

Knowing how explosive the duels between his godfather and his boyfriend could get, Draco decided to step out into the corridor for a minute. To his surprise, as he did so his mother was walking past. She took one look at him and frowned. “What’s the matter, darling?”

“I’m fine,” he said, immediately hating how petulant he sounded. His shoulders slumped. “I — it’s nothing. I’m just... not taking to it as quickly as I anticipated.”

“You’ve only been here a fortnight,” Narcissa reminded him. “It takes time, Dragon. Especially with Severus — you know he’ll be pushing you to your limits.”

“That’s the damned problem,” Draco muttered, “my limits are lower than they should be!”

“Only compared to Harry. Any other person your age wouldn’t last ten seconds against Severus Snape. Hell, *I* barely last a minute against him, when he’s truly trying.” Narcissa moved closer, patting him on the cheek. “You know he’s proud of you. And you are improving.”

“It’s not about making him proud of me!” That was part of it, yes, he couldn’t deny that — he’d sought his godfather’s approval more than his father’s, growing up, because from Severus it felt like it truly *meant* something. With Severus he had to earn it.

But that wasn’t what had him upset now. “I need to be better at this, for Harry,” he insisted. “If I’m going to fight by his side I need to be able to *stay* by his side.” Right now he felt like he’d be cut down in the first five minutes of any proper battle, and that was no use to anyone, least of all his boyfriend who was training to go up against the fucking Dark Lord.

He hated the way his mother’s face softened in something that looked an awful lot like pity. “Oh, darling,” she sighed. “Harry Potter is both a law and a standard unto himself.” Her voice was fond, and Draco’s lips twitched reluctantly. Truer words had never been spoken. “I have every confidence that, when the time comes, you will protect *each other*. You think I would be half as willing to let you throw yourself into battle if I didn’t think he’d keep you alive through it?”

“He shouldn’t have to, though! He’s got enough to worry about as it is!” Anger flared deep in Draco’s chest. “What if he’s so busy protecting me he doesn’t look after himself?” He had nightmares about it; the pair of them in battle, Harry turning to block a spell from hitting Draco and taking a killing curse straight to the back for it.

“You’d never let harm come to him,” his mother told him. Draco wished he could have her confidence.

He let out a frustrated sigh, running a hand through his hair. “I just— I can’t fail him,” he whispered, voice cracking. “Malfoys don’t fail.”

“But Blacks do.” Draco blinked, staring at his mother incredulously. “Blacks fail. All the time. We’re rather good at it, actually.” Her lips curved wryly. “But we get back up and we learn from our mistakes and we become *better*.” When her grey eyes met his, they were intent; challenging. “We make it so that we do not fail when it matters.” Both her hands came to his shoulders, holding him firmly. “You will not fail Harry when it matters. Trust me on