

This year, there were no exams. In solidarity with the OWL and NEWT students, McGonagall had cancelled exams for all year groups, claiming they had enough on their plates as it was. This decision made her wildly popular, even amongst Slytherins. And that little spark of hope within Draco caught alight.

He was turning seventeen. Coming of age in the wizarding world. He had the day off classes, to welcome in his maturing magic — which would set in at 11:02 in the morning, a perfectly respectable time to be born — and he thought maybe, this year might be different. This year he could sit publicly with his boyfriend and his friends and not have to pretend to hate any of them. He didn't have to hide birthday presents in his trunk to avoid questions about who they had come from.

He woke up at his usual time in the morning, his fingers and toes tingling, a strange bubbling sensation in his chest. At first he thought it was just excitement — that foolish hope he was far too old for — but then he realised it was his magic, preparing for his maturity to arrive. The Malfoy magic, and the Black magic, and smaller echoes of other families that had married into both lines along the way. A deep, old magic.

“Happy birthday, Draco,” Blaise said with a grin, tossing a silver-wrapped present his way before Draco could even properly sit up.

Things were much lighter in their dorm, now that Crabbe and Goyle were gone.

“Thanks.” Draco shuffled into a sitting position, glancing at the other bed in the room, which was empty. “Theo in the shower?”

“Oh, no, he never came in last night,” Blaise drawled with a wriggle of his eyebrows.

“*Oh*, I see.” Fair enough. It wasn't like he could judge. “And both of you are still happy with giving me my *other* birthday present?”

Blaise laughed, reaching into his trunk for a white uniform shirt. “Yeah, yeah, don't worry. We've made other arrangements, the dorm is yours.” He winked. “I doubt it'll be too much of a travesty for Theo to spend *another* night in whatever love nest he and Susan have holed up in.”

“True. I still appreciate it, though.” After all the times Draco had been up in the Gryffindor dorm by now, he rather thought it was about time Harry came down to his level for once. Harry didn't know about his plan yet, but Draco couldn't see him complaining.

With no classes to get to, he had a leisurely morning, taking his time in the shower and strolling up to breakfast far later than he normally would. It surprised him, how many people wished him a happy birthday on his way up to the Great Hall. How many of them weren't even Slytherins.

Entering the hall, he couldn't help the way his eyes immediately sought out a head of wild jet-black hair, nor the way his heart swelled in his chest at the beaming smile bestowed upon him, those vivid green eyes lighting up at the sight of him. Harry Potter would be the death of him, honestly.