easily?*
"Gryffindors." He muttered under his breath, shaking his head.
"What was that?" Harry asked.
"Nothing. What made you ask such a question anyway?" Draco asked, still annoyed with Harry's straight-forwardness.
"You seriously need me to answer that? Things between us haven't exactly been normal here, you know."
"I suppose. . ." Draco gave in grudgingly. *Why can't he just keep his mouth shut? Everything was just fine before.*
"Well?" Harry sat up, feeling a little impatient.
"Well what?"
"What the hell is this?" referring to their relationship.
"Harry, you know this whole honesty thing? It's over-rated." As he said this, his mind guiltily flickered back to the fateful match. He still hadn't told Harry the truth of what he did. All day long he'd been going over in his mind how to do it, and every time, he came up with the same ending.
Harry would hate him. He'd be disgusted. *No, the truth would just have to stay buried.* he had decided finally.
"Sometimes I forget that you're still a Slytherin." Harry said bitterly, stung by Draco's

indifference.
"What did you want to hear, Harry? Huh? You want me to say we could be friends? That I'd walk next to you to classes starting tomorrow? Joke with you in the Halls, pretend I like your pathetic friends?" he spat out angrily.
"Shut. Up." Harry said slowly. He was trembling.
Draco ignored this and continued. He had to.
When Crabbe and Goyle had showed up this afternoon to visit him, he'd had to pretend to ignore Harry so as not to let Crabbe and Goyle suspect anything. Their mere presence had made reality come flooding back harshly to Draco's mind. Him and Potter?
His two friends wouldn't understand. Couldn't. And neither would his Father or any of the other Slytherins.
"Look, maybe we could do that while we're still here. Be nice to each other. There's no one around to judge us. But out there. . ." he paused. "Out there, it's a different story. And if you don't realise that, well then you're an even bigger fool than I thought you were."
Silence.
In the darkness, Harry tried to gather up what pride he had left and say as levelly as possible.
"You're absolutely right, Malfoy. I wasn't thinking." He said, as large tears rolled down his face silently in the darkness.
Draco finally stopped. Shocked out of his tirade when he heard Harry call him by his last name again.
*I'm sorry, Harry. This had to be do

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Chapter: 10

Author's Note: Hi guys! You didn't really think that things were going to stay all sunny and perfect forever, did you? I had to throw at least *some* angst into the mix. I honestly don't know how long this story is going to be. For a while now, I've just been writing stuff off the top of my head. The thing at the end between Draco & Harry was a spur of the moment thing.
A couple of people asked me which year they're in. I have NO idea. But feel free to make up your own minds.
Again, love-love-love the reviews. I can't believe I went from just 2 in the beginning to over a hundred now. *sweet smile* and hugs to everyone who's bothered to review the story so far. I LOVE YOU ALL!
Special thanks to: Milady69, ~Mary~, TanisaFyre (mad passionate monkey sex, huh? *laughs* I'll keep that in mind), Elenas, LenaLovely12, di, Jen~, Bunny-kuo, Rings Of Saturn, Liliane Evyl, Athena, nycscribe46 *shakes your hand back*, Sue, SnippyandSnarky, Alex Destine, Koyuuno The Wonder Inu (thanks for the plushies), JediGurrl, bluevanilla (for your honest remark), DD and Kale. Not forgetting Nez, Jordan, Saavik and SparkySparkles.
Chapter 10: Of Delusions and Missiles
"Is there something wrong, Harry?" Hermione asked, for the third time this morning.
The three of them were in the Great Hall having their breakfast together, for the first time in over

a week, since the accident. They had started out talking animatedly; feeling excited to be back together again.
But Hermione can't help but notice how Harry had kept lapsing out of the conversation.
"Oh. Everything's fine, Hermione. Erm, you were saying?" Harry replied, feeling guilty. His mind had drifted and had no idea what his two friends had been talking about for the past five minutes.
"Right." she said, not entirely convinced at all, and continued "Ron and I want to go to Hogsmeade this weekend. They're having that new launch for "Famous Witches and their Cats" and I want to get a copy for myself before it all sells out."
"Fine, fine. But we'll still have time to go to Honeydukes, won't we?" Ron interrupted anxiously, his mouth still full of porridge, causing a few flecks to fly out of his mouth and land unceremoniously on the table.
Hermione wrinkled her nose at this, but just said "Of course, Ron."
Harry looked back down into his bowl of porridge, which was still virtually untouched. He hadn't felt like eating much this morning. He stirred his spoon in the now lumpy porridge slowly.
Last night's conversation with Draco still hung heavily in his heart. He hadn't managed to get much sleep after it. But by dawn, he had made up his mind to try to forget everything that had happened between them during the past couple of days. It wouldn't do him any good otherwise, he decided.
What would be the point anyway? It obviously meant nothing to him. he thought defeatedly to himself.
And this morning before breakfast, he had resolved not to look in Draco's direction the entire time that they would be in the Great Hall.
He'd been doing an admirable job so far.
Even when Ron had made that sarcastic comment to Draco as they were passing by the Slytherin's table, Harry had pretended not to hear it and chose to say hello to Colin Creevey instead.
A move that did not go unnoticed by Hermione.
Something's happened. she had thought to herself then. *I just don't know what, why or who.*
Meanwhile, Draco had gotten up from his seat, having finished his breakfast and was now walking towards the doors with Crabbe and Goyle trailing closely behind, as usual.
As Draco passed by their table, Harry stiffened involuntarily and immediately lowered his head to fix his eyes down on the table.
And that's how Hermione started to get an answer for her question.
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(20 minutes later)
Ron cursed softly under his breath. His crucible of powdered dragon's tooth had spilled over and created a fine mess on the dark surface of his worktable.
Next to him, Harry wasn't doing very well either. He had never been very good at Potions, but the week-long break from schoolwork had made his mind work even more slowly now.
He checked the bubbling mixture in his cauldron and stirred it cautiously.
That doesn't look very green to me. he sighed. He tried squinting his eyes; trying to see if there was a tinge of green at all in the brown liquid.
"Mr. Potter!" a voice suddenly boomed close to his ears.
Harry almost jumped in shock, he'd been staring so hard at his potion that he had been

completely oblivious to Snape hovering closer and closer towards him in the meantime.
The professor looked at Harry's dismal potion and sneered.
"Trying to convince the potion to switch colours, Mr. Potter?" he drawled. "I don't think this method's worked very well for you." he added sarcastically.
His comment earned appreciative laughter from the Slytherins seated on the other side of the classroom.
Harry didn't turn to look if Draco was one of them. He was keeping his resolve, no matter what
"20 points from Gryffindor. And you may stay after class to help me clean up." Snape announced, with satisfaction.
Ron was fuming. He turned to Harry, expecting him to be furious as well.
And gaped at his friend in disbelief.
Harry was completely expressionless. He had picked up his quill and seemed utterly resigned to his fate. He wasn't even frowning.
"Fine." he said simply and started writing some notes in his Potions textbook.
Even Professor Snape was taken aback. He stared dumbstruck at Harry for a moment before turning back to the rest of the class and continuing with his lecture.
Something is definitely very, very wrong. Hermione thought ominously and made up her mind to question Harry as soon as possible.
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Harry wrinkled his nose in disgust as he looked over his hands. His palms were now both stained with dark green smudges, having gotten them from wiping off the careless spills on the tables.
He sighed. He had worked in complete silence so far, but he knew Professor Snape had looked up a few times to look at him while he was working.
"I'm done. May I leave now?" he spoke up.
Snape looked up from marking his papers and his eyes roamed over the work tables appraisingly.
"Very well." he said grudgingly after about a minute. He waved a hand in dismissal and started to continue with his grading, but he soon looked up again to watch Harry's retreating back, still puzzled by the boy's strange behaviour this morning.
However, he soon forgot about it and lost himself in his work again.
But one person didn't forget.
++++++++++++++++++++++++
"GAHHHH!"
"Hermione! What do you think you're doing!" Harry demanded, clutching at his chest.
He had been walking back towards the Common Room after his punishment with Snape when a dark figure had suddenly appeared in front of him as he was turning around a corner, giving him the fright of his life.
"Oh, sorry, Harry! Didn't mean to frighten you, I thought I'd just wait until you were done and walk back with you."
"Well, that's very nice of you, Hermione. But it certainly wasn't necessary. Where'd you leave Ron?" Harry managed out. He had actually thought for a moment that a dementor was coming after him and his heart was still racing somewhat.
Someone should really tell Hermione that skulking around dark corners near the dungeons isn't the best thing to do around The-Boy-Who-Lived.
"Oh, Ron. I mentioned something about brownies in the Common Room and he disappeared."
Harry chuckled and shook his head. They started walking together through the corridor.

"Actually Harry, I did want to ask you one thing." Hermione started cautiously.
"Yes?"
"Did something happen between you and Draco Malfoy?"
Harry stopped dead in his tracks and looked at Hermione, startled.
"Why would you ask that?"
"Well, you haven't really been acting like yourself. You've been quite withdrawn and really distracted. And when Malfoy walked past us during breakfast, I could see that something's obviously bothering you about him." she listed matter-of-factly. She was about to continue and add the bit about his odd behaviour in Potions but Harry raised a hand to stop her.
"Hermione. Look, I appreciate your concern about me, I really do." he said, "But, stop please. . . There is absolutely nothing going on. I'm probably just a bit overwhelmed. Coming back to classes and all. . ." he let his voice trail off, knowing how unconvincing his argument was, but at the same time desperately hoping Hermione would just drop the subject.
It wasn't helping with his whole resolve to erase his mind of everything Draco-ish.
Hermione just nodded and smiled at him understandingly.
Eventhough she didn't believe a word Harry was saying, she didn't want to push her friend. She didn't want to hurt him, especially when he obviously was having a hard enough time as it is, despite his own delusions.
What do I do now? Hermione wondered to herself, worriedly, as they walked side by side.
They soon reached the entrance to the Gryffindor Common Room, ready for a short break before their next class.
Hermione said the password to the Fat Lady in the painting, "Golden Snitch."
It swung open and before they could take a step inside, something small and covered with bright orange sparks came shooting out and whizzed over their heads, missing them by inches.
Harry had instinctively dove down onto the floor, pulling Hermione with him.
Meanwhile, the orange missile continued on its path down the corridor and possibly onto other innocent, unsuspecting students.
"Nice one, Fred! Now, light the other one!" George's gleeful voice came through from within the Common Room.
Hermione got up and brushed herself off furiously, feeling quite ready to yell at the Weasley twins.
"Dumbledore will have your heads! Stop it this instant, both of you!" Percy's voice interjected before she could.
Hermione stopped. *That's it! The headmast

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Chapter: 11

Author's Note: Well, I guess this is AU now. I'm not too keen on labels but I'm happy to oblige, lest I make any more particularly damning errors. *sigh*
Thanks to all the reviewers, I know the last chapter was a bit short, but I think this one makes up for it in length.

Back to the story . . .

Chapter 11: Explanations and the Invisible Man

Draco sighed softly. It feels like he'd been doing that all day. Not that Crabbe or Goyle would ever notice, he thought, looking down at them seated on the floor by the large table next to him. He had stretched himself out on the couch in the Slytherin Common Room, with his head propped on one arm and his feet resting on a cushion.

And next to him, Crabbe was trying desperately to finish his Transfiguration essay, which he had forgotten was due later today. Luckily for him, Goyle had generously loaned him his own to copy from.

Draco had to smirk at this, lulled out of his somber thoughts for a brief moment, imagining the look on McGonogall's face when she sees two suspiciously identical, and not to mention very badly written essays.

Well, the best we can hope for is that his handwriting is so terrible that it makes the whole thing unreadable.

Two first year Slytherin girls came in through the doors, giggling together and Draco's thoughts moved away from his two friends and back to himself.

He sighed heavily to himself. *Why do I feel so bad?*

He closed his eyes. He knew the answer to that question; he just couldn't bring himself to admit what it was.

Or rather who.

All morning long, Harry hadn't even glanced his way, let alone make eye contact. At first Draco was surprised, then he suddenly remembered his speech to Harry the night before.

Well, I wasn't expecting him to act as if I didn't exist! he thought in frustration.

He massaged his temples, hating himself for being so affected by something that he would never even have noticed two weeks ago.

The-Boy-Who-Lived is ignoring him.

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"Harry, you all right?" Ron asked nervously, sitting down next to his friend.

"Hmm? Oh, I'm fine, Ron. Just got a little dirty, that's all." he raised up his hands to display the greenish stains to his friend.

Ron frowned. That wasn't what he meant.

"No, I meant, just now in Potions, you were acting a little strangely . . ." his eyebrows raised meaningfully at his friend.

Harry paused. It hadn't occurred to him until now. Being punished by Snape so unfairly hadn't made him angry at all. He had felt numb, deadened throughout the whole thing. He felt nothing.

"I guess I'm just tired, that's all." he frowned, not knowing what else to say.

"I see. Well, I knew it had to be something." Ron sighed in relief and grinned at his friend.

"What's that on your face?" Harry said, pointing to a dark brown smudge on his friend's cheek.

Ron rubbed at the spot and licked his fingers. "Mmmm. Brownies. From Seamus. Chocolate. Delicious."

Harry sat up, looking interested.

"Finished." Ron added cheekily, earning him a good-natured slap on the shoulder. Harry slumped back into his chair and sighed.

"Hey, where's Hermione?" Ron asked, suddenly aware of her absence.

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(The Headmaster's Office)
Hermione twiddled her thumbs nervously. She had been sitting there facing Dumbledore for over a minute. Having interrupted him whilst he was in the middle of writing an urgent letter, she was now waiting for him to finish.
Hermione fidgeted impatiently in her chair.
"There. All done." Dumbledore said with a flourish and set his quill back into the inkstand on his desk.
He looked at Hermione and smiled kindly.
"Now, Miss Granger. I trust you had something to ask me?"
"Yes, but how did you know?"
"Call it a gift." he chuckled and nodded at Hermione to continue.
"This is probably going to sound very stupid." she started, looking down at her hands.
"I find that very hard to believe, Miss Granger, if it's coming from you." he smiled.
Hermione blushed; her confidence boosted and began.
"Its just that I couldn't help but notice Harry's . . . changed somewhat, since the accident. I was wondering if you knew anything about it?" she paused, "I think it has something to do with Draco Malfoy." she added, helpfully.
The headmaster leaned back into his chair and nodded to himself, stroking his beard absent-mindedly.
"You don't look surprised." Hermione noted.
"That's because I'm not, Miss Granger." he paused.
She looked at the headmaster with a mixture of anxiety and impatience.
Finally he spoke, choosing his words carefully.
"There are many types of magic in the world." he paused. "And you are probably well aware that magic itself has evolved many times through the ages. One of the earliest forms that was practised, and much lesser known today; is blood magic." he stopped, looking at Hermione to see if she recognised the term.
She nodded. "I read about it once in 'Obscure Witchcraft and Wizardry'. It's still being practised by some witches and wizards, right?"
"Yes, it is. But, very few. . . Most have forgoed blood magic for other forms because the rituals were so intricate and tedious to prepare. Not to mention mortally dangerous at times. Also the use of blood for the rituals, be it their own or otherwise gave it quite a reputation for being linked with the Dark Arts. So, people stayed away from it. "
"But what does this have to do with Harry?" Hermione asked, confused.
The headmaster held up a hand.
"Do you know of a Muggle tradition where two people wanting to make a solemn promise to one another would cut their thumbs and press them together? They would call this a blood oath and it would be considered binding between the people involved. "
Hermione nodded. "It's quite a silly thing, I've always thought."
"Well, that Muggle practice actually originated from a particular blood magic ritual. It wasn't exactly the same, of course. The real ritual involved much more than just a few drops of blood shared. And of course, for the Muggles, the act it was merely symbolic; having no magical consequences whatsoever. . . It's funny how things get passed down over time, don't you think?"
He looked thoughtfully and stroked his beard again.
"I suppose. But what exactly are you trying to say, sir?"

"I'm saying, Miss Granger; that the accident between Draco and Harry was an unfortunate re-enactment of a blood ritual. A ancient spell that, in effect; binds two people together in spirit." he looked at Hermione.
"What!" Hermione stood up and exclaimed, gaping at the headmaster. "You're serious, sir?"
"I'm afraid so, Miss Granger."
"Well, why haven't you told them yet?" she demanded, her eyes wide and questioning.
"Ah, but unfortunately Draco's father had come by to visit him soon after the accident took place. He knew what their injuries entailed, and was clever enough to suspect what might have happened. After that, he made me swear not to tell them. He insists that his son would be strong enough to fight whatever influences the magic would have on him and being told about it would simply make him more susceptible."
"I see." Hermione frowned. *That would make things a bit more complicated.*
"Well, what do you plan to do? I mean, how do we help them? Isn't there a cure or some sort of counter-spell?" she said suddenly.
"I'm afraid not. Nothing that wouldn't kill them both."
"Oh." she said dejectedly.
"Miss Granger, I hate to interrupt our discussion. But I'm afraid that your next class is starting quite soon." he said, looking at his hourglass.
"Oh dear, I've forgotten all about classes." She hurriedly turned to leave, then remembered herself and added, "Thank you, sir."
"You're most welcome. Harry is very lucky to have such good friends who care about him." He smiled kindly.
Hermione nodded, her face still full of worry.
"And Miss Granger. . ."
"Yes, sir?"
"Lucius Malfoy made me swear not to tell the boys. He never said you couldn't. . ." his eyes twinkled behind his spectacles.
Hermione met his gaze curiously, and a slow smile started to spread across her face, as understanding dawned in her mind.
++++++++++++++++++
The hallway was busy with students milling around and making their way to various classrooms. Amongst them, Draco had been strolling towards his as slowly as possible without looking too obvious about it. Unconsciously he was on the lookout for Harry, hoping to bump into him. Finally, he spotted him turning round a corner ahead and coming down the hallway, with Ron Weasley by his side.
He noticed how Harry had seen him from afar and deliberately averted his gaze from him instantly after that, instead choosing to fix his eyes to the crowd as he made his way through with Ron.
He's going to do it again. Make me invisible. Draco thought in dismay.
And he suddenly felt desperate.
He needed something, a reaction.
Anything.
Motioning for Crabbe and Goyle to go on ahead without him, he strode towards the two, a familiar sneer starting to appear on his lips.
Ron saw him coming and instinctively grabbed Harry's arm to warn him.

"So, Potty and the Weasel back together again. How sweet. Next thing we know, you two will be holding hands in the hallway." he said mockingly. "Oh, too late." He smirked and looked pointedly at Ron's hand still gripping Harry's arm. Ron quickly pulled away, his face red with anger and embarrassment.
A few Slytherins nearby who had heard this laughed.
"Sod off, Malfoy!" Ron pushed past him roughly and started walking again.
Harry trailed behind Ron who was marching furiously ahead. Draco stared at him in disbelief; Harry was still refusing to look at him.
"Potter!" he called out angrily as Harry walked past him.
Harry just kept his pace, refusing to acknowledge him in any way.
"I'm talking to you, Potter!" he said furiously, taking a few strides towards Harry's still retreating back. A few students who were still in the hallway were watching them with interest now.
Harry just pretended not to hear him, with his back still to Draco, and kept walking.
Draco suddenly snapped. It was one thing to ignore him but this display of blatant disregard was too much for his pride to take.
He half sprinted towards Harry and yanked him back roughly by the back of his robes.
"Hey!" Harry protested in surprise.
He dragged Harry back a few paces and pushed him into an empty classroom, before locking the door behind them.
Harry righted his robes furiously, looking at Draco as if he was crazy. "Have you lost your bloody mind?" he almost shouted.
Draco just glared at him sullenly for a while.
"It seemed like the only way I could get your attention now." he finally said, narrowing his eyes.
"Really? I thought that was what you wanted. Maybe you should get your head examined."
Harry spat out sarcastically as he brushed past Draco to move towards the door.
Except for a hand that swiftly reached out over his to stop him from going any further.
Harry froze, the touch was electric and he immediately tried to pull away, but the grip strengthened and kept him in his place firmly.
"Just . . ." Draco started haltingly, his voice tense with emotion, "Don't ignore me like that again, okay?"
Harry stared at him, stunned. But Draco kept his eyes fixed on the floor, his jaw clenched tightly. He was afraid to meet those eyes. Afraid of what else he might do if he did.
Harry blinked a few times, before replying. "Fine." He paused and took a deep breath, his mind swirling in confusion, and still very much aware of Draco's hand over his.
"I'm. . .we're late for class." He managed out weakly after a while, feeling a little light-headed all of a sudden.
Draco let him go and silently reached past him to unlock the door for the both of them.
Harry stepped out into the hallway again and started to take a few steps towards his next lesson, and on impulse he stopped and turned around.
"Draco. . ." he started.
But he was already g

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Chapter: 12

Author's Note: Thanks for all the reviews! Here's the next chapter. . .
Chapter 12: Midnight Ministrations
"He's planning something, I know it." Ron proclaimed, turning his head back to look towards the Slytherin table.
"Hmm?" Harry mumbled, opposite him. He had taken too big a bite out of his chicken sandwich and was having trouble chewing it all.
"Malfoy. He's been staring at us since dinner started." Ron frowned, narrowing his eyes at the Slytherin, as if trying to make out what evil plot he had in store for them.
"Actually, he's been staring at Harry." Hermione corrected, matter-of- factly.
Harry looked up, and met Draco's gaze. He quickly averted his eyes when he saw that Harry had caught him staring.
"Oh." Harry flushed and finally swallowed his mouthful with difficulty.
"Something's up. . . Harry, he's probably going to try something on you." Ron persisted, looking at his friend earnestly across the table.
I bet he might. Hermione couldn't help smiling a little as she observed how quickly Draco had went back to staring at Harry again.
Next to him Crabbe was trying unsuccessfully to get Draco to pass him the salt. Finally after nudging Draco's elbow several times, Crabbe gave up and leaned over to get it himself.
"It's not funny, Hermione! Harry could really be in trouble!" Ron exclaimed exasperatedly, his tone urgent.
"Oh, Ron." she chided back, shaking her head a little. "He's not going to do any-thing to hurt Harry!" Hermione exclaimed before she could stop herself. She clamped a hand over her mouth, a little too late.
"WHAT? Have you gone com-plete-ly mental?" Ron stood up, throwing his hands up into the air.
Meanwhile, Harry was starting to look at Hermione with interest.
Does she know something I don't?
"You might want to explain that, Hermione. And you can sit down now, Ron." Harry calmly pulled Ron down back to his seat. Several students were looking at the three of them curiously.
Ron sat back down and stared stony-faced at Hermione.
Obviously flustered and embarrassed by Ron's sudden outburst, Hermione started placatingly, "Ron, please don't over-react like that."
Ironically, Ron looked about ready to come up with another outburst at her comment, but Harry kicked him in the shin before he could.
"Ow! Ha-rry!" Ron complained, rubbing the spot where he got hit.
"Sorry, Ron. Yes, Hermione, you were saying?" Harry looked at Hermione expectantly.
"Erm. . . Well, I . . ." she looked at Harry and then back at Ron, knowing she can't very well say everything that she had learnt from Dumbledore in front of Ron, especially in the highly excitable state that he was in.
He might just explode Hermione thought to herself, grimacing.
Ron crossed his arms impatiently. "Well?" he huffed.
"I- I was mistaken." she said shortly and quickly turned her attention to her plate.
"What?" chorused Ron and Harry in unison.

Hermione chose to ignore this and wisely changed the subject, as if nothing had happened.
"So, have you guys completed your Potions project yet? It's due next week, you know." she asked.
Ron looked at her like she was crazy and then gave Harry a knowing look that said "She's lost it, finally."
Harry just bit his lip and looked at Hermione thoughtfully.
She knows something.
++++++++++
Right after dinner, when Ron was out of earshot, Harry pulled at Hermione's elbow and whispered to her urgently.
"You know something, I know you do."
Hermione looked at him and hesitated for a while, glancing at Ron to make sure he didn't notice and nodded, pursing her lips.
"Well?" he whispered again, looking at her meaningfully.
"Not here. Midnight tonight. In the Common Room." she whispered back, after a while.
Harry looked at her questioningly, and opened his mouth to protest but thought better of it as Ron looked over to them suspiciously.
"All right, then." he gave in.
"And bring Malfoy." she added, right before Ron sidled up next to Harry.
"What are you two whispering about?" he asked, looking at the both of them suspiciously.
"Nothing, Ron. We're just talking about what to get you for your birthday." Hermione answered with ease.
Harry raised his eyebrows at her in surprise, feeling a little awed by her quick save.
"Oh! Well, carry on then!" he grinned widely, and bumped his shoulder against Harry's playfully.
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"Be outside the Gryffindor Common Room, midnight tonight. I'll let you in. - HJP." the note read.
Draco read it again, his hands trembling a little.
Harry James Potter . . .
His heart started beating wildly in anticipation and he sat down on the edge of his bed, cold sweat breaking out all over his body.
He gripped his bedspread to keep himself steady.
He wants to meet me. he gulped.
He looked at the note again. The ink was a little smudgy now, from being clutched in his sweaty palms.
Finally Draco gave in to gravity and let his body fall back on the covers, his feet still on the floor, and closed his eyes. All the blood seemed to have suddenly rushed out from his head and he felt rather dizzy.
An annoying hooting suddenly snapped him out of his daze. The snowy white owl that had delivered his precious note was still there, perched on his bedpost and flapping its wings impatiently.
"What do you want? Go away, you stupid bird." he said in irritation, before he realised that Harry was probably waiting for a reply at the very least.
He got up from his bed a little unsteadily and made his way to his desk, where he quickly scribbled a note on a piece of spare parchment.

"I'll be there - DM."
He was about to tie the note to the owl's leg, but she grabbed it out of his hand with her beak and flew out his open window.
Draco looked down at his watch.
Four more hours to go.
He felt all tingly again, and smiled to himself.
++++++++++++++++++++
(11.58 pm)
Draco walked as briskly as he could without making any noise. Which really wasn't very fast at all.
He frowned to himself as he glanced at his watch.
I'll be late. he thought worriedly as he slowed down approaching a corner, and peeked around it before continuing on towards the Gryffindor Common Room.
He couldn't go any faster and risk running into Filch and his damn cat.
It'll ruin everything. he thought anxiously.
Although, he didn't really have a clue what 'everything' was, or would be.
Four hours of contemplation and wild speculations running around in his head about what Harry might have planned still led to nothing conclusive. (The note wasn't exactly a fountain of information, no matter how many times he read it over to himself.)
But just to be safe, Draco had brushed his teeth three times, with extra- strong peppermint toothpaste (they were supposed to keep you fresh for a full day- or at least that's what it said on the box. . .), changed into his best silk pajamas (he found that he looked best in dark green) and patted himself with his favourite aftershave (although he had never needed the use of a razor before in his life, he found that smelling like he did wasn't a bad thing.)
Finally, he stood in front of the painting of the Fat Lady. He stood there stiffly for a few seconds staring at the sleeping figure of the Fat Lady, before he shook himself and knocked softly on her bosom.
Which was unfortunate; because she immediately woke up.
"Ex-cuse me, what DO you think you are doing, young man?" she exclaimed in a loud voice indignantly, looking quite harassed and covering her chest protectively with her ample hands.
Before Draco could tell her to keep quiet, she swung forward suddenly; almost swiping the tip of Draco's nose, as he drew back both in fear and surprise.
Harry stood in the now open doorway.
"Harry!" Draco said in relief, before he was yanked in by the front of his robes and into the Gryffindor Common Room.
Once inside, Harry quickly pulled the painting shut.
"What's with the racket?" Harry asked, "Filch could've heard you."
"Erm. . .Nothing, I - just woke her up." he shrugged, trying to hide his embarrassment over accidentally molesting a painting.
He suddenly realised where he was and started looking around the empty Common Room with curious eyes.
It was almost identical to the Slytherin Common Room, both in size and shape. Except that the decor here was all done in red and gold instead of green and silver.
The couch and armchairs facing the fireplace were velvet and soft, not hard leather like theirs.
He walked over to the red couch and ran a finger over its softness, feeling slightly envious.

The place was warm and inviting, not cold and ceremonious at all; like what he was used to.
Harry looked at Draco, and not knowing what to say, cleared his throat audibly.
Draco looked up and suddenly remembered he was with Harry.
Alone.
Together.
And his heart started to jump annoyingly in his chest again.
"Why don't we sit down?" he ventured nervously.
"Oh, sure. I guess we should." Harry said, nodding. He sank down and slumped against an arm lazily. Draco's eyes widened slightly at this, but he tried to look cool as he slid down next to Harry.
Their knees bumped, but Harry didn't flinch so Draco relaxed and allowed his leg to press casually against Harry's.
Meanwhile, Harry was looking over at the stairs leading towards the girls' dormitory.
Where is she already? he thought impatiently, anxious to find out what she knows.
He had spent the last four hours trying to corner Hermione and get her to tell him something, but she had stubbornly refused and insisted that Draco be there as well before she said anything.
He looked over at Draco now, who seemed a bit nervous and thought he should make some conversation to fill the awkward silence before Hermione came down.
"So. . .how have you been?" Harry asked amiably.
"Uhm, good. . ." Draco paused, his mind racing at their proximity. "Yourself?"
"Okay, I guess." Harry answered and sighed, looking back towards the staircase again.
Draco gulped and stared at the back of Harry's head.
Why isn't he doing something? He's the one who asked me to come here! he thought, panicking slightly.
He blinked nervously, not having had much experience with this sort of thing, and wiped a sweaty palm across the velvet material of the couch.
Bloody hell. Guess I'll have to make the first move since this stupid git certainly isn't. he thought and tried to steel himself.
He felt dizzy again, though his heart was racing.
Taking a deep breath, he started to casually drape an arm over the back of the couch and lean himself towards Harry.
When Harry turned back from looking at the staircase, he suddenly found his face inches from Draco's.
His mouth dropped slightly in surprise as he searched for something to say. Nothing came.
"Wh- wha. . ." he stammered.
Draco didn't wait for him to finish, he had already psyched himself up for the move and nothing could stop his momentum now.
He leaned forward determinedly and brought his other arm over to rest on the arm of the couch, thereby effectively blocking Harry on both sides.
And kissed him.
Harry sat stunned, frozen in his seat.
Draco had his eyes closed and Harry wondered if he should do the same.
"Er-hem." a voice suddenly came from behind the couch.
Draco instantly pulled back, a horrified expression forming on his face as he saw who the intruder was.

Hermione was looking down at them from behind the couch, her cheeks pink. She was trying her best to hide a smile and was doing quite a poor job of it.
Draco looked at her in disgust now.
"How long have you been standing there, Granger?" he asked; his tone dangerous.
"Long enough, Malfoy." Hermione bristled and moved over to sit in the armchair opposite them.
"And it doesn't look like I came too soon, either." she cheekily added.
"What is this?" he exclaimed angrily. "You're joining us now? Going to take notes, are you Granger?" he said sarcastically, looking at the book she had in her lap; causing Hermione to blush scarlet at the implication.
"Draco, she's got something to tell us. That's why I sent you that note. . ." Harry said carefully, still feeling a little winded from the sudden kiss.
"What?" Draco said incredulously.
"Why? What did you think it was for?" Harry asked quizzically.
Draco bit back a gulp and tried to look nonchalant, but his eyes had widened slightly when he looked at Harry.
"Oh." Harry smiled, understanding.
This is too good. He thought I invited him for a snogging session! he thought and smiled wider. But then he saw the stormy look on Draco's face and held back the smiles that were threatening to break out gleefully all over his face.
His cheek muscles were beginning to hurt.
"Are you two quite finished?" Hermione asked. "I do want to get back to bed at some point, you know."
"Right." Harry conceded and rubbed at his cheeks.
They were both silent as she told them everything that she knew.
She had even borrowed a book from the library about the practice of blood magic and showed it to them.
She knew it wasn't going to be easy to try to explain and convince them of what had happened; so she came well-prepared. Initially she had considered making up models of little Harry and Draco to re-enact the accident for them to get a better visual, but then she thought that would have been a bit much. Even for her.
Almost half an hour later, she finished and looked at them expectantly.
"So, do you believe what I just told you?" she asked tentatively.
"I - guess. . ." Harry said, adjusting his glasses. He was still trying to take in what Hermione had just told them.
"Me too." Draco finally said, grudgingly. "I mean, it certainly explains my crazy behaviour." he smirked in relief.
Harry looked at him and frowned, feeling a little annoyed.
"Well, what do we about this, then?" Draco asked.
"Nothing. Dumbledore's right, I can't find any counter-spells or cures that wouldn't effectively kill you both." Hermione sighed, looking at her watch.
Draco sighed heavily and slumped back into the couch.
"Maybe my father would know. . ." Draco suggested hopefully.
"If he did, don't you think he would have tried something to help you by now?" Hermione reasoned.
Draco sighed, dejectedly, knowing Hermione was probably right.

"Look, I just wanted to tell you what was going on. It didn't seem fair to keep you both in the dark about something that affects you directly. Maybe now you can understand why you're feeling . . .the way you're feeling."
Harry nodded, looking at his friend appreciatively. "Thanks, Herm. It certainly helps."
Draco stayed silent, but nodded at Hermione when he saw Harry look at him sternly.
"Well, that's it, I guess. I think I'll turn in now, if you don't mind. We have classes in the morning." she got up tiredly and kissed Harry goodnight on his cheek.
"Sleep well." she said kindly and ruffled his hair.
"Thanks Hermione, you too."
They watched her as she made her way up to the girls' dormitory.
Finally, they were alone again.
Draco got up abruptly. "I better go too."
He was afraid that Harry would bring up the kiss, in that infuriatingly straight-forward way he had and thought he should leave before that should happen.
Thankfully, Harry just nodded and walked him to the painting. He seemed to be too tired for anything else.
He opened the door for Draco, who stepped through it as quietly as he could.
He didn't want to wake the Fat Lady again and have to face her embarrassing accusations. He didn't need to get a reputation for appreciating art in /that/ way.
He mumbled a quick goodbye to Harry before taking off down the dark hallway.
Harry closed the door behind him wearily and rubbed his eyes. He hadn't realised how tired he was until now.
Bed is good. he thought sleepily and started towards the stairs leading up to his dorm.
Except for a sudden rapping on the painting behind that stopped him in his tracks.
He shook his head and paused, thinking he must have imagined it in his tiredness.
There it is again.
Harry furrowed his brows and opened the painting and peeked through the edge cautiously.
"Filch! He's here!" Draco whispered urgently behind it and pushed the painting open and squeezed past Harry to return to the safety of the Common r

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Chapter: 13

Author's Note: Hey thanks for all the reviews! Knew you guys would like some HP/DM action (frankly so would I), so here it is. Btw, this might be the last installment for a while before the next one because I'm going away for 3 weeks and will only be back mid-Jan next year. Meantime, please keep the reviews coming! They make me so happy!
Chapter 13: A Different Sort of Sleepover
Harry looked at Draco and scratched his head lightly.
"You saw him?"
"No, I saw Mrs. Norris. Well, her shadow on the wall, anyway." he gasped, still breathless from his run back down the hallway.

"Oh." Harry paused. "You want to stay here, then?" he asked slowly, furrowing his brows.
"Well, it doesn't look like I have any choice, now do I?" Draco said angrily and pushed Harry aside to stride towards the staircase.
Harry looked at him speechless.
"Well, are you coming? I don't exactly have a map to where you sleep." Draco called out impatiently, halfway up the staircase.
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(Gryffindor boys' dorm)
"Well, this is it." Harry said, stopping suddenly before his four-poster bed.
"Oomfph." muffled Draco. He had bumped into Harry's back when he suddenly stopped ahead of him without warning.
The dormitory was completely dark, save for a bit of moonlight seeping in through the windows, and he couldn't really see much of anything.
"Careful." Harry whispered. "Ron's bed is right next to mine." he pointed.
Draco could vaguely make out the outline of a sleeping Ron, only his red hair was visible from beneath the top of the covers. It was a cold night and he had snuggled deep underneath the warmth of his blankets.
Harry undid the front of his robes, let it fall to the floor lazily and stepped out of them. Draco noticed he had on brown cotton pajamas on.
So Harry Potter. he thought, as he watched the boy slide into his bed easily.
"Are you going to stare at me all night?" Harry asked, fluffing his pillows for the both of them.
Draco went red, thankful for the poor light.
"I wasn't staring!" he whispered defensively.
He heard Harry snort softly as he stepped out of his own Slytherin robes.
It really was cold.
He had to stop himself from practically leaping into the warm bed, lest Harry think he was overly-anxious to get into bed with him.
The kiss had been enough humiliation for one night.
He slid under the covers next to Harry slowly.
It was soft, and comfortable. Warm, too.
Really nice. he thought to himself contentedly as he settled into a comfortable position and got ready to sink into slumber.
Moments passed in silence and just as Draco was about to nod off, Harry spoke up.
He had been feeling sleepy all the way from the Common Room.
Until that is, Draco got into bed with him.
And he suddenly felt wide awake.
Feeling the need for conversation, given his wide-awake state, he said the one thing that popped into his mind.
"Minty."
"I beg your pardon?" Draco mumbled irritably.
"You were very minty. Just now. When you kissed me." Harry stated simply, as if he was commenting on some documentary he had seen on the telly.
Draco groaned. He knew the silence was too good to last.
"Potter, do me a favour and just go to sleep." he whispered, his voice strained.
"Oh. Sorry, did I embarrass you?" Harry asked innocently.

"No! I just don't want to talk about it." he replied and fluffed his pillow angrily and turned his back to Harry, hoping that would discourage any further conversation from the boy.
Silence.
Harry fidgeted, staring at Draco's back.
He bit his lip, then finally not being able to keep quiet any longer, he ventured again.
"Was it your first?" Harry whispered softly, tapping at Draco's back with a finger.
Draco muffled a scream as he turned his face into his pillow, gripping it tightly.
Torture. He's just doing this to torture me.
Finally, he turned to face Harry, his normally pale face livid.
"Why? What does it matter?" he whispered angrily.
"Erm, nothing, I was just curious that's all." Harry said nervously, taken aback by Draco's strong reaction to his perfectly innocent question.
"Fine. If I answer, will you promise to shut up and go to sleep?" Draco ventured in exasperation.
"Ok." Harry agreed, nodding eagerly.
"Yes, all right? You were my first. Happy now?" Draco said, his tone clipped and he quickly started to turn back away from Harry.
Pause.
"I thought so." Harry said to himself, smiling a little as he snuggled deeper into his covers and got ready to sleep finally.
Now, Draco couldn't go to sleep.
"What was that?" he demanded accusingly, looking back at Harry.
"Erm, nothing. Go to sleep." Harry mumbled, his eyes closed, but a small smile still playing on his lips.
"Well, I can't now!" Draco huffed angrily, sitting up.
"Tell me what you meant by that, Potter." he said, crossing his arms over his chest, glaring at the boy next to him.
"I -I just meant that you were a little . . .erm, stiff, that's all." he said in a small voice.
Draco had never felt so insulted, infuriated and irritated by one person within such a short period of time.
His blood slowly started to boil, and he had to stop himself from reaching out for his wand and hexing Harry to Mars and back.
"Erm, Draco, are you all right? I didn't mean to upset you." Harry said a little nervously when he noticed that Draco was staying remarkably silent.
Draco fumed.
So he thinks I can't kiss? I'll show him. he thought, his eye twitching a little.
Without warning, he swiftly bent over and caught Harry's surprised mouth in his.
He could hear Harry emit a small gasp just before it happened.
He licked Harry's bottom lip expertly and coaxed a tongue inside his open mouth. By Harry's soft moan, it seemed that he was doing a pretty good job of it now.
He felt a small twinge of satisfaction as Harry started to delve deeper into the kiss and began to tentatively move his tongue into Draco's own mouth.
He stopped abruptly and pulled his head back, a self-satisfied smirk on his lips.
"See, Harry? I . . ." he didn't get to finish though, as Harry impatiently gripped the back of his head and pulled him back towards himself.
And kissed him some more.

Draco whimpered.
Harry heard it and suddenly felt like he should be showing Draco a thing or two as well.
So with one quick motion he pushed Draco on his back and was on top of him.
His lips never leaving Draco's, not for a second.
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(Dawn)
Harry opened his eyes, feeling fuzzy and warm all over. He smiled and started to snuggle back under the covers.
And suddenly realised that he wasn't alone.
Draco.
He looked at the blonde head still on the white pillow and smiled, as the memory of last night came flooding back. Instinctively he started to lean into Draco's ear and nuzzle into him, wrapping his arms around the lithe body beneath the covers.
Draco moaned and shifted, mumbling something.
"Hmm?" Harry asked softly, kissing his earlobe.
"Not yet. . .Five more minutes." he mumbled sleepily.
"We can stay here all day." Harry said contentedly, closing his eyes.
"Huh?" Draco suddenly opened his eyes wide, remembering where he was.
And more importantly; with who.
He stared at Harry, who was now looking at him sleepily. He was curled up next to him, like a little cat.
Draco hadn't really had a good look at Harry last night.
But now, in the light of day, he could see just how green those eyes really were.
He hadn't put on his glasses yet and for the first time Draco noticed how good looking The-Boy-Who-Lived was.
His raven hair was incredibly messy and his fringe was strewn over his forehead endearingly.
Draco gulped and blinked.
His heart skipped a beat in his chest as he realised that Harry had his arm wrapped around his waist.
"Hi." he said stupidly.
"Hi." Harry grinned and kissed him on the cheek, reveling in the softness of the other boy's skin.
He buried his face in his neck and closed his eyes, drawing him closer in his arms.
"Hmmm. . .You smell really good." Harry mumbled appreciatively and started to kiss his neck, sending shivers down Draco's spine.
Draco started to melt in the embrace and close his eyes again, rubbing Harry's back with his hand.
When suddenly a pair of strong hands grabbed him by his shirt and yanked him roughly out of

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Chapter: 14

Author's Note: Sorry for the long absence, people! And thank you for the great reviews for Chap.

13, though I lost count of how many times the word 'evil' had been used to describe me. (Can't argue there! Heh-heh. . .But I really AM sorry! Truly I am. *smiles innocently*)
Anyway, I'm back now and swamped with loads of work in backlog (yes, yes, I deserve this punishment!) but I finally figured out how to continue from where I left off. (Had a bit of writer's block initially. Oddly enough, my vacation did nothing to inspire me.)
Chapter 14: Rude Awakening
"What - the- HELL do you think you're doing, Malfoy!"
Ron started shaking the dazed boy rather violently by his shirtfront.
Draco's eyes widened with fear at the red-faced Ron.
His eyes had a mad look in them and he was gripping Malfoy's shirt so tightly that Draco felt as though the material might rip soon.
He searched his still somewhat-fuddled mind for something to say.
"Erm, good morning?" he managed out in a small voice and raised his eyebrows meekly at Ron; getting a distinctly bad feeling as the larger boy merely growled gutturally in response and narrowed his eyes at him.
Meanwhile, Harry had sat up in bed and was trying to get over the embarrassment of being caught snuggling up in bed with his worst enemy by his best friend and at the same time desperately trying to come up with the words that would explain the scene and somehow fix everything.
None came.
Throughout all this, Harry was vaguely aware of the other boys stirring in their beds.
He knew that they'd all be awake soon and he suddenly felt that his morning could only get worse.
"Ron. . ." Harry started carefully and held up his hands in a placating gesture, "Now, just try to calm down and I'll ex-"
"First - things - first." Ron stated resolutely, not taking his steely eyes off Draco's white face.
He tightened his vice-like grip on the smaller boy and started to half- lift, half-drag him across the length of the room and towards the dorm door.
Draco let out a small yelp as he tried vainly to struggle out of Ron's grasp.
"Ron!" Harry practically sprung out from bed and leapt towards them. But his feet were tangled up in the sheets and instead he stumbled and fell to the floor on his knees.
"Wait!" he cried out as he impatiently tried to undo himself, but the two boys were already out the door.
Harry could make out the thump-thump-thump sound of feet being dragged down the stairs and more yelps of protests from Draco, and winced visibly to himself.
Finally he freed his feet and dashed out of the dorm as fast as he possibly could.
He bounded down the staircase two steps at a time.
By the time Harry had reached the last step to the Common Room, Ron was already starting to open the painting door with one hand.
His other arm was gripped over Draco's chest, pinning the boy's arms in his front, rendering him helpless.
Draco managed to throw a final desperate glance at Harry right before Ron hurled him viciously out into the corridor.
The back of his head slammed painfully against the wall and he fell down in a collapsed heap; breathless from his ordeal.

In front of him, the painting slammed shut with a resounding bang.
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"Ron! Have you lost it?" Harry cried out in anguish and rushed towards the door to check if Draco was all right.
"Me? Have *I* lost it?" Ron pointed to himself and looked incredulously at Harry. "Harry, I hate to tell you this but Malfoy's got you under some sort of sick spell or something."
"NO, RON! It's . . .well-" he stopped and thought for a few seconds. "I guess in a way, you're right. I mean-"
"I knew it. Now, don't worry, whatever he did, he's going to pay for it." He placed each hand on Harry's shoulders before continuing, "We'll go straight to McGonogall first. Then, we go to Dumbledore."
And who knows, that git might even get expelled for this. he added with some glee to himself and nodded reassuringly at Harry who was shaking his head emphatically now.
"No, no! You don't understand, you don't know!" he pushed Ron's hands off him and tried to move around him towards the painting again.
But Ron stood stubbornly in his way and refused to budge.
"Harry?" He peered into his friend's face, and furrowed his brows.
He's com-plete-ly delusional. Ron thought to himself ominously.
"I'm going to take care of you, don't worry. I won't let that bastard near you until we get this fixed."
Harry's eyes widened at this in horror.
"No, Ron! Get out of my way!" and he tried to push Ron aside, quite unsuccessfully.
"Harry." Ron took in a deep breath, "You'll thank me for this later."
And with that he swiftly ducked and lifted an angry and extremely bewildered Harry up over his shoulder.
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Draco groaned and rubbed the back of his head. His head was still spinning from the sudden turn of events.
One minute he was waking up in Harry's bed and snuggling up with him, and the next he was being manhandled by Weasley and thrown out of the Gryffindor Common Room like some lowly house-elf.
His head hurt but his pride was wounded more.
He cradled his head and started to limp slowly towards the safety and protection of the Slytherin Common Room.
*Damn that Weasl

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Chapter: 15

Author's Note: Thanks to all for the great reviews! You know, I didn't mean for the last chapter to be a cliffhanger, so I was quite surprised when a couple of people said it was. But really, I just wanted to split up the story into coherent chapters. (Queen of Vegetasei: Pls don't kill me; I'm

quite a nice person. Really.)
Special thanks to xixie, Sailor Grape, Lady Doncaster, Katie of Gryffindor (you never know with WBs, they tend to sneak up on you), Hyperbole, Dark-One Shadowphyre, Kat, SparkySparkles, Queen Of Vegetasei and Purple*Passion.
Chapter 15: Bondage
"Have you lost your BLOODY MIND?" Harry shouted as he struggled with the bonds restraining him.
Ron had somehow carried him all the way back up to the dorm. After which, he promptly dropped Harry from his shoulder and back on his own bed.
And before Harry could have reacted, Ron had whipped out his wand and used a binding spell to tie both his hands to the bedposts.
"It's the only way, Harry." Ron said firmly as he checked the straps to make sure they'd hold.
Harry struggled furiously with the straps. They were starting to cut into his skin, he was trying so hard.
After a few minutes of struggling, he finally gave up and laid back again, panting slightly from his efforts. He glared resentfully at Ron who was shaking his head mournfully at him.
"Ron, I'm not kidding around, ok? Let me go this instant!" he shouted.
"What is going on here?" Seamus complained, rubbing his heavy-lidded eyes in frustration, as he padded over to Harry's bed.
He stopped in his tracks at the sight that greeted him.
Uhm, is Potter tied to his bed?
He shook his head in disbelief and wondered if he was having one of his crazy dreams again.
He blinked a few times and looked again.
Nope. Still there!
He stared at Harry's form.
Clad only in his pjs. And tied to his bed. Looking oh-so-deli. . .
"Seamus!" Harry called out, breaking him out of his personal reverie.
"What? Oh!" Seamus gulped as he forced himself to focus, "Erm, wh-what's going on here, Harry? Why a-"
"Seamus, you have GOT to help me. Ron's gone mad! You've got to untie me, please!" he looked at Seamus imploringly.
Seamus looked over at Ron, and hesitated.
"Don't. you. dare." Ron said dangerously, tightening the grip on his wand.
"Err . . .Harry?" Seamus said doubtfully.
By now Dean had shuffled out of his bed and joined them from behind. He peered over Seamus's shoulder curiously.
"Oh my!" he gasped, covering his mouth with a hand.
"Kinky." he added cheekily and giggled.
"This is NOT funny!" Harry boomed.
"You guys want to explain to us what's going on here?" Dean asked quizzically.
"I'm protecting Harry. From himself. He's not quite right in the head for now." Ron explained and frowned a little to himself.
"I'm right here, you know!" Harry said pointedly.
Dean sighed. "Ron, you have to do better than that."
It was way too early in the morning for riddles and cryptic answers.

"Fine. When I woke up this morning, I found. . ." he gulped and started to look disgusted again as the memory of it returned to him.
"Malfoy. In bed. With -" he gestured with his head at Harry's direction.
"What?" the two chorused in unison.
Ron nodded, looking grim.
"Obviously, he's done some-thing to Harry and I'm keeping him safe until I figure out what it is and fix this whole thing." He explained further.
Dean and Seamus just stared at Ron open-mouthed.
Harry let out a long weary sigh and closed his eyes. He knew he couldn't explain things to Ron. Not in the state he was in now.
And frankly, he wasn't feeling very friendly towards his best friend at the moment.
"Where's Malfoy, then?" Seamus asked, looking around the room, as if expecting to see the Slytherin tied up as well.
"Oh. I threw him out." Ron shrugged.
"Woah. . ." Seamus looked at Ron with undisguised admiration. Ron managed a modest grin and puffed his chest a little.
It felt good to be the hero for once.
"Cool." Dean chimed in.
I could get used to this. Ron thought, basking in the warm glow of admiration from his friends.
Watching their little exchange, Harry suddenly feeling more alone than ever, and he gave one last desperate attempt to break free of the straps.
Dean looked over at Harry. "Easy there, Harry. We'll soon get you sorted out."
Seamus just nodded in agreement, fully concentrating on trying to permanently burn the image of Harry Potter tied to his bed in his brain.
Where's Colin and his camera when you need him?
Oblivious, Ron felt a rush of self-love flooding over him. *I'm such a great friend. I hope Harry realises this.* He walked over to Harry's bedside and reached out a hand to give him a reassuring pat on the shoulder.
But Harry flinched to avoid it and gave him a cold stare instead.
"Don't. Touch. Me."
Ron merely commented, "See? He's not himself."
Though feeling a little stung by Harry's rejection, he brushed off his discomfort swiftly. He couldn't show weakness now.
"Right. We should go get McGonagall. Let her see this for herself." Ron said in a commanding tone, straightened his back and resolutely tucked his wand back into his pocket.
"That won't be necessary, Mr. Weasley." a familiar voice rang out.
Harry snapped back to attention and let out a sigh of relief as he saw who it was.
McGonagall.
"Professor! Thank god you're here!" he cried out.
Finally, An adult! Someone rational.
"Would someone kindly explain to me why there was shouting coming from this room? I am shocked as to how the four of you could behave in such an irresponsible and-" she stopped her tirade as she came into full view of what the three boys were crowding over.
She stared speechless at Harry for a few seconds before finding the words to continue.
"Would someone explain to me why Mr. Potter is currently tied to his bed while the three of you

are hovering over him?"
Her eyes shot daggers at the three.
"Well, you see Professor, Harry's been cursed. He's under a spell by Malfoy. And I had to tie him up because he was acting all crazy." Ron explained.
"Me!" Harry shouted indignantly.
"Mr. Potter, if you please." the professor chided wearily.
"And what spell was it, Mr. Weasley?" she continued.
"I don't know yet, exactly."
"Well, what did it make Harry do, then? That you felt you had to restrain him in such a manner!" she persisted with some impatience. The situation seemed to be getting out of hand.
"Uhm." Ron paused, glancing at Harry who was giving him a rather hateful glare.
"I- err. . . I found Harry in bed with Malfoy. And they were quite. . ." he paused, wondering what the right word would be.
"-friendly with each other, if you know what I mean." he waggled his eyebrows meaningfully at the professor.
Harry sighed loudly and let his head fall back on the pillow. He had never felt so exhausted in his life.
McGonagall raised her eyebrows in astonishment. This certainly wasn't what she was expecting to hear.
Spells for warts and boils she could deal with. Turning Harry into a ferret for revenge she could take.
But this? Well. This was certainly something quite different.
"Mr. Potter, would you like to add something to this?" she asked Harry in a softer tone, feeling a little sorry for the boy who was looking extremely helpless and lost now.
"Please, just go get Dumbledore." he whispered hoarsely, his eyes closed.
He was too tired for any more battles to

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Chapter: 16

Author's Note: Hi everyone, Thank You for all the lovely reviews!
Special thanks (and some overdue ones) goes out to sk8brdrme, dragons lover, TanisaFyre, SoulSister, EPP, Saavik, zeynel, Hyperbole, LenaLovely12, jeanniiee, Fanny chan, Sky Chief, mandraco, Diartemis, asaroth69, S. Wing, Sheron, kerstin-vol, Lazile, Lady Doncaster, nightwing, Dreams Coast, Bishonen no Hime, Myrddin Ambrosius and chibi-Tenshi.
Back to the story. . .
Chapter 16: Where's Draco?
"And what do we have here. . . Young Harry Potter tied up to his bed?" the headmaster surveyed the scene with some amusement. "A bit early for such adventures; isn't it, Mr. Weasley?" he teased; with a twinkle in his eye.
"And with such an audience, too!" He couldn't resist adding, looking at Dean and the still-transfixed Seamus.

Ron was making a choking sound, his face flushing a crimson red.
A huge grin immediately broke out on Harry's face.
He suddenly felt as though a huge weight had been lifted off his chest; now that the headmaster was here.
Everything was going to be all right.
Meanwhile, Ron was sputtering out something incoherent.
"It's all right, Mr. Weasley. Professor McGonagall has filled me in about your morning. I think I have a pretty good idea of it so far." the headmaster interrupted.
Professor McGonagall merely nodded in agreement. The headmaster had obviously clued her in on what was happening when she had looked for him in his office. She was looking much more like her usual self again.
"Oh." Ron said shortly, relieved. He suddenly didn't feel as confident as he did five minutes ago.
"And I do believe that you have no cause for concern. Now this may surprise you, boys - but, I am well aware of both Mr. Potter and Mr. Malfoy's 'condition'." he paused, taking in the three boys' stunned expressions.
Ron's mouth dropped open.
The headmaster put up a reassuring hand at them before continuing, "And I must say, though well-meaning in your efforts, it is quite unnecessary to tie Mr. Potter to his bed." he said, looking at Ron pointedly, with a smile.
"But- but. . ." Ron sputtered again. "I saw them-" he pointed at Harry's bed.
"I trust you can respect my decision and allow Mr. Potter the use of his limbs back." he said again; his tone a little sterner and his smile disappearing.
Ron looked quite put out by this dismissal and he pouted a little as he took out his wand to undo the spell.
In a blink, Harry's hands were free again.
He sat up in bed and sighed softly as he noted his bruised wrists. They were rubbed raw and a painful red tinge now circled his otherwise pale thin wrists.
"Thank you, Professor." he said to Dumbledore softly with as much gratitude as he felt.
"Anytime, Harry." and he noted with some amusement at how Seamus's face fell at Harry's release.
"So what the hell's going on, then?" Dean asked a tad too loudly. He was starting to pull at his hair, feeling as though he had woken up and the whole world had somehow gone mad.
"I'm afraid that the nature of the matter is quite discreet and I'm not at liberty to say without Harry or Draco's consent." he smiled at Harry kindly.
He nodded gratefully at the headmaster, wondering a little if the powerful wizard could read minds, but not caring either way.
Explanations can wait; and so can Ron and everybody else.
All he can think about now was Draco.
++++++++++++++++++++
(In the Great Hall- half an hour later)
Harry scooped up the remainder of his scrambled eggs into his mouth and looked impatiently towards the doors again.
Still no sign of Draco.
He sighed, feeling dejected. *Did Ron really hurt him that badly?* he mulled anxiously to himself.

Ron and Hermione were off somewhere. She had generously offered Harry to try to explain to Ron what was really happening.
Good old Hermione he had thought. *You can always count on her when it really matters*
And it had never mattered more than now.
Meanwhile, Seamus and Dean were still giving him funny looks from across the table.
But he couldn't care less.
Harry sighed, briefly considering sneaking into the Slytherin Common Room to search for Draco. But he didn't know the password and he doubted any of the Slytherins would be kind enough to tell him.
He spotted Goyle and Crabbe getting up from their seats and suddenly got an idea.
He was desperate.
Standing up quickly, he followed them out the Hall.
Once they were safely out in the corridor and away from the prying eyes of the school, he called out to them.
"Hey! Wait up!"
They stopped in their tracks and slowly turned to face him.
Harry had forgotten how big those two were, and he gulped a little and forced himself to focus on the issue.
He had to find Draco, even if that meant getting pummeled by his two bodyguards.
"Potter?" Goyle said.
The two Slytherins glanced at each other dumbly, clearly not used to conversing with Harry Potter directly. Draco was the one who normally did.
"What do you want?" Crabbe gruffly asked.
"Erm, I was just wondering if you know where Malfoy is?" Harry asked with a confidence that belied his inner nervousness.
Crabbe looked suspiciously at Harry.
"Why do you want to know?" he asked, taking a step towards Harry and immediately towering over the much smaller boy.
"He - err left his Potions textbook at the library and I want to return it to him."
"Really?" Goyle asked, with a gullible expression. Crabbe still looked unimpressed.
"And you know how much he likes Potions." Harry continued, wondering what he had gotten himself into.
But he couldn't stop now.
"Though I suppose, I could just wait till tomorrow or whenever. . ." he feigned a casual air and started to walk back towards the Great Hall again.
Crabbe frowned, trying to think. He briefly considered Draco's wrath in this matter.
That little git really did like Potions a whole lot. . .
One might even think he had a thing for Snape. Crabbe scratched his chin. Finally after a long pause, he conceded.
"He's in the Infirmary. Said something about his head hurting." Crabbe said.
Goyle nodded in agreement.
Harry stopped in his tracks; his hand already on the door by this time.
"Oh, ok." Harry blinked a few times, not believing his luck.
How easy everything would be if everyone was as stupid as these two. he pondered to himself for a moment.

"Thanks!" Harry said brightly to the two boys and turned to fly down the hallway, leaving them to stare at him, utterly flabbergasted at his enthusiasm to find their leader.
Thankfully, neither one had noticed the fact that Harry was strangely empty- han

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Chapter: 17

Chapter 17: Right Back Where We Started
Draco winced, fingering the bump on the back of his head.
He had to admit, Weasley was pretty strong. Even stronger still when he was pissed off.
Draco was still seeing stars every once in a while, especially when he got up on his feet. But he was safe as long as he was sitting or lying down. Like he was now.
Madam Pomfrey bustled into the infirmary.
"Are you sure you don't want the healing balm, dear?" she said kindly.
"No!" Draco said quickly.
"I mean, thanks. But I think I'll live." He said, with a weak smile.
The balm she had offered had smelt worse than Crabbe and Goyle did in the morning. And Draco was sure he wouldn't be able to stomach having that disgusting concoction so near his sinuses like that.
Pain was a better option than smelling like he had rolled around in Hippogriff dung for several hours.
"Well, you can stay here for this morning, but if you feel strong enough, perhaps you can still attend your afternoon classes." she suggested, whilst changing the sheets on the other beds.
"Okay, I'll try." he put on his most world-weary and pathetic face for Pomfrey's sake. She tut-tutted and left the room again, her arms full of dirty linen.
She's crazy if she thinks I'm going back to classes when I have a perfectly good excuse. Not to mention proof! he thought silently as he gingerly fingered his lump again.
Of course, he was also relieved to escape classes and avoid bumping into Weasley.
Draco hated to admit it, but he wasn't as adept at physical confrontations as the redhead was. But then again, that's what Crabbe and Goyle were for. Draco's strength lied in his sharp wit and stinging verbal insults rather than brute force.
Well, that's what he told himself, anyway.
He sighed deeply as the events of his humiliating morning came back to him. His face flushed uncomfortably every time he recalled how easily Weasley had overpowered him.
Harry must think I'm a complete wimp. he thought.
Right then, who should come bursting through the door, his hair even more mussed up as usual, and his glasses a tad askew, but Harry Potter himself.
Gasping for breath, he only stopped when he spotted Draco lying in bed, looking at him with the most surprised expression.
Feeling embarrassed suddenly, Harry tried to regain some semblance of composure and started walking slowly to his bedside.
A slow grin started to appear on Draco's sly little face.

So, he was worried, eh? he thought mischievously.
"Hi." Harry gasped out, still out of breath from his sprint. He clutched at his side where a stitch was forming.
"Been looking for me?" Draco drawled silkily, a small smirk on his lips.
"Uhm, yeah. You know, you waren't at breakfast and -" he explained, feeling flustered all of a sudden.
He took in a deep breath and finally, not being able to help himself; burst out with "Are you all right?"
He looked at Draco earnestly, concern plainly etched in his green eyes.
Draco suddenly feeling quite overcome with guilt.
God, I'm such a bastard. He's really worried about me.
His chest felt tight and his knees felt quite weak, and quite tingly. Almost the same feeling he got whenever he descended too quickly in the air on his broom. A film of cold sweat covered his body and he curled his clammy palms in his sheets.
"I'm fine. Thanks. Just got a nasty bump on my head." he replied finally, trying to get a grip on himself.
"Oh." Harry frowned, the small crease between his eyebrows still there.
"I'm sorry. About Ron." And he took another step towards the boy, standing by his bedside now.
Draco grunted and waved a hand in dismissal. Somehow he didn't feel like talking about Ron now.
Eventhough he's thought about almost nothing but the many (many) ways the redhead could meet with his sudden yet gruesome death.
Harry nodded silently in thanks and started to straighten his spectacles when Draco noticed the angry red marks on his wrists.
"What happened to your wrists?" he asked, a little alarmed.
"Oh, that." Harry glanced down at them and tried not to grimace. It was better that he didn't look at them; it just made the pain worse.
Draco sat up in bed and reached out for his hands. He turned them over, and gasped at the severely blistered skin.
"Erm." Harry hesitated; feeling quite embarrassed.
How do you tell someone that you were tied up in bed just an hour ago, by your best friend and had an audience to boot?
"Well?" Draco asked again, feeling suddenly protective of Harry in his silence.
"It was my fault, actually. . ." Harry admitted.
"I shouldn't have struggled so. . ." And sighed again, recalling his not too pleasant morning.
A switch suddenly went off in Draco's mind, and everything else faded to black.
"Who was it? I'll kill him. I swear; I'll kill him." A glazed determined look had crossed over his eyes.
Taken aback by Draco's sudden vehemence, Harry automatically tried to take a step back, except his hands were still quite firmly in Draco's grasp.
"I'd rather you not do that." Harry said slowly. "Besides, Ron might just kill you this time."
Draco bit his lip at this, wishing he had something to punch.
But he looked at Harry and simply said, "Some best friend."
Harry nodded wearily.
"I know Ron can get a little over-protective of me sometimes. But he means well, I know he

does. Even when he had me tied up in bed just now."
"WHAT?"
Uh-oh.
"He did what?"
"Ummm. Tied me up. In bed. That's how I-"
Draco fumed silently, and gritted his teeth.
Bloody hell, and I can just bet that pervert Finnigan probably enjoyed the show, too! he thought jealously, mentally giving Seamus a kick where the sun doesn't shine.
"And /why/ would Weasley tie you up?" he interrupted, his jaw clenched tightly.
I better start making a list of people I want to give a good ass-kicking. And give it to Crabbe and Goyle. Draco decided to himself.
"He thought you had put me under a spell or something. You know, cos he found us - uhm, in bed and all. Remember?" Harry said, flushing.
"Of course. Of course." Draco nodded absently, waving a hand in acknowledgement. How could he forget?
He looked at Harry thoughtfully now.
The list could wait. Besides it was a rather short list; being only Weasley at the top and Finnigan running a close second now.
Draco started to pull the other boy towards his bed, shifting a little to make room, and motioned for Harry to sit down next to him.
Harry complied and perched himself on the bed next to Draco, wondering why he felt so nervous when he had spent a good part of last night in bed with the same boy.
He took a deep breath and tried to relax and slowly leant back against Draco.
I guess a part of me was afraid he'd pretend last night never happened after all. Harry thought.
"We seem to be in here a lot." Harry mused out loud, looking around the room.
"Hmmm." Draco agreed, and wrapped his arms possessively around Harry's waist.
"Actually, we're right back where we started." Harry said again.
Meanwhile, Draco was busy contemplating Harry's utterly delectable nape before leaning in to kiss him lightly there.
He vividly remembered how good it felt when Harry had kissed his neck before.
And he breathed in Harry's scent deeply.
"You smell like rain and freshly-cut grass." He commented as he buried his face in Harry's silky hair.
Harry laughed out loud. "Is that a good thing?"
"Mmmm. Very good." Draco mumbled and tentatively sucked softly at his neck this time. Harry moaned softly and tilted his head slightly to give Draco better access to his neck.
Encouraged, Draco sucked harder this time and then gently bit Harry's earlobe.
Harry sighed and leaned back more into the embrace; resting his entire weight on Draco's chest now.
He turned his head to Draco's. And the tips of their noses met briefly before Draco pressed forward to clamp his lips over Harry's.
But he didn't kiss Harry. He just kept his lips pressed against Harry's own, and stayed there, motionless, with his eyes closed.
Though surprised at first, Harry's eyes soon fluttered close as he followed suit.
Almost immediately it seemed all of his nerves were standing on end, and tiny electrical

sensations tingled their way thrillingly up his spine and towards his head, finally centering on his forehead, where they circled deliciously.
He felt oddly vulnerable and quite detached from his body but yet he wasn't afraid at all.
Quite the contrary, Harry had never felt anything that was so delicate and exciting at the same time before in his life and he savoured every second of his unique connection with Draco, dreading to break apart from it.
I could stay here forever. he thought to himself, wishing it was

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Chapter: 18

Author's Note: YEAH! I'm past the 300 mark! hehe. (more please. please? I love reading all your reviews, it lets me know you care. *sniff sniff*) In other news, I can't believe I'm up to 18 chapters. For someone like me; that's a LOT of words! I actually frighten myself. . . Originally I'd thought I could wrap this up in 10 chapters or less, but I guess I was wrong. Either that or I'm just incredibly long-winded. And yes, I get the irony, seeing how long this note is. Feel free to shut me up and scroll down to the story now.
dragons lover, (twist eh? yes, coming right up, my lovely...it takes time to build up to these things, u know) but u can expect Marcus back in the fray (actually he's just there to feed my obsession with MF/OW right now.)
Liliku, you're right (am I that transparent/predictable/evil?-wait, don't answer that.). I *was* sorely tempted (oh, so very, very tempted) to end the last scene with such an intrusion in mind, but the romantic in me won out. So I decided to leave them be. (How sweet I am! Just call me cupid from now on.)
Special thanks to Caelestis, Kanoi, raven of the night, Evil Laughter, Marie McBride, Dark Peppermint (sometimes I don't find me very funny either, so it's probably not just the 3 am thing), ashley, KenderElf, asaroth69, Ali, kale & Saavik.
Chapter 18: A Captain's Orders
All too soon, the bell rang.
And with a tremendous show of willpower, Harry tore himself away from Draco.
"It's the bell." he said stupidly, running a hand through his hair.
"I didn't hear anything."
Harry smiled.
Draco pulled him in for one last lingering kiss before finally letting him go.
"I better go." Harry said, and stood up; resigned to his fate.
"Yeah." Draco said, his eyes heavy lidded, a lazy smile plastered on his face.
"I'll see you later, ok?" Harry called out as he left the room.
"Won't have it any other way. . ." Draco drawled to himself as he leant back against his pillow contentedly, resting his hands at the back of his head.
He can't seem to get the smile off his face.
It's just as well there's nobody here. he thought, as he closed his eyes, wishing time would speed up and he'd be back to spending more time with Harry again.

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"Harry! Where have you been?" Hermione whispered urgently as he ran to his seat. He was the last to arrive and everyone else were already in their seats.
Thankfully, McGonogall hasn't showed up yet.
"Hmm?" he mumbled, rummaging through his bag for his parchment and ink; hoping that the warm blush creeping over his face wasn't so noticeable
"Oh. I was with - " He was just about to say Draco's name when he suddenly noticed a pair of eyes watching him intensely.
Ron.
Oh boy.
"Never mind." Harry said quickly, pulling out his textbook and wishing McGonogall would get there soon so lessons could begin.
Ron leant forward and said to him quietly. "We'll talk about this later."
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Draco blinked. He had dozed off.
He wondered what had woken him up.
A knock on the door.
He sat up in his bed.
Harry? he thought happily, rubbing at his eyes.
"Come in!" he called out, thinking that The-Boy-Who-Lived was really too polite for his own good.
Draco sat up and quickly smoothed back his hair, making sure that every strand was in place. He soon stopped though and his face fell when he saw who it was.
"Hello, Marcus." he sighed, lying back down in bed with a disappointed frown. "What do you want? I'm not really sick or anything, it's just a bump."
The Slytherin Captain ignored this and strode over to stand by his bedside, a confident sneer playing on his lips.
"So. . . I heard you've been getting along quite well with Potter recently." he started casually, looking at his fingernails, and flicked off some imaginary dirt from under one.
Draco sat up with a start, looking at Flint suspiciously.
"Why? What have you heard?"
"Nothing nobody else haven't already. It's all over the school. You two are officially an item." Flint said.
Draco raised his eyebrows in surprise.
"Is that so . . . Wow. Rumours work even faster than I do." he commented, before going back to glaring at Marcus.
"Anyway, what the hell business is it of yours, Flint? And shouldn't you be in class?" he spat out.
In the background, the school bell rang faintly, signalling the end of afternoon classes for the day.
Draco hoped that meant Flint would be leaving soon.
"I skipped. Official Quidditch Captain business." he said, and sprawled himself down on a chair next to Draco's bed.
Draco rolled his eyes.
"And I'm it?"
Flint nodded.
"Just thought I should tell you that the match between Slytherin and Gryffindor is back up as

planned. Dumbledore finally gave in, since you two have been looking so well lately." he sighed as if this was a great disappointment to him, "And although I was counting on us not having to play them again this term; as Captain, I understand the need to be prepared."
Draco waved a hand in acknowledgement and nodded impatiently.
Quidditch.
What is that anymore when you can make out with Harry Potter instead?
He must want me to get back into practice again soon. And they say Wood is a slave-driver. he thought to himself.
"So the match is scheduled for the week after next. And I *want* to win." Marcus stated, a little dramatically, his eyes glinting as he looked intently at his Seeker.
Draco shrugged at this.
"So, what else is new?"
"You get what I'm saying, don't you?" Marcus persisted.
"Yes, yes! I'll go to the practices again. Just tell me when." Draco said impatiently.
"No, you idiot. You've got to end. . ." he paused briefly, "whatever-it-is that you've got going on with Potter."
For a moment Draco just looked at Marcus, not believing what he had just heard.
"And why the hell would I do that?" Draco almost shouted, suddenly feeling angry by the bothersome meddling of what seems like the whole world now.
"Are you really so bloody naive? Do you think I'll let my Seeker go out there all googly-eyed and vulnerable? You'll ruin our chances just by being there!" Marcus shot back.
"Look, it is *just* a game, okay Flint? And what makes you think Harry will have such an effect on me? I'll play as I always have!"
"So you're telling me- you're willing to play dirty and get rough with your boyfriend on the pitch?" Marcus challenged, looking at Draco's face intensely for his reaction.
Draco stopped and blinked. He shuddered a little as he pictured what Marcus meant.
God, he couldn't hurt Harry.
Wouldn't.
Especially so since it was his fault that they had both nearly died the last time.
He hesitated for a split second.
"That. Right there." Flint stood up from his seat and pointed a finger in Draco's face.
Draco immediately pushed it away in annoyance.
"What?" he said defensively, averting his eyes from Marcus's intense observation of him now; lest they give away his doubt.
"I *saw* that. You can't, can you?" Marcus spat out, feeling suddenly quite disgusted with the blonde.
This bastard's gone all soft on me. How sick could you get? Flint thought in repulsion.
"I don't know what you're talking about." Draco lied obstinately, crossing his arms over his chest.
"I don't give a damn what you know or don't know, Malfoy. All I want to hear is that you'll quit seeing him. I want the *old* Malfoy back."
Draco gulped, thinking about Harry and the time they'd spent together so far. He couldn't end that.
No Way.
Not for anyone.
So he shook his head firmly at the captain.

"No." And gave Marcus his best steely unblinking gaze.
Marcus sighed and rubbed the tip of his nose.
"Well, then you leave me no choice."
Knowing Marcus, Draco was expecting something like that.
Flint wasn't one to back down easily. One of the reasons why he made such an excellent captain for their team.
"What? You're going to write a letter to my father?" Draco scoffed in disgust.
"I thought of that. . .But he probably already knows -the whole school does. And seeing how you're still very much alive still; I can only assume that the news didn't have quite the desired effect on your father."
He sighed to himself, thinking what a sick family the Malfoys were.
Draco smirked at this, and sat back against his pillow with satisfaction.
He knew Lucius wouldn't care. It makes for an amusing story.
Like father, like son, after all.
"So. . .I guess you're all out of options then, Cap-tain." Draco gloated.
Marcus lowered his head slightly and nodded, before giving Draco a defeated smile.
And he turned around as if he was about to leave Draco to himself again.
When he stopped suddenly.
"Un-less. . ." he slowly said, and rubbed at his chin in mock contemplation.
He turned back to face Draco again, an evil look in his eyes.
"I end things *for* you."
Draco sneered at this, but inside he was starting to feel a little worried.
"And how would you pull that off, pray tell?" he just responded instead, sarcasm heavily dripping off each syllable.
Marcus cocked his head and turned to look back towards the door thoughtfully.
What incredibly perfect timing.
"I could tell Harry the truth." he said, raising his voice a little.
Draco scoffed. "What the hell are you on about?"
"You know. . . The 'ac-ci-dent'?" Marcus lifted an eyebrow meaningfully.
Draco stared at Marcus open-mouthed, and his heart skipped a beat.
No way! He couldn't know. How? he thought, his mind in a frenzied panic.
Marcus chuckled.
"Not quite the innocent 'accident', now was it? But don't worry, I've been keeping your secret safe all this while. Though I might feel the sudden urge to confess it all to a certain young Gryffindor very soon." he said thoughtfully, letting the threat linger in the air.
"How? How did you know?" Draco blurted out.
"How else? I saw it. Saw you. Hitting him from your broom." He slunk closer to the horrified boy, their faces now only inches apart.
"It was brilliant." he said and tapped his finger at Draco's chest.
"Couldn't-have-done-it-better-myself. And two times even. Now *that's* what I call dedication." he noted approvingly.
He leant forward and whispered conspiratorially in Draco's ear.
"So you can understand why I want the *old* Malfoy back."
Draco had covered his face with his hands.
Everything was spinning out of control.

"Now, don't fret, Malfoy." Marcus patted him consolingly on the shoulder, "I'm quite sure I was the only one who saw you. No one else was close enough at the time."
Draco's hands slid from his face and he let them fall to his lap. He felt so utterly helpless now that Marcus knew his secret, and he didn't like this feeling at all.
"You're- you're going to tell him?" he whispered.
"Actually, *we* already have." Marcus straightened back up again.
"What does that mean?" Draco asked slowly.
"Oh, it's just that, uhm," he pursed his lips and brushed some dirt off his robe, "Were you. . . expecting Potter?" Marcus asked with a casual tone.
Draco nodded slowly, watching Marcus very carefully now.
"Well, he's already here. Been standing outside the door for -," he looked down at his watch, "oh, about five minutes now."
"Omigod!" Draco immediately jumped off the bed, stubbornly ignoring the waves of dizziness that instantly hit him and scrambled towards the door.
Marcus had cleverly left it slightly ajar when he had come in.
And now Draco swung it open, before stumbling out into the corridor.
Empty.
He could hear the sound of footsteps around the corner.
And it's someone running away, because the steps were swiftly growing fainter.
Harry.
Draco slumped back against the wall, and covered his face with his hands again.
Marcus now stepped out, and he gave Draco a clap on his shoulder as he walked past him out through the corridor.
"See you at practice tomorrow, Malfoy." he said brightly, not looking back, with a huge smile plastered on his face as he strode down towards the Great Hall for his dinner.
And the whole way he's thinking how wonderful life is when you're Marcus Fl

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Chapter: 19

Author's Note: So sorry to keep you all waiting. I've been sick. *pathetic sniffles* Came down with a fever over the weekend and felt quite shitty overall so I was relegated to my bed. Which was good cos my head felt like a pneumatic drill was working its way through to the centre of my brain. I suppose it found what it was looking for and took it because the pain has gone away. I don't know yet how this loss of grey matter has affected my thought processes but I will keep you updated or perhaps you might get clues when reading this new chapter.
In other news, (same news actually -sorry! heh-heh) I've been popping pills like there's no tomorrow.
And it's about this time, that you; fellow readers, realise that I am indeed - a hypochondriac. (I'm also a Virgo, so it's my birthright.) In other news (really it is this time!) Your brilliant, wonderful and most entertaining reviews made me feel a thousand times better. So, thanks!
Back to the story. . .

Chapter 19: And the Truth Shall Tear Them Apart

Harry took in a deep breath as he waited for Ron to say something.

Classes had just ended for the afternoon and they were now seated at a table in a quiet corner of the library.

It was pretty much empty save for the two of them and a few scattered students wandering through the bookshelves and reading quietly at the tables.

Harry took it as a good sign that Ron chose the library to have their little talk. He can't plan on yelling at him in there. Still, he was rather glad that Hermione had told him she'd be waiting for them outside the library.

Uh-oh, Ron's looking all serious. Harry observed, with a little apprehension. He still didn't really know what Hermione had told Ron or how she did it.

"So." Ron started, his face grim, his lips pressed into a thin white line on his face.

"So." Harry reciprocated and sighed inwardly.

"Hermione's told me your side of the story." Ron said shortly.

"It's not my *side* of the story. It *is* the story." Harry corrected.

"Whatever." Ron waved a hand in dismissal. "The thing is, I understand now what you're going through and that none of this is your fault."

He paused.

"Or . . . Malfoy's." He finally added grudgingly.

Harry grinned in relief.

At least there's progress.

"Thanks, Ron. That means a lot. I -"

"Now don't get carried away just yet. I'm not saying that I approve of what you've got with Malfoy now."

"Oh." Harry sat back, disappointed.

"What I'm *saying* is . . . I can help you, if you want me to, that is."

Harry eyed him suspiciously. "How, exactly?"

"Well, for starters I can keep his filthy claws away from you. Now, I've drawn up a timetable and I thought together we could sort out how best to avoid crossing paths altogether with that git." He pulled out a crumpled piece of paper from his robe pocket and pushed it towards Harry, before adding, "For the rest of the semester."

Omigod. Harry thought in horror as he stared at the piece of paper on the table. *Nothing's changed!*

"No, Ron! I told you, that's not what I want. " Harry blurted out in frustration and stood up to leave.

Draco was waiting for him.

"Wait, Harry!" Ron tugged at his sleeve.

"What?"

"Look - I know I'm not as smart as Hermione. . . or brave like you, or even have any experience with this sort of thing, but. . ." he bit his lip and looked away "I *worry* about you, Harry, I mean you're my best friend. How can I not?"

Harry's heart softened at this, and he took Ron's hand in his and gave it a squeeze.

"Ron, I -" Harry started apologetically.

"I - I'm not finished."

Harry nodded patiently as he waited.

"He's *going* to hurt you. I know it. For Pete's sake, this is Malfoy we're talking about here."
Ron held up a hand to stop Harry's protests, "And when he does, I'm not going to say 'I told you so', Harry. Because that's not what best friends do. I just want you to know that when that happens, when he leaves you; your friends will still be here. That's all I've got to say, really."
Ron shrugged, and looked embarrassed.
He hadn't meant to say so much.
Harry felt two completely conflicting emotions tugging at him now.
On one hand, he felt really touched that Ron cared about him so much to make his little emotional speech; something he knew mustn't be a very easy thing at all for the quick-tempered redhead.
But at the same time he felt that familiar frustration and anger rise in him again at Ron's total lack of trust in Draco. Albeit reasonable given their bad history, but still; can't he trust his own best friend to know better?
Harry took a deep breath and thought quickly. He really wanted Ron's support in this. He wanted things to be the way they were. And that would take time.
He can't hate Draco forever, Harry reasoned. I've just got to give him time to slowly get used to the idea.
So finally, he grabbed Ron's shoulders and looked him right in the eye.
"Ron, I just want you to know that you're the best friend I've ever had. And nobody could ever take your place. Not Draco, or anyone else." He looked meaningfully at his friend. "And thank you for saying what you just said. It means a lot to me."
With that, he planted a kiss firmly on Ron's forehead and smiled brightly at his friend before dashing out of the library in a flurry.
He really was quite late.
Ron just shook his head at his friend and tried not to think about the fact that Harry was running off to be with Draco Malfoy.
Outside, Hermione was still waiting dutifully outside the library when Harry dashed past her, almost knocking her books down in his haste.
"Harry!"
"Oh, sorry, Hermione!" He had completely forgotten that she said she'd be waiting for him.
"How did it go?" she called out.
Harry just smiled and gave her a thumbs-up sign as he continued speedily towards the Infirmary.
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He only slowed down to a brisk walk as he reached the hallway.
And as he neared the door, he could hear voices carrying faintly through it.
There was someone else inside with Draco; a male voice. He raised his hand to knock on the door eventhough it had been left slightly open, but he stopped it in mid-air when he heard what was being said.
"I could tell Harry the truth."
Harry's heart skipped a couple of beats at those words.
And though Harry Potter was as honourable as any other Gryffindor, for some reason he simply could not stop himself from listening in on the entire conversation going on inside the room.
He heard Marcus's words about the accident.
It can't be. It must be a trick. he thought desperately to himself as he stood outside the door.
Then, as if to answer his silent question; Draco's familiar voice betrayingly rang through the air.

"How? How did you know?"
Harry shook his head numbly in shock and disbelief as he unconsciously took a few steps backwards to slump against the opposite wall, staring horrified at the door.
His mind raced, an unintelligible jumble of thoughts and words had formed in his mind.
He couldn't think straight.
Ron was right. he thought defeatedly as the large tears rolled down his cheek.
He didn't bother to wipe them away.
He didn't know exactly how long he had just been standing there like a statue but suddenly he was aware of a faint scuffle.
Someone scrambling towards the door.
Towards him.
So he ran.
And he felt like he would never stop running again.
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(Dinner in the Great hall)
Oliver Wood picked up his chicken leg.
"Hey, what's with Flint?" Angelica said, looking towards the Slytherin table.
Oliver turned his head around to look.
And he dropped the chicken leg with a clatter on his plate.
Flint was *smiling*.
And it wasn't his token ugly sneer or a wicked grin or even a nasty smirk.
The Slytherin Captain looked genuinely happy and pleased with himself.
"*What* is he so happy about?" Oliver wondered out loud.
Fred chuckled. "He looks like he just won the Wizard Lotto or something."
"Or maybe he finally discovered deodorant?" George added.
Laughter.
Oliver just stared at Marcus.
Some of the other Slytherins were giving Flint sidelong glances every once in a while. They waren't used to him being in such a good mood either.
Even Snape was giving Marcus odd looks.
Oliver narrowed his eyes at Marcus as he tried to figure it out.
Malfoy is missing. Wonder if he has anything to do with this.
By now Pucey had noticed Oliver's intense stare towards Marcus and clued him onto it.
Marcus glanced up and met Oliver's gaze.
Then he immediately broke out into another wide smile, puckered his lips and blew a kiss towards the Gryffindor.
Oliver immediately snapped back around to face his plate, his cheeks flushing with anger and humiliation.
Behind him he could hear the Slytherin table erupt in raucous laughter.
"I really hate that guy." Oliver said through gritted teeth. Lee gave him a consoling slap on the shoulder.
At the other end of the table, Ron and Hermione were trying not to notice Harry's conspicuous absence.
"I suppose he's still with-" Hermione started awkwardly.
"Yeah, I know, Hermione." Ron said, obviously tense.

Hermione took a deep breath and tried to take a different tack.
"You know, Ron. I haven't told you how proud I am of you. And how well you're dealing with all of this. With Harry's sudden change and all. You've really matured." Hermione said matter-of-factly as she took a sip from her glass.
Ron's eyes lit up. "Really?"
Hermione nodded.
"Uh-huh. I mean, okay . . . so you didn't take the news very well at first," she said, thinking about the whole bondage fiasco related to her by Harry.
"But, af-ter that, you were really supportive and understanding. And I'm surprised that you took the initiative to talk to him like that. That was a really mature of you."
Ron grinned and started to feel a warm glow spread to his face. It wasn't often that he got compliments from Hermione, or from anyone for that matter.
"I guess I *am* growing up." he said wistfully.
She smiled at him warmly from across the table.
Suddenly Ron was wishing that Malfoy was around, just so he could show Hermione just how more mature he could be.
Heck, he'd even shake the guy's hand.
Bet Harry would be pleased about that too.
He had felt a little guilty after their talk.
Harry was obviously disappointed and hurt, but he had been great to Ron nonetheless. It was things like that that makes Ron wonder what Harry was doing hanging out with him in the first place.
He wondered briefly where Harry had run off to.
Back at the other end of the table, Oliver Wood was wondering the same thing.
He had tried to catch Harry in the Common Room when classes were over but he wasn't there.
And he's not at dinner now either.
Oliver frowned. He had wanted to tell Harry about the upcoming rematch against Slytherin.
They would have to get back into rigorous practice, and try to make up for all the time lost.
He looked over at Weasley and Granger. Those two should know where Harry would be.
"Oy! Ron!" he called out loudly and leaned forward in his seat to get in their line of sight.
Ron turned to Wood expectantly.
"Where's Potter?"
Ron shrugged his shoulders.
"He went to the Infirmary, Oliver. He could still be there." Hermione answered instead.
"Infirmary? Why? Is he ill?" Oliver asked anxiously.
That would put a damper on their training schedule. They have less than two weeks as it is.
"No." Hermione furrowed her brows and sighed.
Well, everyone's heard the rumours by now anyway, she reasoned.
"Draco Malfoy's there." she said.
A hush fell over the table for a moment.
Then almost immediately Fred started making smooching noises and tried to kiss his brother who was fending him off with his napkin. A couple of the girls cooed and started chattering excitedly about how sweet a couple they make. Seamus immediately went red with jealousy and banged his cup back down on the table rather violently.
Hermione rolled her eyes.

So this is what it must feel like to live in a circus.
Meanwhile, Oliver wiped his mouth and threw his napkin down on the table.
He had had enough of this foolishness. It was time to find Harry and knock some sense into

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Chapter: 20

Author's Note: Yes folks, this latest instalment has come in pathetically late. I'm so sorry! I've just been feeling ex-treme-ly lazy and uninspired lately. You can just picture me staring dumbly at the computer screen for hours*** on end, unable to type anything. Horrors!
Anyway your reviews make me so wonderfully happy and light, as always! (more, more, more!)
Special thanks to: Kanoi, justfordraco99, Tine (hey I like your fic -k.y.e!), Purple People Eater, shakiya, Justice-hime, Akemi, Ali, Shannon Corrigan (I need closure too.), frizzy, EPP, serotonin, destinywriters, Ilithril, Minerva-Severus-Dumbledor, Ariel, Natzlin, Middie, Val Mora, mandraco, shinigami5218, Emma, Dia, Tasha, Liliku, Razberry, Dark Peppermint, S. Wing, asaroth69 and Fantastic Mr Foxkins.
***Of course, in between these horrifying and mind-numbing lulls, I was online playing gin. I'm getting quite good!
On to the next chap. (Sorry for the bloody awful title! - I tried, I really did!)
Chapter 20: Deliberate Designs & Ill Counsels
Oliver wandered through the corridors. It was empty, given that most people were still in the Great Hall. After stopping by the Infirmary to find it empty, he had went to the Common Room thinking Harry must have gone back there.
No such luck either.
So now Oliver was walking down random corridors hoping by slim chance to bump into the boy.
And just as he was about to give up the search, he heard a sniffling sound; and stopped in his tracks.
He looked around the hallway for the source of the sound.
No one about.
Suddenly, he noticed some movement in the shadows. He walked towards it cautiously.
"Who's there?" he asked.
The sniffling stopped abruptly.
"Go away." a voice muffled through the darkness.
Oliver recognised it at once.
"Harry? Is that you?"
He went towards the darkened corner of the hallway. As he got nearer, he saw that it was actually a crevice in the wall. It was quite a small space and rather narrow.
Just enough for one person to fit through at any one time.
And right now, Harry Potter was sitting cross-legged on the floor, within it.
His head was bent down, but Oliver could see the shiny tracks of tears on his cheeks, reflected in the poor light.
Oliver sighed at the pitiful sight and crouched down on the floor to face him.

"Harry. . . What's wrong?"
Harry just shook his head silently. It didn't feel as if he could form words just yet.
It still hurt too much.
Oliver frowned.
"Is it You-Know-Who?" he asked with some trepidation.
Harry shook his head and wiped at his nose with the back of his sleeve.
"No." he said dully, finally looking up at Oliver.
His glasses had fogged up and he sniffled again pitifully before taking them off. He started to wipe at his lenses with the edge of his robes.
"You know, everyone's going to be coming out of the Great Hall pretty soon." Oliver noted as he took in Harry's reddened and slightly puffy eyes.
He stood back up and extended his hand down towards the boy.
Harry considered it for a while before finally accepting Oliver's hand and pulled himself up to his feet.
"I'd rather not talk about it." he said quickly. "I- I'm going back to the Common Room now, if you don't mind, Oliver."
"No. I *do* mind." Oliver said, not letting go of his hand.
"Come on." He said firmly and started to pull Harry through the corridor.
Not feeling up for a fight, Harry let himself be led.
"Where are we going?" he sniffed.
"Out." Oliver simply said.
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Draco sighed. He had been wandering around the hallways looking for any sign of Potter ever since the boy had run off.
His feet hurt, his head throbbed and his heart ached.
All he wanted was to find Harry and explain his side of the story. He was sure everything would be right again once he got a chance to.
Sure, he had kept the ugly truth a secret all this time, but if you think about it; he never really said outright that he wasn't guilty.
Harry just assumed that he was innocent.
Yet, even as he was trying to rationalise this to himself, he knew how pathetic it would sound out loud.
I'll find a way to make it up to him somehow. It can't be over just like that.
A low grumbling from his stomach reminded him that he hadn't eaten a thing since this morning.
He frowned and wondered what he should do.
Harry was still nowhere in sight.
He was near to the Great Hall now.
It was late, but there should still be some food left. He sighed wearily again as he gave one last look through the empty halls before opening the doors.
I'll find him. He can't hide forever. he told himself.
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"Here." Oliver handed the younger boy his handkerchief.
Harry took it gratefully. His sleeves were getting uncomfortably damp and were pretty useless now.
"Thanks."

Oliver nodded. They sat in silence.
They were sitting on the top row of the seats around the Quidditch field. They were alone and for that Harry was grateful.
He wasn't feeling very sociable now. If it was up to him, he'd be curled up in his bed right now, with the covers over his head.
Overhead; the sky seemed to mirror his mood. It was slate grey and from the dark clouds growing over the Forbidden Forest; a storm looked fast approaching.
"What are we doing here?" Harry asked.
"You tell me."
Harry gulped, feeling very uncomfortable.
"What's going on, Harry?"
Harry merely bit his lip in response to this and shook his head in muted silence.
"So you're going to keep quiet forever, are you?" Oliver persisted.
"I - I just. . ." his voice broke and trailed off.
Oliver sighed.
He dreaded to ask this question. But it seemed the only way to speed things along.
"Does it have *anything* to do with Draco Malfoy?"
Harry blinked and looked at Oliver, his eyes wide; before turning away.
"You just answered my question, Harry."
Oliver turned to straddle the bench and faced the younger boy.
Harry sniffed and thought for a bit.
He knew he had to say some-thing but on the other hand he didn't want to tell the whole story to Wood either. He could still remember how hard the Captain had fought to get the blame pinned on Draco.
If Wood knew the truth, he'll definitely, *definitely* report it.
Angry and hurt as he is, Harry didn't feel as though he could deal with the professors and Dumbledore all over again. The whole incident would have to be rehashed again and Draco would be forced to confess in front of him.
Once is more than enough. he thought bitterly to himself.
"I can't give you any details, Oliver." he finally stated softly.
Oliver raised his eyebrows slightly at this, not used to being told no by any of his team members.
"Okay. . .I'm not asking for details, Harry. Just tell me what you can. I might be able to help you, you know." he said coaxingly.
Harry chuckled soundlessly and without mirth.
"I don't think you can, Oliver. But, thanks."
He glanced over at the older boy who was now looking at him with a rapt expression.
"To put it simply," Harry paused, an uncomfortable tightness spreading over his chest, "I just found out something. He - Dra - Malfoy - lied to me about . . . something. Uhm, something very important." he stumbled.
Oliver sat and waited for more, but then he realised Harry was finished.
"That's *IT*?"
"Without going into details. . . yes." Harry knitted his brows.
"*That's* why I found you in the middle of some dark hallway, hiding in a dark corner, weeping your heart out?"
Harry hesitated briefly before managing a small wry smile in acknowledgement.

Oliver gaped at the boy in disbelief.
He ran a hand through his hair and shook his head.
"Well, I've heard my share of people's problems; but *that* has got to be the stu-pid-est reason I have ever heard." He commented.
And he finished by adding (rather insensitively).
"In my whole life."
Harry didn't know whether to feel angry with Oliver or to be embarrassed.
Wood had just managed to trivialise everything he had been feeling upset about. And in truth, now he was beginning to feel as though he was being rather silly about everything.
In fact, he almost made him forget why he was feeling so hurt.
Almost.
Harry shook his head. "Well, there's more to it than what I've *said*, obviously."
"Oh, do tell." Oliver said; his tone mockingly enthusiastic.
Harry frowned at this.
"I know you think I shouldn't care because it's Malfoy and all." He paused and wiped at his eye, "but we've . . .we've actually gotten close over these weeks. We're not enemies anymore. We've even-"
Oliver put up a hand to stop Harry.
"Yes, I've heard all those rumours, thank-you-very-much." He said quickly.
"So you know what I'm talking about, then."
"I suppose." Oliver relented.
Harry nodded.
"So, what do you plan to do about it then?" Oliver asked.
"Huh?" Harry looked at him in puzzlement.
"What? Don't tell me you intend to spend the rest of the term moping around and weeping buckets everytime you spot him in the halls or have to sit in the same classes as him?"
"No." Harry sniffed indignantly.
"Well?"
"I haven't thought about all that." he admitted; grimacing as the thought of being in the same classes with the blonde came to him.
He didn't want to face Draco anymore now than he wanted to have a blast- ended skrewt in his bed at night.
He sighed sadly and raised his knees up to hug them to his chest and looked at the rolling clouds. The wind was starting to pick up and blow his hair around.
"For god's sake, Harry! It's not the end of the world, you know!" Oliver exclaimed as he took in Harry's slight pout, feeling quite infuriated with the boy.
Harry pursed his lips obstinately.
Oliver got a sudden urge to shake him.
So he did.
"Owww! Oliver!"
"Sorry, Harry. Couldn't help myself."
Harry frowned and straightened his robes.
Oliver took in a deep breath.
"Look, Harry. I don't know how to put this to you gently, so I'm not even going to try." Harry shot him a fearful look at this, but Oliver didn't care, "SNAP out of it! Stop acting like a rud-dy

CHILD! I mean, seriously, you're The-Boy-Who- Lived, for *Mer-lin's* sake! And you're going to *pieces* because of a lousy break-up?"
Harry's mouth dropped.
"Now, I don't care what you have to do, I don't care what it takes. You've got to get over it!" Oliver shouted.
And stopped.
Harry was strangely silent at his outburst.
Oliver wondered if he had gone too far.
But he couldn't go back now, he thought. And besides he had to do *something*.
A blubbering, overly-emotional Seeker would absolutely kill their chances of winning the match against Slytherin.
Oliver waited with bated breath, hoping that Harry wouldn't burst into tears or something stupid like that.
Harry seemed to be in deep contemplation now. That is to say, he was staring at his feet.
Then his jaw seemed to tighten as he turned to face Oliver, his face resolute.
And he took in a deep breath.
"Thank you, Oliver."
Oliver grinned in relief. *Phew!*
Harry managed a brave smile. "I needed that."
"Good." Oliver nodded and clapped a hand over Harry's shoulder; still not believing that he somehow managed to knock some sense into the boy.
"So you'll be all right then?" Oliver asked.
"Uhm- I think so. I just have to erase it - clean off my mind. Everything." He blinked, "A-And put all of my energy and focus onto . . . something else." He paused and thought, "Er, maybe my classes?" he looked at Oliver expectantly.
The older Gryffindor was grinning like a Cheshire cat.
"No, Harry. I've got something *much* better than that."
Harry raised his eyebrows questioningly at Oliver.
"Quiddit

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Chapter: 21

Author's Note: WOO HOO! One more chapter up! WOO HOO! 400 reviews! You guys are the best-est (BEST!) readers/reviewers in the universe! Those of you who have not reviewed, it's never too late, you know *hint hint*
Special Thanks to: dragons lover, Dark Peppermint (this is pretty early, right? *grins*), LenaLovely12, EPP, Diamond Angel, spangle*star (happy, sweetheart?), Crispy17, Black Heart, Shannon Corrigan, Gabie & Dani, Rei the Genki-Chan, Akemi, caroline, Natzlin, zeynel, Hyperbole, TanisaFyre, beautifulelf and shinigami5218.
Chapter 21: A Not-So Friendly Match
Last night had passed by uneventfully. Harry had gone back to the Common Room with Oliver

after their little chat and together the two boys had gone through various game strategies.
And it's Saturday today, so that means they would be free to practise.
All day long, if need be, Wood had said.
And for once Harry was glad that the older boy was such a slave-driver. He knew he needed to keep himself occupied to keep from thinking about what happened, and how stupid he had been.
Despite his resolution to forget everything remotely Draco-ish, he's still nervous about seeing the boy again.
Afraid he might start to show weakness and break down or something. The last thing he wanted was for Draco to know how affected he was by his betrayal.
But with luck, the weekend would give him time to get it together.
I hope so. Harry sighed.
He clasped his Quidditch robes over his white T-shirt. It was quite chilly out and he should be wearing his jumper but he knew he'd be warmed up by the physical activity.
He hoped Oliver would be done talking soon. He wanted to get back on his broom again and it didn't seem as though the rest of the team were paying him much attention anyway.
Fred was stretched out on the locker room bench, dozing peacefully.
With the bench currently fully occupied, his twin was leaning against his broomstick, half-dressed, with his eyes closed and his mouth hanging open.
Even the girls were looking at Oliver with glassy eyes as he droned on and on about the importance of training especially hard now with the limited time they had.
"All right, then. That's it." Oliver suddenly finished and clapped his hands together rather loudly, snapping George out of his daze. Only then he realised he only had one shoe on and had neglected to put on his pants.
Fred yawned loudly and started to get up from the bench in slow-motion, until Oliver shot him a glare that would scare any Weasley.
Finally they were all out on the pitch.
The sky was clear; only a few stray clouds were hovering above them.
Harry smiled as he got on his beloved broomstick and kicked off into the sky.
The feeling of almost weightless soaring gave him an instant adrenaline rush. He had almost forgotten how much he loved flying.
He sped up and did a few turns in the air, laughing as the exhilaration coursed through his veins.
His cheeks were flushing a healthy colour and he felt better than he had in a while.
About 30 yards below him, he could hear Oliver curse loudly.
Harry stopped his joyriding to look down at Oliver; wondering what the Captain was so pissed about.
Slytherins.
The entire team was assembling onto the pitch, their dark green robes whipping against the wind.
Even from this far up, they looked to be reckoned with.
Marcus Flint shot them a dirty grin from below before turning back to his team-mates.
Oliver was zooming fast down towards the ground; presumably to yell at Marcus for his unwelcome intrusion.
Fred, George and the others were all following him.
Strength in numbers.
Harry hesitated, he could spot Draco clearly; talking to Flint.
He bit his lip and held back the tears; this was harder than he thought.

Finally deciding to leave the confrontation to his teammates; he hovered listlessly in the air, waiting.
Oliver seemed to be close to punching Marcus but Fred and George; knowing him all too well, each kept a steady hand on Oliver's shoulder to hold him back.
Harry sighed.
He was overcome with a sudden urge to leave all the others behind and fly around on his own. Or maybe he could go find Ron and hang out with him and Hermione. Hell, he'd rather be in the library than where he was now. Even detention with Snape sounds like a pleasant idea.
But he knew he couldn't leave.
For one thing, Oliver would find him and flay him alive for wasting precious practise time.
Also, leaving would mean admitting he cared.
Which he wasn't supposed to; according to Oliver.
Something was going on down there.
The Gryffindor team - minus Harry, were now crowded over to one side (away from the Slytherins) and appeared to be in deep discussion.
Harry leant over on his broom handle and squinted his eyes; trying to figure out what they were talking about.
Hmmm. . .I should think about learning how to lip-read.
He flew around in slow, lazy circles until Oliver got on his broom and flew up to his side.
"What are *they* doing here?" Harry immediately blurts out.
"Uhm, Harry -"
He suddenly noticed then that the other Quidditch players, /including/ the Slytherin team were beginning to get on their brooms and rise up into the air.
"Whoa! What's going on here? We're going to have to *share* the field for practise?" he interrupted.
"Oh. It's much worse than that." Oliver paused.
"We're going to play against them. A friendly match." he finished brightly.
"WHAT? Whose *brilliant* idea was this?" Harry yelled.
"Flint's actually."
Harry narrowed his eyes.
"Actually Harry, if you think about it - it's not a bad suggestion." Oliver nodded thoughtfully to himself, "I mean, how good a practise can we get just from playing against ourselves? But playing against those Slytherin bastards? You can't beat that!" He smiled widely at Harry.
Harry looked at Oliver like he was crazy.
Oliver chose to ignore the look and clap the younger boy on his shoulder heartily, almost knocking him off his broom.
"Come on Harry. . . It'll be fine, I promise. Just forget about him."
Easy for you to say. Harry thought bitterly.
Suddenly Marcus's voice rang through the air. "Are you two love-birds going to talk all day or can we start the match?"
Oliver gritted his teeth but gave Marcus a nod nonetheless.
He gave Harry encouraging thumbs up before speeding over to his goal-post.
Harry sighed.
He could sense Draco hovering nearby.
Could *feel* those intense grey eyes on him.

He took in a sharp intake of breath when the boy started to inched closer to him on his broom. They were now only a few feet apart, but Harry steadfastly refused to acknowledge his presence and concentrated instead on what was going on below.
One of the Slytherin's reserves was walking into the centre circle with the heavy box containing the balls and the Golden Snitch.
Draco hesitated.
He considered Harry's tense stance and extremely rigid posture. His knuckles were white from gripping the handle so tightly. It doesn't look good.
I can handle this. he told himself.
"Harry?"
No answer.
Maybe he didn't hear me.
"Harry." he said, a little louder this time and inched even closer towards the boy, "I've been looking all over for you." he gulped and blinked.
Silence.
Overhead, the clear sky was steadily being replaced by fast approaching grey clouds.
Yesterday's gloomy weather looked set to repeat itself.
Harry narrowed his eyes and clenched his jaw tight.
"Don't bother." he finally said without a trace of emotion.
And without warning, he immediately dove away in a blur, before Draco had time to process what he said. The confused Slytherin could feel a whoosh of air from Harry's sudden departure.
He looked down to see why the boy had gone.
Snitch!
The Golden Snitch had just been released and he hadn't been paying attention.
He turned a deaf ear to Marcus's furious yelling as he immediately dove and followed Harry.
Meanwhile, Harry was determined to make this the shortest Quidditch game in history, or at least one of the shortest.
He absolutely *had* to catch the Golden Snitch.
Nothing like a bitter ex to boost morale. Oliver thought proudly as he spotted his Seeker chasing the snitch with a passion and intensity that was unrivalled by his past performances.
The match went on; the snitch staying cleverly out of Harry's grasp.
The score was dead even.
30 - 30.
Draco sighed wearily, he'd been on Harry's tail for ten whole minutes, without a break and at top speed.
Is he some kind of human dynamo?
The snitch dodged just in time from Harry's outstretched hand and Draco could hear him curse softly to himself.
It started to rain.
And lightning flashed across the sky, lighting up their world for a split second.
But it was enough to make Harry lose sight of the snitch momentarily.
In a flash, it was gone.
Harry stopped and surveyed the sky, feeling extremely frustrated with himself.
Of course, Draco took this opportunity to catch up with him again.
He was exhausted from the marathon flying but he tried to compose himself as he flew to Harry's

side.
"Harry, wait."
And for the first time during the match, Harry looked at him.
"What is it?" he said coolly, before turning his eyes towards the sky to search for any sign of the snitch again.
"What did you mean by that? Don't bother?"
"What did I mean, Malfoy?" Harry repeated incredulously, "Exactly what I said." he spat out.
"Look, I know you have every right to be mad at me, but -" he took in a breath, "I have a good explanation." he nodded.
"Oh, really? I have one too."
Draco raised his eyebrows hopefully at this.
Harry maneuvered his broom closer to the other boy, so that they were side by side. Their faces were inches apart now.
"You're a liar."
Draco blinked, a little taken aback.
"Okay. . . I deserved that." he put up his hands in defeat.
"And a coward." Harry added.
Draco gritted his teeth and tried to rein in his mounting anger. He wanted to make things right, and if Harry needed to get angry at him, so be it.
So Draco nodded reluctantly, his eyes narrowing just a little.
"Oh! And I almost forgot." Harry said sweetly.
"You're a bastard and I wish I never met you." he finished with relish, a triumphant smile on his face.
The rain started to pour down harder now, soaking the both of them to their skin.
But by now, they were oblivious to everything else around but each other.
"Are you done?" Draco managed through clenched teeth.
His blonde hair was plastered over his forehead, and for once he didn't brush it away.
Harry looked at Draco appraisingly.
"Yes." he paused briefly.
"And so are we."
"You're *not* serious?" Draco looked him right in the eye.
"I am." Harry said, turning away, and bit back a gulp.
Draco stared at him for the longest time before speaking.
"Fine." he said, his voice slightly strained as he grappled with the turmoil of emotions that was threatening to sweep him away.
Harry could feel the rush of cold air as Draco sped away from him to God knows where.
He started to take off his spectacles to wipe it dry, and saw that his hands were trembling uncontrollably as he lifted them up from his handle.
Everyone else had left.
The game was over; the captains had called it off because of the heavy downpour and Harry was the only one left.
*I did the right thing." He told himself out loud.
Then why do I feel so awful? he thought wearily, feeling more confused than ever.
He took his time descending to the ground.
And as he walked dejectedly back into the castle, his broom dragging behind him, a pair of cold

grey eyes followed his movements from high up an old forgotten to

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Chapter: 22

Author's Note: Sorry for the long - yes, I'm ashamed to admit it - loooonnng delay, guys. (please don't hate me.) I have started a motorcycle learning course and it's made my free time shrink drastically now, so I can't spend as much time as I did before on writing.
Thanks for all the great and wonderful reviews! They kept me going.
Chapter 22: Cold Reflections
The rain continued to pour down relentlessly as Harry climbed up the steps to the owlery.
He had came back from the match soaked to his skin. After taking a long, hot shower (which he thought might help clear his head - but didn't); he had dressed again in some drier clothes and joined Hermione and Ron in the Common Room.
The rest of the Quidditch team were already lounging around by the time he got there, and Fred and George were working on a new practical joke as usual. Surprisingly, Oliver was nowhere to be seen.
Hermione had curled herself up in the armchair with a hideously thick book and Ron wanted to play Wizards' Chess.
Finally Harry had excused himself to go to the owlery, after being beaten by his best friend for the third time in a row.
It wasn't the losses that made him leave. He was quite used to his best friend beating him at the game and he didn't mind at all actually.
He left because it had been exhausting trying to pretend to his friends and everyone else that nothing had happened during the practise.
Where would I even start? he had thought in despair as he looked at Ron's grinning face across the chess set.
He wanted to be alone and Hedwig seemed like a good excuse.
Finally he reached the top of the staircase and entered the owlery.
It was quieter than usual, most of its residents were fast asleep.
No one was sending messages out in this weather.
The only sound to be heard was of the rain pounding furiously on the rooftops above him.
Harry stepped quietly towards a snowy-white owl and petted her gently.
Hedwig cooed and hooted softly as she opened one large round eye. Once she saw who it was, she closed it again and drifted back to sleep contentedly, burrowing herself deeper into the warm nest in her cosy corner.
Compared to what he felt like now, Hedwig looked peaceful and happy.
How simple your life is, Hedwig. Harry sighed enviously, as he rubbed the spot behind her ear soothingly.
++++++++++++++++++
The shower was empty save for him, which was a good thing because Draco Malfoy was not in a pleasant mood.

He looked at himself in the mirror appraisingly.
The steam in the shower room had fogged up the glass but he had rubbed an area clear with his palm; where he could see his reflection clearly.
His long lashes were clumped together, the wetness making them appear darker than usual.
And offsetting against his extremely fair skin, his lips were rosy and flushed with blood.
He had spent too long under the shower just now; with his eyes closed, as if trying to make the last twenty minutes disappear down the drain with searing hot water.
His damp blonde hair was sticking up in all directions after drying it off roughly with his towel.
The towel now hangs loosely around his too-slim waist.
He picked up a black comb from the sink and started to pull it slowly and deliberately through his messy hair.
Never once taking his eyes off himself as he went through this all-too- familiar routine of his.
A familiar scowl started to form on his lips.
He was starting to look like himself again.
He put down his comb.
His hair is slicked back neatly once more.
His grey eyes are like steel as he stares into them coldly and unblinkingly in the mirror.
An ugly sneer had fixed itself upon his face.
The transformation was complete.
Oh, you are /so/ going to pay, Harry Potter . . .
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(Monday morning, breakfast in the Great Hall)
"Are you feeling okay, Harry?" Hermione asked with some hesitation, from across the table.
All weekend long, he had been extremely moody around them.
Even a trip down to Hogsmeade on Sunday hadn't lifted his spirits like it normally did.
One moment he would be looking extremely sad and woebegone, and the next he would be like himself again; laughing and joking with them playfully.
And then after some time; for no apparent reason he would fall deadly silent once more and look as though he was about to shed tears at any moment.
Ron and Hermione didn't know what to make of his erratic behaviour.
They were both worried and Ron had wanted to simply confront him about it; but something in his eyes had made Hermione think that doing that, however well-intended it may be; might just send Harry over the edge.
She made up her mind to do some research on Nervous-Breakdowns-Amongst- Young-Famous-Wizards in the library first.
"Harry?" Hermione prodded gently again when he failed to respond and merely continued stirring his spoon listlessly in his bowl of oatmeal.
"Huh?" He finally looked up slowly.
Hermione forced back a sigh.
"Never mind." she said and bit her lip.
"Oh. . . okay." Harry went back to staring dully at his bowl. Moments later he finally gave up and set his spoon down.
Ron shook his head at the sorry sight.
It didn't look as though Harry had slept a wink last night.
And behind the lenses of his spectacles, Ron could clearly see the dark shadows that had formed

beneath his bloodshot eyes.
His normally healthy tanned skin was deathly pale this morning as a result of his lack of sleep.
Lack of everything . . . Ron thought, as he glanced at his own empty plates littered with crumbs and then at Harry's barely touched ones.
On impulse, he grabbed a piece of toast and buttered it heavily, and then proceeded to add a generous layer of jam over it.
"Here, eat this." Ron ordered, thrusting the bread towards his friend.
Harry looked at his friend, feeling a little taken aback by his unusually firm tone with him.
"Erm, thanks Ron, but I'm done." he shook his head and tried to give him a small smile, and failed.
"But, you hardly *ate* anything!" Ron protested, and thrust the toast into Harry's hand; hoping that might end the argument.
Harry looked at it hesitantly and considered taking a bite while his two friends looked on expectantly.
But that sickening feeling rose up again in his stomach and he finally he dropped it back on his plate.
"I'm not hungry." he said softly and lowered his eyes.
++++++++++++++++
At the other side of the hall, Draco was eating heartily.
He bit into the last piece of his bacon with relish and licked his lips.
"We've got Herbology next, right?" Crabbe asked slowly, his thick eyebrows crinkled together as he tried desperately to remember.
Draco rolled his eyes and held back a sarcastic comment that was on the tip of his tongue.
"Yes, Crabbe." he finally contented himself with saying and instead focused his eyes on Harry's back.
The-Boy-Who-Lived was slumped over in his seat on the bench and didn't seem particularly interested in eating this morning.
"Er, Malfoy?"
"What is it, Goyle? You can't remember our timetable either?" he snorted in disgust.
"Didn't I tell you to tape it on the back of your lunchbox so you would never forget it?" he asked impatiently.
Really! The standard of conversation at this end of the table seemed to be getting worse every day! Draco thought to himself in distaste, and wondered what long-term adverse effects this might have on his intellect and wit.
"No. . ." Goyle corrected slowly. "I meant to ask, are you gonna be hanging around with Potter again this week?" he asked.
"What?" Draco spat out in shock.
He turned to Goyle, who immediately regretted those words ever coming out of his mouth.
Fear started to creep into his eyes as Draco glared at him.
Oh, he must have noticed I was looking at Potter. Draco realised, and felt a little angry at himself for being so careless and embarrassed for having been caught by Goyle, of all people.
"It's just that you've been spending a lot of time with him these past few weeks. We - erm me and Crabbe hardly get to see you now." he said quickly and hunkered over his plate as he braced himself for the verbal assault that was sure to come flying his way.
Draco could really wound when he wanted to.

But right now, their leader didn't feel like lashing out.
So. . . I've been missed, have I? he thought, feeling amused and oddly touched at the same time, as he took in Goyle's nervous posture and Crabbe's fearful look.
"No, Goyle." he paused and casually leaned forward to take a piece of sliced apple from the fruit bowl.
"I don't think I'll be anywhere near that Mudblood lover any more than I can help it." He bit into the slice and savoured the sweet juice that immediately burst through his mouth.
Crabbe and Goyle immediately sat up at this.
"Really?" Goyle asked hopefully.
Draco nodded affirmatively, "Don't worry . . ." he paused, "You'll find that things will get . . . right back to the way they always were. . ." he raised an eyebrow in a distinctly Malfoy-esque fashion.
"Starting from next period." he finished with a sneer.
I'll give Mr. Potter a lesson he'll /never/ forget. . . he finished silently in his head, shooting a cold look towards his old adversary again.
Crabbe and Goyle smirked and nodded at each other triumphantly.
It felt good to have Draco back.
Things were getting too dull around h

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Chapter: 23

Author's Note: Hey guys, THANKS SO MUCH again for the reviews, not to mention telling me about my little spelling error. By the way, did you know I was afraid people would be pissed at me for not having updated recently and would not read the story anymore? Hehe. Anyway, sorry guys, if the mistake bugged you, but I gotta edit this stuff all by myself (boo hoo hoo!) and sometimes I miss out some things. To err is human/me.
Special thanks to: Ji Nu - ^*Star Goddess, kandra, zeynel, Diamond Angel, Jess, blackunicorn, JJ, Amethyst Shard, Rei the Genki-Chan, SnippyandSnarky, Winged Goddess, Akemi, ALITA, RAVENCLAWPUNKg, Amy, KittenBabyGirl, KawaiiAngel4, Dark Peppermint, Justice-hime, dragons lover, Ariel, Sayuki, junejewel9, Tramill De Laxson, Drupadi, EPP, Saavik, Butterfly, Jessica, jadewtch, Giza Firestone, Katie of Gryffindor, ForeverYoung, redredredred & frizzy
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Chapter 23: Payback
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"Watch out for that cubby hole, Neville!" Dean said loudly, right before seeing his friend step right into it instead.
Neville let out a frightened yelp and fell clumsily on the grass.
Dean, Seamus and a few others who had seen the comical sight laughed merrily. But there wasn't any cruelty to their laughter. They were always in high spirits when the lessons were conducted outdoors.
A few Slytherins looked on at the laughing bunch and frowned in disdain.

The class was a combined one, as usual. But the two houses still managed to keep a respectable distance from one another as they moved across the school grounds.
Professor Sprout had them going out towards the lake for the day's lesson.
Finally she motioned for them to stop when they've almost reached the shoreline. She had her back to the lake whilst the class faced her.
"All right, class. Today we're going to be plucking Gnome-Tossers."
Blank looks all around as Professor Sprout asked loudly, "Can anyone tell me what Gnome-Tossers are?"
Hermione's hand shot up into the air even before the professor could finish her sentence.
"Yes, Miss Granger?"
"Also referred to as Ferus Propella; Gnome-Tossers are plants that were bred for the efficient removal of gardens gnomes. They work by immediately repelling anyone that comes in contact with its stem, thereby sending the offending creature into the air and removing it temporarily. However, Gnome- Tossers were discontinued from use only years after their introduction to the Wizarding World."
"Ve-ry good, Miss Granger. Ten points to Gryffindor!"
Ron whooped silently, much to the chagrin of the Slytherins.
"Now, I'm sure you're all asking yourselves- *why* aren't they being used anymore, especially when they provide us with such a useful service?"
She looked around, ignoring Hermione's hand that immediately went up again.
"Neville?"
"Oh." he stuttered, caught unawares.
"Erm, p-people stopped using them because they wouldn't stop growing."
He paused briefly, feeling a little unsure of himself and looked at Professor Sprout for approval. She gave him a small nod and he took a deep breath before continuing, "The Gnome-Tossers grew very rapidly and a fully-grown Gnome-Tosser could reach up to six hundred feet in height. Of course, then no one wanted these monsters in their gardens anymore."
"Excellent, Neville! Twenty points!" she beamed.
Dean clapped him on his back, and he flushed deeply and grinned.
Pansy stuck out her tongue at him, rather childishly.
Oblivious, Professor Sprout continued, "Despite outgrowing their intended purpose, Gnome-Tossers also produce a very useful by-product which is little-known to most. Their flowers contain a sap that can be used to treat motion sickness."
"As you know, at times wizards *do* suffer from some adverse effects when travelling long distances by broom, floo powder and even port keys."
A couple of students nodded woefully in acknowledgement at this.
"And today, we are going to pluck the flowers of these trees. Look behind you please, and you will find plenty of Gnome-Tossers, all fully-grown." she said.
"All of them were re-planted from the Hogwarts gardens and we're extremely delighted to see that they've flourished quite beautifully here by the lake." she motioned to the large cluster of almost giant-like trees.
The sight of them *were* awe-inspiring. A few looked so tall, they might have reached the clouds.
The thick trunks of the immense trees were each covered with a dark brown bark. Sharp branches stuck out dangerously from these trunks.

And hanging from the branches were lush deep red flowers.
"All right, I want all of you to listen very carefully now." she suddenly said seriously.
"When you are plucking the flowers, you will have to strict-ly note that a safe distance has to be kept from yourself and the trunk at ALL times. No matter how close a flower is to the trunk, do *not* attempt to touch it. Pluck those that are further, even if it takes more effort."
"Remember, these trees *are* fully-grown and I assure you, more than capable of sending you flying off at the slightest touch." she paused and looked at them sternly for a while before finishing.
"Now, you will work in pairs. Each student is to take a basket and fill them up as best you can." she pointed to a pile of brown baskets on the ground next to her.
"You may begin once you're ready."
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"Hey!" a deep male voice called out.
"What?" Oliver stumbled and started to hop on one foot. He had been in the middle of putting his shoes on.
"You forgot this."
Something white flew from the bed and hit Oliver in the face, before he caught it in his hands.
He looked at it.
A pair of white boxer shorts.
His.
He /knew/ he forgot something.
Well, I did get dressed in an awful hurry. he thought.
"Oh, thanks." he muttered quickly instead and turned a little red.
He wadded up the shorts into a ball and stuffed it quickly down his robe pocket before finally managing to get his left foot into his shoe at last.
And with that he fled the room immediately; not even bothering to lace them up.
The door slammed behind him.
Sniggering, Marcus Flint leaned back against the pillow, his hands cradling the back of his head.
Contrary to Oliver, Marcus felt very relaxed indeed.
He hasn't even bothered to get dressed yet.
Only the tangled sheets covered the lower half of his body now, leaving the rest of him bare, exposing his well-tanned muscular chest and his strong arms (courtesy of years of Quidditch training).
He briefly considered getting dressed before brushing the annoying thought away.
He was too late for morning class anyway, so why rush? he reasoned and closed his eyes instead.
A slow smile started to spread on his face as last night's events came rushing back to him in delicious fragments.
Not too difficult, considering that the heady scent of Oliver was still everywhere, eventhough the boy had already left the room.
It was on the sheets, the pillows, even on Marcus himself.
Mostly on Marcus, actually.
Smells of sunshine and sweat and sand.
Intoxicating, to say the least.
Marcus opened his eyes suddenly and groaned to himself.
/Why/ couldn't he just have kept his mouth shut just now?

It would have been nice if he could keep those boxers for himself instead.
Well. . .Maybe next time.
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(By the lake, amongst the Gnome-Tossers)
"Harry, come here. I've got one more." Ron motioned, waving a red flower to his friend.
Harry grudgingly trudged to where Ron was standing, the big basket hooked over the crook of his left arm.
"Ron, for God's sake, why didn't you get your own bloody basket?"
Ron shrugged. "Well, you know. . . because carrying a basket is uhm - kind of girly?"
"What?" Harry yelled, almost dropping the basket in the process.
"But it looks very good on you, Harry!" he quickly covered up, "*Much* better than it would on me." He nodded unconvincingly.
Harry frowned at his friend and gave him a playful slap on his shoulder.
"Ok, but now we've got to take turns carrying it." he handed the basket to Ron.
It *did* look a little girly now, more so with all the flowers in it now.
"What? No way, Potter!" Ron protested and ducked out of the way, seeking refuge at the other side of the huge tree.
"Ron!" Harry laughed and started to chase after his friend.
"Harry, wait! There's one right above your head." Ron said and pointed, hoping that might distract Harry from pushing the basket onto him.
Harry looked up.
There /was/ one.
A very plush deep-red one.
"It's too high, I can't reach it." Harry complained.
Ron merely grunted in response. He had spotted another one over at his side and was busy leaping up into the air trying to grab it.
Harry sighed and looked around for something that he could use to boost himself up.
And found it quickly.
A half-rotting log jutting out from the soil.
He set his basket down carefully on the ground and climbed up on the log.
If he balanced himself on the highest point at the tip of it, he might *just* be able to reach the flower.
Meanwhile, unbeknownst to him and Ron, Draco had been observing their movements.
He watched Harry now, waiting patiently for the right moment.
Harry tiptoed on the log, extending his right arm up as high as he could.
He focused purely on reaching the flower now, his eyebrows knitted together in concentration as he tried to inch himself upward a bit more.
Almost. . .
Draco shot a look at Crabbe and Goyle who had stopped their plucking to observe their leader.
Cupping his hands around his mouth, Draco let out a shout, "HEY POTTER!"
And instinctively, Harry turned his head around at the voice.
Unfortunate, because that moment's lapse was enough to throw off his delicate balancing act on the log.
"Woah!" he started to wobble precariously on the log, and flailed his arms out.
"R-Ron!" he called out, in alarm.

"Harry!" Ron cried out, his eyes growing wide as he saw what was about to happen.
He rushed forward to catch his friend, stumbling on the gnarled roots on the ground.
But it was too late and Harry went careening forward, straight into the tree trunk.
His glasses immediately broke in half upon impact, and he could feel a sharp pain from his lower lip where it had landed heavily against the trunk.
"Harry, move back! Move back!" Ron cried out in a panic and pulled at the back of his friend's robes in desperation.
Feeling a little dazed, Harry tried to straighten up and push himself off the trunk.
But he couldn't.
Invisible hands were gripping him to the trunk.
It was like a huge magnetic force refusing to let him go.
He gulped.
A deep groan started to emanate from deep within the tree.
It was working its way up from below the ground and swiftly moved up through the trunk, resonating through the forest.
Harry could feel vibrations from the tree trunk.
Oh boy
The sound attracted the rest of the students and Professor Sprout; who came running as fast as she could.
But it was already too late.
What happened next was a complete blur for Harry.
All he knew was that he was going fast.
Really, really fast.
Somewhere along his flight, he was aware of sharp branches brushing against his cheek and forehead,
And before he knew it, he had landed in the lake with a huge splash.
He was only underwater for a few seconds, before the distinctly slimy tentacles of the Giant Squid started to circle his waist.
Slowly but surely he was being pulled back towards the shore.
"Harry! Are you okay?" Faces crowded him as he felt himself being laid down gently on the rocky bank.
A sharp pebble was poking him in the back.
"Everyone step back, give him some room!" Professor Sprout's loud voice broke through the babble of eager voices.
Harry lifted his head slightly off the ground and squinted at the faces surrounding him.
He couldn't see Draco.
The world was a blur without his glasses.
Then, everything went bl

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Chapter: 24

Author's Note: I'm so SUPER DUPER SORRY for the incredibly looooong hiatus. I /actually/ wanted to post an update just to tell people that I won't be updating, cos I've been completely busy. But then I decided not to, cos that might make some people even madder.
I've received death threats! *author whimpers and hides behind her desk*
But, luckily for me (and my life), I think the release of OoP might have re- kindled my desire to continue this story. Thank You Everyone for your reviews, they constantly amuse me.
Oh, and about the fic posted on ... I can't do anything about it cos I've completely forgotten my UserID and password. So just ignore it, if you can.
Chapter 24: Aftermath
"I heard about what happened this morning." Marcus whispered conspiratorially, his mouth close to Draco's ear, and a rough hand on the younger boy's arm.
"Nice one." he finished with a satisfied sneer, thumping Draco on the back solidly before continuing down the hallway.
Draco looked at the retreating figure of his Captain and saw that Crabbe and Goyle were grinning (albeit grotesquely); obviously impressed that an older student had heard about their little scheme.
Draco gave them an obligatory smug smile.
But his pretense quickly faded as he walked into the Common Room.
Throwing himself down on the couch, he tried to lean back and organise his jumbled thoughts.
He hated feeling like this. It was *supposed* to be so good.
He sighed heavily and stood back up again.
He ran a hand through his neatly combed hair agitatedly and started to pace.
The gut-wrenching guilt does *not* bode well with his temperament. And hiding it is even worse.
Despite the adamant and repeated denials in his head that he shouldn't care and didn't; the truth was that, he did.
And try as he might, he could not turn off the torrent of images of Harry lying on the lake shore this morning.
With his pale face scratched up and lips bleeding so freely.
And at that moment, revenge suddenly didn't seem so sweet anymore.
Now for the first time in his life, Draco Malfoy hated himself.
He didn't even know how Harry was doing now. While he was being carted off to the Infirmary (again), Ron and Hermione had thrown him what can only be described as 'The Look of Death'.
Which is probably largely due to the fact that he had managed to get away with his little prank scot-free.
With some help from two eyewitnesses. Whose names just happen to be Vincent and Gregory.
Heck, he had almost wished that Sprout had called him on what he did.
Almost.
The Slytherin wrung his hands for the umpteenth time and kicked sharply at the almirah by the wall in frustration.
It creaked whinnily in protest and tried to back itself up against the wall more closely in an effort to edge itself out from Draco's path.
Draco knew some of other Slytherins in the Common Room were watching him now and giving him odd looks.
And he didn't care.

A nervous looking first year trying to exit the dungeons skittered by around him, giving him a wide berth.
Even Crabbe and Goyle had moved away from him by now. With the excuse that all his pacing was making their heads hurt; they went in search of some chocolate to make themselves feel better.
Things were not looking good.
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"Still think he's harmless, Hermione?"
Hermione pursed her lips in response. Ron had been gloating over what had happened in Herbology for the past fifteen minutes and Hermione felt just about ready to slap him.
"Are you enjoying this, Ron?" she asked with a glare.
"WHAT?" Ron looked taken aback by this accusation.
"Well, given that our best friend could be seriously injured for the second time this term, you seem awfully pleased with yourself." Hermione noted coolly.
"Well, I *was* right, wasn't I?" Without waiting for a response, he rattled on, oblivious to Hermione's growing annoyance.
"I was right that he couldn't trust Malfoy and I was right about that git hurting him, too!"
Hermione rolled her eyes and stood up. She had just about enough of Ron.
"/I'm/ going to the Infirmary to see whether Madam Pomfrey is allowing any visitors yet." And with a huff; she strode off, her robes swishing behind her, leaving behind a very befuddled Ron.
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By the time Harry had woken up, it was early evening. The sun had just begun to set outside the window next to his bed, and a soft dusky glow had filled the large room.
He opened his eyes and squinted through his blurred vision. Reaching over to the small table beside him, he groped around for the familiar feel of his glasses for a while, before finding them and putting them on.
Someone had bothered to fix them, he realised, as the memory of his flight this morning came back to him in a tidal wave.
He touched his face curiously, to feel the angry cuts that now grazed his left cheek and forehead. He looked down to see that his arms waren't spared either.
But still. No broken bones. No punctured lung. Definitely an improvement for me. he thought bitterly to himself.
As he sat up in bed, he started to piece together the events that led up to his latest misadventure. He knew Draco had a huge part to play in it.
And this time I remember. He brooded as he unconsciously licked the still- crimson cut on his bruised lower lip. He pressed his lips together. For some reason, the pain felt right.
He sighed softly to himself.
"Not the best term," a deep familiar voice interrupted his gloomy thoughts, "is it, Harry?"
Harry looked up to see the headmaster standing at the doorway.
"Professor Dumbledore," he said in acknowledgement and smiled weakly as he unconsciously fingered the scratches on his forehead, "It's not as bad as it looks, actually."
And as if to prove this, he slid off the bed and stood up, without much difficulty.
"Ah..." The headmaster nodded and smiled as he walked into the room.
"I'm sorry things haven't been easy for you this term, Harry." he said as he watched the boy rummaging around a nearby closet for his school uniform and robes.

"Yeah." he replied shortly as he started pulling his pajama top over his head.
"I hope you know that you need only to look for me if you ever need to talk, Harry." The professor said.
Now Harry was starting to feel a little annoyed now at the wizard as he put his arms through his school shirt.
It's not as if he needed reminding of the whole depraved affair with Malfoy.
Things have just gotten from bad to worse and he hadn't the slightest clue of how to go about his life now.
He exhaled hotly before putting on his shirt, "Well, it's not as if I can do anything about it, is there? So what's the point in talking about it?" and threw an accusing look at the headmaster before doing up his shirt buttons a little hastily.
Silence.
And almost instantly, Harry regretted his words. He knew that he had no reason to be angry at the headmaster.
He looked up guiltily and started to form an apology, but the headmaster raised a hand to stop him before he could.
"No need to explain, Harry. I can't pretend to know what it is that you're going through. It certainly is a unique position that the two of you are in." he said.
Harry nodded absently. He had by now managed to kick off his pajama bottom and was now trying to get into his school trousers as deftly as possible.
The headmaster seemed to be perfectly comfortable with, or oblivious to the teenage boy's state of undress before him.
"Thanks." Harry mumbled as he threw his dark robes over his shoulders. He couldn't wait to get out of the room.
All of a sudden, it felt incredibly stifling in there.
"Erm... If you don't mind, sir, I think I'll be going down to the Great Hall now." he managed an apologetic smile, "See if there's any food left."
The headmaster smiled graciously. "Of course. I'll tell Madam Pomfrey that you're feeling better." He started walking with Harry to the door.
Harry held back a sigh of relief as they headed for the doorway. He had been afraid that the wizard would start asking him questions in a bid to get him to talk about his feelings. Or something equally useless like that.
"And Harry..." the headmaster said as he held open the door for the both of them.
"Yes?" he half-turned, avoiding the headmaster's gaze.
"Take care of yourself." he said kindly.
Harry nodded quickly in thanks before heading out and away from the Infirmary.
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Chapter: 25

Chapter 25: Nervous Breakdowns Among Young Famous Wizards

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In the Great Hall, students had been slowly trickling out for the past half hour.
By now all the professors had retired to the staff lounge or their respective rooms. Only a handful of students remained in the vast hall.
A few Hufflepuffs were still chattering amiably over dessert in one corner of their table. The Ravenclaw table was devoid of its students; all that was left were empty plates and crumbs. Two second year Gryffindors were seated close together at their table, giggling and exchanging bashful glances.
And at the Slytherin table, Crabbe and Goyle were still too enamored by tonight's servings of chocolate cream puffs to leave just yet.
Next to them, sat a sullen looking blonde boy, who stayed behind because he simply had nothing else better to do just yet.
He had spent most of dinnertime accepting congratulatory pats on the backs from the Slytherins and putting up with accusing glances and hateful stares from the Gryffindor table.
Apparently word had spread over his latest prank.
It never used to bother him before.
In fact, he remembered a time when he would positively eat up the hate- filled, resentful stares of some lesser breed of wizards.
But today had felt different. With each accusatory glance, his own damning guilt was mirrored back to him.
He really did *not* enjoy dinner.
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"Harry!"
He stopped and turned around in mid-stride as a figure ran up to him from behind.
"Hermione!" he exclaimed as he was thrown into a big bear hug by the bushy haired girl.
"*What* are you doing out of bed? I went by the Infirmary earlier and Pomfrey said that you were still passed out."
"I woke up." he said wryly, as he pushed her slowly off him.
"Well, are you sure you should be out -".
"I'm fine, Hermione." he cut her off quickly.
He didn't really feel like being coddled by her right now.
She looked a bit taken aback by his quick tone but continued nevertheless, "Let's get you back to the Common Room at least..." and she touched him on his arm.
He sighed deeply. She was beginning to sound like Dumbledore.
"Actually, if you don't mind, I'm going to the Great Hall first. I haven't eaten a thing since breakfast this morning." he said and started to walk away from her.
"I'll see you later, Hermione." he added as an afterthought, a little more amiably.
He had no idea why he's been feeling so incredibly moody ever since he got up.
"Oh. But Harry!" she ran a few steps up to him, "I think Malfoy's still in there..."
Right. That's why.
He gritted his teeth.
"Do you want me to get you something from the kitchen, instead? I could get the kitchen elves to-"
"No!" he shouted, "I'm fine! I'm not going to change every-single-thing just because Draco Malfoy's around!"

Shocked silence.
"Harry... That's *not* what I meant," she blinked, "I just thought you might not want to see him after this- this morning, that's all."
He softened a little at her hurt expression.
"I'm sorry, Hermione. I didn't mean to snap at you like that." He looked up at the ceiling and took in a deep breath as he ran both his hands through his messy locks.
He doesn't look fine at all! He looks like he's on a brink of a nervous breakdown... she noted worriedly as she took in his agitated stance. His eyes were bloodshot, and a crusty scab had formed over the deep cut on his lip. The scratches on his face contrasted starkly with his weak pallor.
"It's okay, Harry." she said instead, quelling her secret fears, "I'm just feeling a little over-protective of you. We really thought you were hurt this morning."
Now he *really* felt bad.
"I - err thank you, Herm. I'm just feeling a little jumpy that's all." he managed a weak smile as he gave her arm a reassuring squeeze, "But, don't worry, please...I'll be back to normal after a good nights' sleep, I expect." he said, only half-believing his own words.
"Whatever you say, Harry." she said to herself softly, as she watched his retreating back.
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Meanwhile, in the Great Hall, Draco had just about enough of listening to the sounds of Crabbe and Goyle's seemingly endless munching.
He mumbled a quick excuse at them and stood up to leave. He checked himself out of habit and frowned in distaste.
Crumbs now littered his robes; courtesy of the Crabbe and Goyle's enthusiastic face-stuffing.
Biting back a scathing comment, he angrily brushed them off him as he walked briskly out of the Great Hall.
And headlong into Harry Potter.
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Chapter: 26

Author's Note: Thanks very much for all your reviews! It's much appreciated. More More Moreeeeee! *heh-heh*
It feels good to be back. :)
Special thanks to - Kawaii-chan, Stormy1x2, fatchap (hey, thanks for calling off the assasination attempt, dude!), Shannon Corrigan (because she asked so nicely), Rei the Genki-Chan, PhoenixSong, LadyRaya, rofro05, Ange de melancolie, Shania Maxwell, Rarity88, Aahz, Fire of the Angel, Storm, NayNymic, Furies, Vidalark, Dark-One Shadowphyre, Mudblood, shakiya, TanisaFyre, Ms. Padfoot.
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DreamerofHope, EPP (if you're still reading this fic, I've had a few crashes on the bike and been flattened under it, but so far no horrific accidents. Yet.)
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Chapter 26: Last Resort
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The two collided into each other.
"Ow!"
"Hey, watch it!"
Draco cursed loudly, a scowl on his face. He had just bumped into a rather- bony-someone right outside the Great Hall and his head was smarting from the sudden impact. Though, he also noted with some satisfaction that he had managed to trod on the offendor's feet at least.
He looked up slowly, relishing the sweet taste of the verbal assault that the clumsy oaf had coming to him.
The words he had prepared all but died in his throat, as he stared into two very fierce-looking, brilliant green irises.
"Harry." he said softly, almost in wonderment.
He had been thinking about the boy so much; that for a moment he thought his mind must be playing tricks on him.
But then, he suddenly remembered the very corporeal body he had just walked into and shook himself.
His grey eyes widened slightly as he took in the angry looking scratches running along the other boy's cheek and forehead.
There was a deep vertical gash on his lower lip, which looked raw still, as if the boy had been chewing on it.
Draco stared at it, momentarily transfixed.
Harry, on the other hand, hadn't counted on running into Draco quite so figuratively. And now that he had, all his pent-up rage started boiling to the surface once more.
"Oh. So I'm 'Harry' now, huh?" the dark haired boy responded vehemently.
Before him, Draco blinked in surprise. Words had suddenly left him.
He felt awkward, the now-familiar feeling of guilt rose up in him again like bile. He looked at everywhere but Harry.
Angered even more by his silence, Harry gritted his teeth and continued slowly, "So tell me..." as he took a predatory step towards the blonde, and backed him up to the wall.
"Are we going to play nice now?"
He laid a flat palm on the rough wall next to Draco's shoulder, all the while glaring at him, a dare in his eyes.
"Because I'd really like to know." he said, sarcasm dripping off every syllable.
He felt a certain satisfaction at seeing the boy fidget uncomfortably before him.
After a significant pause, Draco looked down and whispered almost inaudibly to the floor.
"I'm sorry."
Harry had to lower his head to hear it.
He scoffed.
"You're sorry?" With his free hand, Harry pretended to rub his chin and looked thoughtful, "For what, Malfoy? Being you?" he asked with a sardonic smile.

Draco looked up now, an angry glint in his eyes as he stared at Harry.
"I'm sorry," he forced himself to take a breath, "for hurting you." he managed out, his jaw tight.
Harry sniffed and pulled himself back. He crossed his arms, and looked at Draco appraisingly, his expression cool.
Draco's lip twitched as he tried to remind himself that Harry had every right to be mad at him.
He tried another tack.
"Are you okay now?" he asked, telling himself not to be put off by the cold gaze before him.
"Couldn't be better." Harry said; his cold tone unfaltering.
"It looks bad." Draco said, looking at the scratches.
He reached out a hand and made as if to examine them, but pulled it back immediately when Harry flinched his head away, looking annoyed.
Draco ignored the painful twinge squeezing his heart and nodded.
"I've had worse." Harry said pointedly, "I'm sure *you* can recall," he couldn't resist adding, if just to see Draco wince.
"I didn't mean it this morning." Draco said hurriedly. "What I did, I mean... I didn't mean for you to get hurt like that, I just wanted to... you know - humiliate you." he surprised himself with his own answer.
"Ah." Harry knitted his brows, "So that's it. Well, thanks, I feel *much* better now." he said, and started to walk towards the doors to the Great Hall.
A desperate choking sensation came over him when he realised Harry was walking away from him yet again.
His eyes welled up, he felt so ridiculously helpless. His efforts seem futile.
Nothing had worked.
As a last resort, he blurted out in desperation, "I don't know what else to do. I don't know what else to say. I miss you." he sputtered. The words had come bursting out of him before he had time to think twice.
"I miss you." he repeated, softer this time, almost as if he was telling it to himself now.
Harry froze, one hand on the door, his back still to Draco.
For a second, hope flared in Draco.
This is it. He's going to forgive me.
He held in his breath.
"I - " Harry halted, and closed his eyes for a moment, "I can't do this anymore. It's too much." he swallowed thickly.
And with that, he went inside the Great Hall, closing the door on the Slytherin.
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Draco just stood there, dumbfounded.
He had bared his soul, showed his weakness.
Forsaken all his pride.
And for what?
Harry hadn't forgiven him.
Will never... he thought, catatonically.
He had been rooted to the spot, staring blankly ahead for the past few minutes. In some small part of his brain, he knew that true despair hasn't set into him yet.
Because right now, he was just numb.
He shoved his hands into his pants pockets and willed his feet to move.

He had lost track of how much time had past since Harry had gone into the Hall, and he wasn't going to risk Harry coming out and seeing him again.
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Harry sat down at a table heavily, a little relieved to be off his feet.
His heart was thumping so fast, he had thought his feet would give out the instant he walked into the room.
He could sense someone at his same table standing up now and walking away.
He didn't even look to see who it was.
Everything around him now was background noise.
An insignificant blur.
What did he come here for?
He ran a hand through his hair, his mind was blank for a few moments before he remembered.
Right. he sighed tiredly as he picked up a stray bun on a plate before him and put it back down again.
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Chapter: 27

Author's Note: Want more? REVIEW! (Author admits she might have a problem.)
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Chapter 27: Nervous Breakdowns Among Young Famous Wizards (Part Two)
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"Hey." A hand shot out and grabbed his arm as he walked past. The suddenness made him falter back a step clumsily and he looked around to see if anyone had noticed.
There were still far too many students around for Oliver's comfort. Since that night, he had been very careful to avoid bumping into Marcus.
Taking the long way to his classes, scheduling his meals so that they'd miss each other and actually paying attention in his classes rather than daydreaming and staring at the back of Marcus's head. (he only paid attention in those classes that they had to share with the Slytherins that is.)
And here the boy was.
Right in front of him.
After the friendly match, when it had rained, things had gotten a little out of hand between him and the Slytherin captain.
Oliver tried to tell himself afterwards that it must have been the electricity of the storm, combined with the charged atmosphere and the adrenalin from the match, and not to mention all that mud clinging to them both.
He had heard of Muggles wrestling in mud for entertainment from his cousin, so there must be something to it. (He still couldn't be sure; though he was glad for the explanations.)
Because a small part of him sometimes couldn't believe what they had done together only a few days ago.

While other parts of him have been lucidly reliving the sweat-filled moments at every given opportunity.
At this thought, an uncontrollable blush started to spread across his face as he looked at Marcus; the brute who was staring at him now under his hooded eyes, with a knowing sneer on his lips.
Oliver frowned, in an attempt to look more in control.
But Marcus wasn't having none of that.
"So." he said, glancing down at Oliver lips for a moment.
"What do you want, Flint?" Oliver groused, yanking his arm away from Marcus's tight hold.
Oliver checked the hallway again quickly.
Luckily, no one was paying them much attention.
He sighed and turned back to Marcus.
"I thought you might like to see something." Marcus drawled suggestively, swiftly sneaking a hand inside the front of Oliver's robe and letting his fingers trail down slowly from chest to stomach.
"What?" Oliver yelped and jumped back.
He straightened his robe and glared at Marcus with as much indignation as he could muster. (Which was quite a lot.)
Marcus laughed under his breath.
"Relax, *Wood*." he said, putting particular emphasis on the boy's name, causing him to redden even further.
"I'm serious, though. You got a minute?" continued Marcus gruffly, his sneer fading.
Oliver breathed out and considered the boy/man standing before him for a few seconds. His classes for the day just ended, but he didn't want to give Marcus the satisfaction.
"Oh, all right! What is it, then?" he finally relented ungraciously.
"Good boy. Come on, then. No sense wasting valuable time." Marcus said vaguely as he walked away.
Oliver stood his spot stubbornly for a while, undecided whether or not he should follow Marcus. At the very least he expected Marcus to stop and turn around when he noticed the other boy wasn't following him, but the Slytherin just strode on without so much as a care.
Typical! Oliver narrowed his eyes as he ran to catch up with Marcus.
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(In the Gryffindor Common Room)
"Ron, have you seen Harry yet?" asked Hermione. She had just gotten back from the library. Piled high in her arms were various books she had borrowed.
Ron looked puzzled for a moment. "Hermione... he's still sleeping it off, remember?"
"Not anymore. I bumped into him after dinner. He said he was going to get something to eat." Hermione frowned and looked at her watch, "I'd have thought he would be done by now."
"Harry's alright? Why didn't you come get me?" he exclaimed, standing up from his armchair.
"Oh." she looked slightly abashed, "Uhm, I had something to do in the library and I guess I got a little carried away..." she trailed off and sniffled.
The books were more than a little dusty.
"Hermione! I can't believe you'd value homework over your friends!" Ron looked at her in horror.
"I didn't! I mean, I don't. It's research for Harry, mind you!" Hermione wondered a little too late if she'd said too much. Knowing Ron he'll overreact as usual.

"What research?" Ron asked curiously, taking a book off the top of her pile.
"10,000 Signs and Symptoms of the Emotionally Unstable Friend. What the..." Ron looked perplexed and took the next book, "Understanding Suicidal Tendencies and How to Prevent them." he read out loud, his eyes almost bugging out.
"Ron, don't worry, there's lots more. This is only what I could carry back from the Nervous Breakdowns section. It's fairly extensive...you should see- "
"Hermione!" Ron cut in, exasperated.
She sighed. *He's bound to find out sooner or later.* she thought.
"Ron," she started, and spoke as slowly and clearly as she could.
"Do Not Pa-nic. I am *just* a little worried about Harry, that's all. What he's been through..." she sighed and shifted the books on her arms a little, "It's not easy for him, that's for sure. And Malfoy's not making it any easier." Ron blinked as she continued, "I thought it might be helpful to know a little bit more about what to expect and what to do if anything should happen."
"What's going to happen?" Ron asked automatically.
"I don't know, Ron. That's what I'm trying to find out, see?" she said patiently.
"Oh."
"Yes." She hoped that he finally got it. Her arms were getting tired and there was still a pile of books more that she has yet to pick up from the library.
"Need any help?"
She smiled.
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The first low rumble of thunder echoed through the now-empty hallways.
Oliver cursed his luck. He had been hoping for dry weather today so he could practise on his broom. But from the sounds of it, the wet weather they've been having lately would be repeating itself today.
"Where are we going, Flint?" Oliver asked, impatiently. They had been weaving in and out of interconnecting hallways for a few minutes now.
Throughout, Marcus had been mysteriously and infuriatingly silent.
"Look here, I'm not moving another step until you tell me." Oliver finally said firmly.
And true to his word, he stopped dead in his tracks, and crossed his arms.
Marcus smiled indulgently to himself before turning around to face the headstrong Gryffindor.
"You won't have to." he reached out and his hand found a doorknob in the wall that Oliver hadn't noticed.
Marcus opened the small door with a flourish.
"This is it."
"This is what, exactly?"
"What I've been wanting to show you." Marcus said pointedly.
Oliver glared at him before grudgingly taking a step towards the open door.
He stuck his head inside curiously and looked around.
"It *looks* like a broom closet, Fli-"
No sooner than that, he was pushed roughly within.
Marcus stepped in smoothly and locked the door behind them.
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(Back in the Gryffindor Common Room)
"Do you think we have enough, Herm?"

"Yes. For now." she said, looking with satisfaction at the vast collection of books they had amassed now on a corner table.
"I'll just pop upstairs to the dorm room for a bit. Harry's probably back by now. I want to see if he's okay." Ron said.
"Alright." Hermione nodded.
Two minutes later, Ron came bounding back down the stairs to her surprise.
He was visibly shaken and a little out of breath, but he still managed to lower his voice when he told Hermione.
"He's gone!"
"What?"
"Shhh! No sense telling the whole world. We could be getting him in more trouble than he needs to be." scolded Ron.
"What do you mean, he's gone?" Hermione whispered anxiously.
"His cloak is missing," Ron panted, "and so is the Map. He must've taken them to go somewhere."
The two friends stared at each other in silence, aghast at the implications.
++++++++++++++++
(In a Broom Closet, somewhere in Hogwarts)
"So," Oliver panted, in between kissing Marcus back ferociously.
Kiss. Slurp.
"this."
Bite. Nip. *Rowr*
"is what..."
Pant, pant. Suck.
"you wanted to show me?" he finished, gasping for air.
Marcus pulled his head back with an evil smile, "I knew you'd be pleased."
He covered Oliver's mouth again with his own and slid a rough tongue into the boy's sweet mouth.
Oliver let out a low moan and grabbed the back of the captain's head to pull him in even closer.
And Marcus Flint didn't need any more encouragement than that.
His calloused hands circled Oliver's slim hips, and pushed the boy up against the wall.
Something clattered to the floor.
"What was that?" Oliver started.
"Doesn't matter." Marcus growled as he impatiently aligned his own body up with Oliver's slim frame and pressed his erection against Oliver's growing bulge.
The heat and the sudden friction caused Oliver to gasp audibly.
The sheer pleasure shooting through him was intoxicating.
All he could think now was *More. More. Mo

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Chapter: 28

Chapter 28: Runaway

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Harry Potter sat, in a far corner of the shop; faced away from the other customers.

He was still aware however, of the crowd starting to thin gradually when the thunder started an hour ago.

Now, only a few customers were left; him included.

People didn't want to get caught in the rain going home, he supposed.

But Harry wasn't bothered by the change in weather.

Because he wasn't planning on going back to Hogwarts just yet.

Earlier, when he had grabbed his Invisibility cloak and the Marauder's Map from his trunk, he hadn't the faintest idea where he was going.

His only thought had just been;

/Away from here/

And under the blanket of his invisible shroud, his path had led him to Hogsmeade.

Where he had been sitting for the past two hours, in the Three Broomsticks, staring out of the window. The only time he had spoken was when Madam Rosmerta asked him what he wanted to drink.

Now, his butterbeer remained almost full still, having only sipped it once or twice since she put it in front of him.

Things were quiet here now, and without the din of a crowd; only the sound of the rain hitting the pavement outside could be heard.

He sighed and leaned back against the backrest of his chair.

It felt unbelievably good to be away from all the confusion he had felt.

He checked his watch.

It was just past eleven o'clock at night.

That gives him only seven, maybe eight more hours.

Anytime after that and his dorm mates would awake to find his bed empty. Ron would probably throw a fit.

Now, the mere thought of having to eventually return back to his life in the morning was filling him with a heavy dread.

He wondered briefly if he could get a room upstairs. He started toying with the idea of leaving Hogwarts for good and living on his own.

He certainly had enough money to sustain himself modestly.

And what was stopping him from getting a job?

Only his age, of course.

Well, it won't be long till he turns eighteen. And until then, he could do whatever he wanted.

He smiled to himself and took a sip.

The possibility of the plan seems so alluring in its potential.

He could start a new life, forget about everything that had happened.

And everyone. he added sullenly.

But he stopped, it would be awful to never see Ron and Hermione again.

They were the first real friends that he had known in his short life.

Well, they could always visit. he thought as he sipped his butterbeer and started to feel cheerful again.

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Meanwhile, back in Hogwarts, Ron and Hermione had been frantically going over the school grounds for any sign of their friend.
"Ron. Wait, stop." Hermione said wearily, pulling on the back of the redhead's robe. They had been walking and asking the other students if anyone had seen Harry, for over an hour now.
She sighed.
"It's useless. He wouldn't take his cloak and map with him if he didn't want to leave the school grounds."
"Yeah, I know." Ron admitted. "But what else can we do? It's not like we can sneak out like he did. Someone's bound to spot us."
"I think -" Hermione paused thoughtfully, "I think it's time we went to the most obvious reason he ran away in the first place."
"What? You want to ask Malfoy for help after what he did to Harry?" Ron almost shouted.
"We have no choice, Ron." Hermione said quietly.
++++++++++++++
Draco Malfoy was lying on his bed, both hands clasped over his stomach.
His eyes were closed but he wasn't sleeping.
After he had gotten back from the Great Hall, he hadn't even bothered to change.
Thunder boomed dramatically from outside his window and the rain was splattering onto his windowsill and the floor underneath it.
He also hadn't bothered to pull the shutters close when the storm had started in earnest.
*What does it matter anymore? I think I'll just lie here forever. * he sighed deeply.
Just as he was about to turn and curl himself up on the mattress, someone knocked on his door sharply.
"Go Away." he called out, not moving.
The knocks came again, more insistent.
He cursed.
"Whoever you are, go away. I'm not in the mood!"
"Draco, open up! It's us - Hermione and Ron!"
He sat up in surprise, and narrowed his eyes at the door suspiciously.
Was it a trick?
The voice *did* sound like a lot like that mudblood.
But what the heck were they doing here in the dungeons?
He reluctantly slid off his bed and walked the few steps to slip the bolt off his door before opening it.
"How did you two get in here?" he demanded almost instantly when he saw it *was* them.
"Never mind that. We have more important thi-" Hermione started urgently.
"I'll have to report you to Professor Snape, of course." he cut her off, "It *is* an offence to trespass the dungeons." he continued coolly, ignoring Ron's growing livid expression.
Hermione shook her head impatiently.
There was no time for their games now.
"Harry's gone missing." she blurted out.
Draco blinked and took a step back.
His first thoughts were "What? Why? and Where?"
But then he suddenly remembered that it was no longer any of his business now what Harry did.
"I don't see how *that's* my problem, Granger." he said indifferently.

"I think it *is* your problem, Malfoy. Because I don't see any reason why Harry would want to leave if *you* hadn't had something to do with it." Ron seethed.
Draco frowned.
Was that true? Did Harry leave because of me? But, why? It doesn't make any sense! he wondered, feeling quite astounded.
"We've searched everywhere. He's not in the school." Hermione continued, biting her lip worriedly.
"We think he might have run off somewhere...maybe Hogsmeade... it can't be too far. But the thing is, we can't sneak out to find him without getting caught ourselves." she said.
Looking at her tense expression, Draco felt the first surge of uncertainty and fear squeeze his heart.
If Granger was worried, then maybe Harry *was* in real trouble.
"He could just have taken his broom out for a joyride, you know." he suggested hopefully.
"In this weather? You must be joking!" Ron exclaimed.
Draco automatically turned his head to glance back at his open window. A strong gust of wind suddenly blew in, causing his shutters to bang violently against the wall.
And the rain was coming down in sheets now. He could barely make out anything outside.
"Besides, I checked and his broom is still here. So wherever he went, he went on foot." added Ron.
"Right..." Draco said and turned back to the two friends.
The three looked at each other in silence.
For maybe the first time, they all had something in common.
Harry.
Draco gripped the side of his door with a hand and looked down for a moment, thinking hard.
"I have an idea." he said suddenly, looking up.
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(5 minutes later in The Owlery)
"This is it? *This* is your idea?" Ron asked, in disbelief.
"Yes, Weasley." Draco stated non-plussed, and straightened a few hairs on his expensive broom.
"Unless you have a better one." he waited and looked at the redhead.
Silence.
"Well, I guess that says it all."
"Malfoy... Ron has a point. Don't you think it's a little dangerous for you to be flying around in a storm?"
Draco shrugged and tied his cloak around his neck. It was black and he couldn't be easily spotted with it on. Its inner lining however, was satin and blood-red.
Hermione drew her wand and quickly performed an Impervious charm on the cloak.
"That should keep the rain off, but I don't think it'll hold against lightning. So BE CAREFUL!"
"All right." Draco said absently, straddling his broom with ease.
"And keep your hood on!" Hermione added.
Draco looked at her incredulously for a moment before nodding brusqely and putting his hood up over his head obediently.
Who would have thought the day would come when Hermione Granger would be molly coddling a Slytherin?
"I think I should go instead. Or at least let me come along with you." Ron said insistently.

"Weasley, we both know that I'm the better flier. And I can get there faster without having to babysit you the whole time."
Ron sputtered and seemed about ready to throttle the blonde before Hermione wisely stepped in.
"I think what Malfoy *means*," she threw the blonde a stern look, "is that he wouldn't want to see you get hurt. And there's no escaping being caught if you do. Which means we'll have to tell McGonogall about Harry as well."
After a loaded pause, Ron finally nodded reluctantly.
"Look - are we just about done here?" Draco asked impatiently.
"I guess." Hermione said reluctantly.
"Good. I'm off then." he said as he prepared to kick off but stopped himself as he thought of something. "You two better get back to your dorms. No sense all of us getting into trouble."
And before they could say anything he shot out the window.
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Harry rubbed at his eyes and stifled a yawn.
He was feeling rather sleepy.
Perhaps it was time he got himself a room and slipped into bed. He could deal with the repercussions of him leaving Hogwarts in the morning, he thought tiredly.
He got off his chair slowly and turned around.
To see a very wet and stone-faced blonde dripping before him.
"Leaving so soon?" Draco asked flatly and side-stepped a very surprised Harry to take a seat at the table.
He propped his broom up against the wall to dry and shrugged his cloak off his shoulders.
It was still warm and dry; Hermione's charm had worked well.
The only thing she hadn't anticipated was that the wind would blow his hood off during his flight. The rain had completely soaked his hair.
He hung the cloak on the back of the chair and sat down.
Harry gaped, speechless. The last person he was expecting to see right now was Draco.
At once, a thousand questions raced through his head.
What was he doing here? How did he know where Harry would be? And worse, if he knew, did Dumbledore and everyone else already know as well?
"So." Draco sat back, looking at Harry thoughtfully. "I brave the rain and the lightning on my broom, in the middle of the night, no less, to come looking for you; I scour the streets for a good fifteen minutes before I finally *do* find you, and... you have nothing to say?" he asked plainly.
Harry opened his mouth to speak, and closed it again.
Draco sighed and ran a hand through his damp locks. They were dripping down his collar uncomfortably.
"What were you *thinking*?" Draco asked curiously, when Harry remained silent.
Harry swallowed and bit his lip before he remembered that it was still quite bruised.
All of a sudden, his plan seemed rather silly now.
He flushed deeply.
"I guess I wasn't." he said glumly and slumped back into his chair.
"How did you -" he started.
"Granger and Weasley found out. They came to me."
"Oh." Harry frowned. He hadn't thought that Ron would notice.
The thought of making his friends worry over him made him feel rather ashamed of himself. He

winced.
"Does anyone else -"
"No. Just us three know. That is, unless somehow the two of them got caught out of bed after I'd left."
Harry groaned.
This was bad.
And this time, it was entirely his fault.
He *had* to fix it somehow.
"All right. We better head back now; the sooner the better. If they're in trouble, I'll take the blame for everything." He said determinedly and stood up.
Draco stared at him.
"Uhm, unless you haven't noticed, we have the Storm of the Century brewing out there. How *exactly* are the two of us going to get back?"
"The same way you got here." Harry said, pointing at the broom.
"No way! I *barely* made it here in one piece and that was just *ME* alone on the broom." He shook his head at the memory.
For the first time since he had made his appearance, Harry noticed that the boy's shoulders were trembling a little.
Maybe it *was* too dangerous to fly out there all the way back to the school.
Harry glanced out the window to see the sheets of rain pounding the pavement mercilessly.
Lightning lit the empty street outside for a split second.
He couldn't imagine what Draco had to go through to get here to him.
And in a moment of clarity, all the confusion he had been feeling within him evaporated.
All that he could feel now was concern and fear for the boy.
"Are you all right?" he asked cautiously. "You're - you're shaking."
"Oh. Must be the cold." Draco said dismissively, with a tired sigh.
"So - it looks like you're stuck with me till the storm blows over." He looked away from Harry as he said this.
Now that the initial relief of finding Harry had faded, the rejection he'd faced this evening came flooding back to him again.
It stung just as raw as it did then.
Suddenly he was regretting his decision to come, instead of letting Ron make the trip himself.
Harry would probably have been delighted to see Weasley, he thought bitterly. He forced himself to blink back the hot tears that were threatening to spill.
How humiliating. Only his pride saved him now.
"We can fly back in the morning, hopefully make it back in time before everyone wakes up. With luck, no one will be the wiser and we can forget this ever happened." Draco continued, keeping his eyes fixed on the table top.
Harry nodded with relief. It seemed like a good plan.
"Thanks." He said gratefully and tried to meet Draco's eyes to convey this but the boy was refusing to look at him. Harry frowned.
"Forget it." Draco mumbled.
Harry, of course, remembered what had happened outside the Great Hall very clearly.
He could guess then that he had hurt Draco but he hadn't known till now how much.
And now, looking at the blonde, he wanted nothing more than to hold him close and tell him how

sorry he was and how he hadn't meant what he had said.
Things had been awful for so long and he wondered what was standing in his way now to making them right again.
Nothing, he realised truthfully.
And if there was anything Harry could do well, it was being direct after he had made his mind up about something.
He stood up abruptly, scraping the legs of his chair on the floor loudly as he did so.
Draco looked up at him.
"You - want to sit at another table." He stated flatly.
He knew Harry wanted nothing more than to escape from his presence, but he hadn't expected such an obvious gesture.
"No!" Harry exclaimed, looking at Draco strangely. "Why would I - oh never mind. Come on, get up!" he held onto Draco's arm and coaxed the boy out from his seat.
"Wha- what are you doing?" Draco asked, baffled.
Not letting go of Draco's arm, Harry grabbed the broom with his other hand before pulling a very reluctant Draco forward along with him determinedly.
"I'm going to ask Madam Rosmerta if she could let us have a room for the night. No point sitting here the whole time when we could get some sleep in a warm bed, right?" he said matter-of-factly.
Draco started to yank his arm back in sheer horror, but Harry's grip was remarkably strong and it kept him in place.
Stay in the same room with Harry? In the same bed? Was the boy trying to torture him even further?
"I think I'd rather just sit here, really! You go ahead, though." He suggested, with an air of desperation.
Harry looked back and faced the protesting boy; shaking his head firmly.
"That just won't do. Besides, you need to dry off or you'll catch your death of cold." Harry paused thoughtfully.
"I think I'd better run a hot bath for you as well, just to be on the safe side." He added mischievously.
"What?" Draco yelped, his eyes growing wide in alarm. This was *too* cruel, even if Harry did hate him.
"No! Look, just -"
"Dra-co..." Harry cut him off with such affection in his eyes, that Draco was stunned speechless.
Unable to contain his smile any longer; Harry let the broom fall to the floor with a thud, and used his free hand now to gently trace Draco's smooth cheek.
Draco blinked in shock.
"You have *got* to learn when to stop talking." Harry said with a slight shake of his head, and pulled the resisting blonde closer against him.
Draco thought his heart would leap out of his chest, it was ramming so loudly in his ribcage when he saw Harry lean in towards him.
And he did the most incredible thing Draco could ever wish for.
He kissed him.
Draco closed his eyes and melted into the kiss almost instantly.
His nerves were on fire.

Every brush, every touch of his skin against Harry's seemed amplified a thousand times.
His legs were starting to buckle weakly under him. It was a good thing that Harry was holding him so tightly or he would've crumpled to the floor within seconds.
"Er-hem." Someone in the room cleared his or her throat loudly.
To Draco's dismay, Harry pulled away. But he exhaled shakily as he realised that he was still tightly ensconced in the boy's arms.
And for some reason, the simple gesture gave him a strange thrill.
Harry looked up to see a stern looking old wizard staring at them reproachfully. He must've been the one who had cleared his throat pointedly.
There was nobody else around, except for Madam Rosmerta behind the counter and she was pretending to be busy wiping her mugs dry, a small smile playing at the corner of her lips giving her away.
Ordinarily, Harry would've immediately let go of Draco and feel completely embarrassed at his inadvertent public display of affection.
But, for the first time in his life his heart felt free and light, and he found that he couldn't care less what anyone else was thinking about them.
He was amazed and delighted at this entirely new and unfamiliar feeling of freedom.
"So." Draco started awkwardly and fingered Harry's robe. The raven-haired boy turned back to him, a question in his eyes.
"How about that room?"
Harry grinned and leant in to kiss him again.
++++++++++
A/N: A very big Thank You to everyone who's read this story and reviewed or bothered to send me an e-mail about it. When I started this, I never (NEVER) imagined that it would get quite so long & get so many reviews! I LOVE all your feedback and it never fails to put a smile on my face. This chapter stayed in my computer for a while before I could finish it because I've been a little distracted putting together another HP/DM fanfic (my second) "Stuck! The Elevator Story." So, check it out if you haven't already & let me know what you think!
Cheers! ~ Katane